

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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With A Broomstick In A Jeweled Hand

The gold mines have upset all social and domestic arrangements in Monterey; the master has become his own servant, and the servant his own lord." The above is quoted from the diary of Walter Colton, a clergyman, first alcalde of Monterey and author of "Three Years in California," 1846-1849.

Last week we wrote several columns, quoting from letters written by Charles T. Botts from Monterey to his brother in Virginia, telling of the gold rush and the results of that great historic event upon the lives and habits of the citizens. The original letters had been loaned to us by Mrs. K. Hovden of Monterey, who had inherited them from members of her family.

Today we will use a bit of information regarding this important subject as viewed through the eyes of Walter Colton, the builder of Colton Hall. In Charles T. Botts' letter, dated August 28, 1848, he writes: "A party has just come in bringing news of the discovery of a new placer 100 miles nearer Monterey richer than anything that has been seen before," This is probably the party which Colton records in his diary, in the same month. He wrote of them: "Four citizens of Monterey are just in from the gold mines on the Feather River, where they worked in company with three others. This employed about 30 Indians, who are attached to the ranch owned by one of the party. They worked precisely seven weeks and three days and have divided \$76,844, nearly \$11,000 to each."

Then Colton writes: "Make a dot there, and let me introduce a man, well known to me, who has worked on the Yuba River for 64 days, and brought back, as a result of his individual labor, \$5,356 dollars. Is not this enough to make a man throw away his ledger and shoulder a pick? But the deposits which yielded these harvests were now opened for the first time; they were the accumulations of ages; only the footprints of the elk and the wild savage had passed over them. Their slumber was broken for the first time by the sturdy arms of the American emigrant."

Mrs. Thomas Oliver Larkin, Mrs. Botts, Mrs. Soberanes and Mrs. Milton Little, all Monterey first ladies, along with many others, were affected by the gold rush. From Colton's day-by-day notations of the activities in

Monterey, we learn that Mrs. Botts (the wife of the writer of the letters we have quoted) was here with her husband at the time of the gold rush and California's First Constitutional Convention. Botts was a delegate and signer of the Constitution drafted in 1849 in Colton Hall.

Colton continued in his diary on Aug. 28, 1848: "The millionaire is obliged to groom his own horse, and roll his wheelbarrow; and the hidalgo – in whose veins flows the blood of all the Cortes – to clean his own boots."

Here is lady L---, (Larkin) who has lived here 17 years, the pride and ornament of the place, with a broomstick in her jeweled hand! And here is lady B--- (Botts) with her daughter – all the way from old Virginia, where they graced society with their varied accomplishments – now floating between the parlor and kitchen, and as much at home in the one as the other!

And here is lady S---, (Soberanes) whose cattle are on a thousand hills, lifting, like Rachel of old, her bucket of water from the deep well! And here is lady M. L --- (Milton Little) whose honeymoon is still of seraphic light, unhousing a potato, and hunting the hen that laid the last egg. And here am I, who have been a man of some note in my day loafing on the hospitality of the good citizens, and grateful for a meal, though in an Indian's wigwam.

Why, is not this enough to make one wish the gold mines were in the earth's flaming center, from which they sprung? Out of this yellow dust!"