

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **The Gold Fever**

Charles Tyler Botts, whose letters from Monterey written to a brother in Virginia we quoted here yesterday, arrived in this pueblo in 1848 and at once became a merchant and prominent among the citizens who were interested in a movement to establish self government in California. At the age of 39 years he had come west under the auspices of President Polk, was elected a delegate to the First Constitutional Convention and helped to draft the State's Constitution in 1849.

The enthusiastic letters, loaned to us by Mrs. K. Hovden, expound the prosperity of California, the quantities of gold being brought to Monterey and its extreme value – along with the complaints about the high salaries and the lack of help.

“Gold bullion is the common currency of the country, it passes freely at the rate of \$16 the ounce,” Botts wrote to Virginia. “Coin is exceedingly scarce and as it is required for the payment of duties it is in great demand. With \$12 to \$14 in coin you can buy here \$20 worth of gold. But there is no end of money that is to be made here now with capital either in coin or goods. They dig all the gold they want to exchange it at any rate – they hardly care at what price for the necessities of life.”

After all this explanation and wonderment at the suddenness and reality of the discovery of gold in California, Botts urges his brother to take advantage of the opportunity to make money and requests him to send a cargo of goods to the West coast as soon as possible. From this part of his letter we quote:

“If you can manage to send me a cargo within the next twelve months of cheap woolen clothing ready made, flannel, woolens, domestic drills, cotton shirtings, shoes, flour, beef, pork, etc. to the amount of ten or twenty thousand dollars. I hazard nothing in saying that I could dispose of it at four hundred percent advance. If any of your friends will join in such a speculation, I will be satisfied with one-third of the profits. As soon as you conclude to do something or nothing let me hear from you.”

On August 24<sup>th</sup>, 1848, C.T. Botts wrote from Monterey to his brother in Virginia, adding it to the first letter

saying “When I was about to dispatch the communication that accompanies this five or six weeks ago, I learned that the government intended to send a messenger to the U.S. and I reserved my letter for him as the surest and probably the most expeditious chance of communication.”

Botts explained that the gold fever rages still more and that all the consequences for good or evil exist to a still greater degree than in July.

“I will give you an idea of the prices of labor,” Botts wrote. “The government is renting a storehouse here for \$50 a month with the privilege of giving it up at a moment's notice. We have now plenty of room for the goods in the public storehouse and three men probably could turn the goods from one to the other in the course of a day. Under these circumstances we offered ten dollars a day for laborers and cannot get them at any price. I have hundreds if not thousands of dollars of beef and pork spoiling for want of coopering and pickling. I offered a cooper twenty dollars a day for ten days work, but he laughed at me and started for the gold mines”

Another interesting paragraph in this 1848 letter refers to an official investigation of the rumors during the gold rush: “This gold subject has assumed such importance that Gov. Mason, who is remarkably cautious and sober-minded, visited the mines in person accompanied by some of his most scientific and skilled officers. Their survey more than confirmed the rumors we had heard. He conceived the subject to be of such a character as to justify him sending a special messenger with his report to the government at home and to this document, which I assume will be published immediately, I refer you with the assurance that you may place the most implicit reliance on its statements.”

(More Tomorrow)