

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The Last of the List

Of the several important figures chosen by Thomas O. Larkin U.S. Consul at Monterey in 1846, as the outstanding men in the American conquest of California, only three were chosen as delegates to the Constitutional Convention and were signers of the Constitution of the State of California in 1849. These three were Larkin, Sutter and Vallejo. The list had been made at the request of Secretary of State James Buchanan.

John C. Fremont is the fifth on the list as prepared by Larkin. He was a native of Georgia and lieutenant of topographical engineers who led (1842 and '43) several exploring parties and mapping expeditions to the West. He first visited California in 1844. In 1841 he married a daughter of Thomas H. Benton.

The author of "California in 1846," Oscar Lewis, has this to say about Fremont: "His reasons for disregarding Castro's orders to leave California in 1846, and his subsequent actions before and during the conquest of California have long been subjects of debate. He gave tacit support to The Bear Flag exploit, later organized and led the California battalion of volunteers and, becoming involved in a quarrel with General Kearny, was finally arrested by the latter, tried by court martial and convicted. Pardoned by President Polk, he resigned from the Army, returned to California in 1849, served briefly as U.S. Senator and, in '56, ran for President, being defeated by Buchanan. He later engaged in business, with varying fortunes, and held minor public offices."

Fremont died in 1890. In 1846 when the names of the most important figures in the American conquest were compiled by Thomas O. Larkin for Buchanan, Fremont was listed as being 32 years of age.

Archibald H. Gillespie as a Marine carried secret dispatches from Washington to Larkin and Fremont in 1845-'46. He reached Monterey in April of 1846, after Fremont had left this territory, overtook the latter in southern Oregon and returned with him to Sacramento Valley. He participated in events that followed and became adjutant of Fremont's California battalion. He commanded the garrison at Los Angeles which was driven out by the revolt of Californians in October 1846.

Gillespie led reinforcements to Kearny in December, was wounded at San Pasqual, received his second wound at San Gabriel in January of 1847. He went east with Stockton's party later that year but returned to California in '48 and died at San Francisco in 1873. When the list was made by Larkin in 1846, Gillespie was 33 years of age.

William B. Ide was named by Larkin as outstanding in California's history making program in 1846. Ide had reached California with the Grigsby-Ide party in 1845. He settled in Sacramento Valley. Near his adobe home on the state highway, there is an historic marker pointing the way to the property and giving a short history of the former owner. It is planned that some day the historic house will be the property of the state and open to the public under the supervision of the State Parks Commission.

Ide participated in the capture of Sonoma, where he was chosen leader of the Bear Flag party and June 15 issued a proclamation detailing grievances of the settlers and announcing the establishment of a republican government. Later Ide served as private in Fremont's California battalion the office under General Mason and, after experiences at the mines, acquired and settled on a large ranch near Red Bluff, thereafter holding several county offices, he died December 1852.

Steven W. Kearny was the next on Larkin's list. At the outbreak of the Mexican war Kearny was made brigadier general, commanding an expedition to conquer and occupy New Mexico and California. He left most of his force at Santa Fe, and after a difficult march across the desert, reached California in December of 1846. He suffered severe defeat at San Pasqual. He was wounded but he and his diminished force reached San Diego and, early in 1847, joined Stockton in an expedition to recapture Los Angeles. He assumed rank of military governor on March 1, 1847, served until June 1, then returned east over the central route.

During the major part of Kearny's stay in California he was involved in controversy with Stockton and Fremont over questions of authority; so on his return preferred charges of mutiny against Fremont, which was sustained by court martial. Kearny died in 1848.

Robert Field Stockton is the last in the list. He reached Monterey on the Congress in July of 1846. He succeeded Sloat in the command of the Pacific Squadron, and as military governor – July '46 to January

'47 – directed operations against the Californians, working in close cooperation with Fremont. Blunt and decisive by nature, his lack of tact, historians say, in dealing with the Californians prolonged their resistance. Stockton returned east in 1847, resigned from the Navy two years later, served one term, '51-'52, as Senator from New Jersey and, in '56, narrowly missed the nomination for President. He died in 1896.