

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The Sudden Empire ... California

Members of the California Pioneer Society from Monterey County will hold a reunion meeting at the Casa Munras in Monterey on Saturday, May 10th. Luncheon will be held at noon, followed by a discussion and formulation of plans for further activities of this early state organization.

Thomas W. Norris of Carmel, is the county vice president, and Edward David Kell of San Francisco is the state president.

The story of the Society of California Pioneers is related in "This Sudden Empire – California," printed in 1950 by the Society as a valuable addition to the list of Californiana published during the Centennial years. A woman, Ruth Teiser, was the editor and decorations were drawn by Mallette Dean. Edward Kell wrote the foreword.

"This Sudden Empire – California," is the commemorative story of the dual centennial of the State of California and the Society of California Pioneers. The usage of the word "Dual," explains Kell, does not seem presumptuous as the Californians of 1850 founded both the state and the society. Unlike most ancestral or historical societies, the Society of California Pioneers was not the distant forethought of descendants who desired to investigate and recreate the historic past of their community and of their ancestors.

"The Society of California Pioneers was formed in the year 1850 – the year of California's statehood and its story and that of the state was closely identified during all the first century so that it is not unseemly that now its story should be told," wrote the president.

The society is composed of pioneers and their male descendants. The first organization was formed in San Francisco in 1849 and many of those who came west on the first steamboats and those who made the long journey overland were the charter members. The society has accepted as its honored task the collection and preservation of revered flags, documents records and memorabilia of the pioneer days of California and holds its duty to care for them, not only as a legacy from the earlier members, but as a sacred trust for the people of the State of California. Theirs is much the

same position in San Francisco as the History and Art Association is to the Monterey Peninsula.

Pioneer Hall on McAllister Street in San Francisco is the headquarters of the association and the membership shares the building, which it owns, with the California Historical Association. The interested public is always welcome to visit the building and view the many fascinating exhibits there.

"Zack Taylor Dies and the Society is Born" is the heading for chapter one of the "Sudden Empire." When the Pacific mail steamer "California" came up the bay with her colors at half-mast one August morning in 1850, a wave of anxiety swept over the crowd which had gathered at the wharf in San Francisco. Almost an hour passed before the ship steamed near enough to hear the shouts from those on board that President Taylor, hero of the Mexican War, had died.

The mayor of the city ordered the flag in Portsmouth Square lowered to half mast and called a citizens meeting at the city hall to plan for an observance of the national tragedy. Old Californians met with young Californians who had joined the gold rush, and together they laid plans to honor the late President.

One of these days a group of old Californians met for refreshments at Delmonico's saloon on Montgomery street. Sio Delmonico, brother of New York's famed Lorenzo Delmonico, had but recently arrived in San Francisco to open this famous establishment. Of the six who met there that day, three were men of prominence in Northern California since the summer of '46 when Captain Montgomery had raised the United States flag on the Plaza pole. Two more had arrived in California by the winter of that year, and the most recent settler among them, could remember the May night of '47 when the town was alight in honor of "Old Zack's" victory. All were prominent in 1850.

They were William D.M. Howard, the most popular man in the north – the man who lost out to Ross when red flannel shirts arrived in the harbor and the latter beat him of their purchase; Sam Brannan, the richest; and Talbot Green, one of the most highly trusted; Ben Lippincott, member of the First Constitutional Convention at Monterey; William Swasey, friend of Fremont; and James C.L. Wadsworth, the youngest old Californian in the group, who had arrived in the spring of '47 to join Stevenson's regiment.