

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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On a Crowded Ship

Among the passengers on the "California" when she left New York on her pioneer trip to San Francisco on October 6, 1848, was Rodman M. Price, destined to become one of the leading citizens of the new west. In 1874 he wrote of his experiences on the memorable journey and his later life in both Monterey and San Francisco for "The Society of First Steamship Pioneers."

The volume "First California Pioneers," containing Price's biographical sketch was published in the 25th anniversary, February 28, 1874, of the arrival of the "California" in San Francisco. Several of the passengers out of the 800 persons who sailed from the east coast, became members of the first Constitutional Convention at Monterey, and many remained to later become citizens of the new state.

Price wrote in his biographical sketch: "This life sketch of the passengers must prove a very interesting history as each had a marked individuality, and represented the highest type of enterprise, intelligence, progress and discovery. Their vicissitudes and trials on that crowded ship, made up of representatives of every nation, profession, trade, and occupation, who had paid the most fabulous prices for passage and received the poorest accommodations, made history.

The 'California' being a vessel calculated to carry 120, whilst we left Panama with, I think, 800; but this I know, that as high as 1,200 dollars was paid for deck passage alone."

Our narrative continues with a review of the hardship of the long journey around the Horn, telling of the scarcity of wood or coal to keep steam up and the final use of the last bit of the precious fuel in order to reach the Port of Monterey. All lumber was used to make this last lap of the journey even to that which had been used for extra sleeping accommodations, and close sweepings of the coal bunkers. "We found the ship just in time to stop her from running into the Custom House wharf at Monterey, to the great relief of all on board. Here we had to remain for several days to procure wood from the forest and other necessities to carry us to San Francisco."

Joy was manifested in San Francisco with the landing of the passengers. Baskets of champagne were thrown in

their path, and the most profuse and extravagant exhibitions of welcome given them, showing a clear indication of the abundance of gold, related Price.

Price first arrived in California in March 1846, and was at Monterey, and landed with the Naval forces which raised the United States flag over California on the 6th of July of that year. He was sent ashore to take charge of the Mexican and California archives; and to perform the duties of Alcalde and Prefect during the military occupation, which he continued for some time.

Price returned to California after the treaty of peace with Hidalgo and was made Navy Agent of the whole Pacific coast, with various and extraordinary duties and powers.

When the constitutional convention was called at Monterey in 1849, Price was elected a delegate from San Francisco where he was living at the time. He was later elected to the U.S. Congress from his native state of New Jersey.

At the time of the Convention in Monterey Price was 31 years of age. He had been educated in the schools of New Jersey and New York City. He prepared for Princeton, at Lawrenceville, New Jersey, and entered the sophomore class at Princeton College, but did not graduate. He studied law in New York City, and afterward entered the Navy of the United States as purser in 1840 and served on the U.S. ship "Cyane" in the Pacific Squadron.