

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

February 29, 1952

### **Pockets Full of Gold Dust**

There is no end indeed to the wonders that I could relate as coming under my own personal observations," wrote Charles Tyler Botts from Monterey to his brother in Virginia in August of 1848. Botts had come west that year as a representative of President Polk. He had founded the Virginia "Southern Planter" in 1840, had been a successful lawyer and newspaperman.

His letter from Monterey telling of the wonders of the gold rush continues: "It was only yesterday that a company of seven persons returned from the gold mines. I saw weighed out 42 pounds of gold for the portion of one of them. I do not exaggerate when I say that almost every man that you see has a pocket full of gold dust – gold too of the purest character and finest quality. That you may judge of it I send you a small specimen enclosed."

Later on in the letter Botts speculates upon the results of all this. "What are they to be?" he questions. "I'll tell you what has already come to pass. The abundance of bullion and the scarcity of money has led to the most extraordinary disproportion in their relative appreciation. I bought gold yesterday myself, worth \$18.44 at the mint in Philadelphia, for \$8 per ounce. Every dollar I can rake and scrape I am investing in it."

This is not all Mr. Botts relates. Men, he wrote, who never knew before what it was to have more than the bare necessities of life found themselves suddenly wealthy and consequently conceived new ideas and desires which they were willing to gratify at any price. Blankets of any kind sold for \$20. Botts sold a pair of pistols that had cost him \$7 in New York, for a pound of gold.

Botts thanks his brother for a letter and a packet of papers which had arrived on board the Isaac Walton, but he reports that the Undine must be trading at Mazatlan and along the coast as she had not made her appearance in Monterey. He writes his brother that he is at a loss as to what to do with the stoves that arrived on the Walton. "The anchorage here," he wrote, "is more than a fourth of a mile from the wharf and we have no boat, except those small ones which belong to the ship and labor is almost impossible to obtain at any price. The whole crew will desert in less than two days.

They are getting \$12 a month and there are persons here ready to entice them away to the mines under a contract for \$120 a month.

Before these two letters left Monterey Charles Tyler Botts added a postscript to them, saying: "A party had just come in bringing the news of the discovery of a new placer 100 miles nearer Monterey, richer than anything that has been seen before. If you want to make your fortune and mine and that of half a dozen others, send me capital in any form either in specie or merchandise. The speediest way is the best. I should say let it come across the Isthmus at once, if practicable in the form of specie. Money will command here double its weight in pure gold."

A bit of news recited to further impress his Virginia brother and probably to convince him that he must hurry with his assistance, Botts wrote from Monterey: "A little vessel came into this port today from San Francisco on her way to Valparaiso. She registered 75 tons and is chartered by a merchant of Chile at \$700 a month. The captain is just returning with his vessel after a sale of a cargo at San Francisco. He dined with me today and informed me confidentially that his cargo had yielded him 400 percent higher than those of New York. He carried to Valparaiso upwards of \$300,000 worth of California gold. The East Indies never offered to the adventurer of the old world such a harvest and such promises to the capitalists of America. Now is the time – rouse all your energies and try to do something out here. Write me by the first and every opportunity."

We do not know if the Virginia brother came to Charles T. Botts' assistance but we do know that he stayed in California, moving to San Francisco from Monterey in 1850. He practiced law in a firm known as Botts, Emmett and Campbell. He later published a newspaper, The Standard, in Sacramento and was district judge of Sacramento and Yolo counties. He died in 1884 at the age of 75. He is reputed to have received a fee of \$25,000 for winning one legal case.