

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

February 27, 1952

Gold-Digging in California And Women's Rights

"I know men myself who 15 days ago could with great difficulty raise the means to take them to the mines, who have returned within the last day or two with their saddle bags full of gold – some five or six thousand dollars each. One of the men assured me that he picked up \$750 worth of gold between breakfast and dinner."

The above is quoted from a letter written from Monterey on July 15, 1848 by Charles Tyler Botts one of the signers of the California Constitution and a delegate from Monterey to the First Constitutional Convention held in Colton Hall in 1849. Botts is known to historians as the delegate who "descanted upon the frailty of woman and the evils of woman's rights, and was for expunging the section (separate property for married women) from the Constitution. He had been a Virginia lawyer and was considered a good debater.

The letter containing the news of the great gold rush in California from which we have quoted above, was written by Mr. Botts to his brother in Virginia we suppose, although there is no address and the salutation is the merely "To my dear brother". Before the first letter left Monterey, the writer, on August 24, 1848, had time to write another, and on August 27th still another. The three were fastened together at the top with a length of linen tape.

This valuable bit of American history, written from California during the important era of gold-digging, is one of the most prized possessions of Mrs. K. Hovden of Monterey, who has kindly loaned to us the originals that we might share their contents with our readers. It is very possible that this is the first time that the letters have been published.

The letters first came into the possession of C.B. Dahlgren in 1883 according to a statement written on the outside. Dahlgren was a captain in the U.S. Army and was the son of Adm. John A.B. Dahlgren, an intimate friend of Abraham Lincoln and the inventor of the Dahlgrens 9-inch and 11-inch guns, while he was in command at the Washington Navy Yards. From 1866 to 1868 he was in command of the South Pacific Squadron. C.B. Dahlgren gave the letters to his son, J.B. Dahlgren, who became a well known New York lawyer and

married Luisa Archer of Salinas and aunt of Mrs. Hovden, the present owner of the letters.

Botts further writes: "I avail myself of another opportunity offered by the returning of Mr. Clister, formerly storekeeper clerk at the Sandwich Islands, to write you. It is almost impossible to give you an idea of the real state of this country. Facts would be taken for exaggeration. California is yielding a gold production the world never dreamed of. It more than realized the brightest dreams of Cortez and Pizarro." The latter statement is underlined in red ink.

Botts further relates to his eastern brother that there are very few who do not average \$50 a day even though there are from one to 2,000 persons already at the placer. He admonishes him that "this is a surface deposit which the Spaniards call a placer and should not be confused with a mine."

After declaring his belief that there exists in the upper part of California the richest and most extensive deposit of gold that the world has ever known, Botts writes: "There was a widow living in reduced circumstances in Monterey. Her son, a lad of 15, found his way to the placer and in ten days sent his mother \$15,000 worth of gold."

"The consequences of all this," he tells his brother, "is that every pursuit is abandoned and everybody high and low is hastening to the gold region. The farmer leaves his crops in the midst of the harvest, the shoemaker throws away his last, the doctor packs up his pill box, the lawyer puts aside his books and with a shovel in one hand and a pan in the other starts for the placer. I know not two men who will be in Monterey at the end of the next week – except officers of government."

Botts underlines the words ordinary laborers and ten dollars a day, when he writes how difficult it is to get anyone to do anything in those hectic days of 1849. With the price of labor everything rose in proportion – flour rose from \$8 to \$20 a barrel and "will be 50 in less than six weeks." Shovels have been sold in Monterey, he wrote, for \$10 apiece. In short, Botts declares, every business should make a profit of from \$20 to \$30 a day or it is abandoned for this placer.

(More Tomorrow)