

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

April 28, 1952

An Elegant Banner

The Peninsula Diary recorded on Friday last the happenings which led up to the organization of the California Pioneer Society, so today we will continue with the history of that event in 1850. President Taylor had died and San Francisco was planning a funeral procession in honor of the late executive for Thursday, Oct. 29.

On Wednesday a newspaper notice addressed "To Californians of three years' residence and upwards," summoned those qualified to a meeting at 7:30 o'clock that evening "at the iron warehouse of Messrs. Howard and Green ... for the purpose of making arrangements for joining the funeral obsequies of the departed friend of California, Zachary Taylor, late President of the United States." And, on the following day, some 40 or 50 pioneers lined up behind the police department delegation and marched about the city in what was immediately afterward agreed to have been "the best organized demonstration that had ever been made in California."

During the next two months the society organized, wrote a constitution, elected officers, and supplied itself with "an elegant banner." The society's aims were qualified thusly: "To cultivate the social virtues of its members, to collect and preserve information connected with the early settlement and conquest of the country, and to perpetuate the memory of those whose sagacity, enterprise, and love of independence induced them to settle in the wilderness and become the germ of a new state."

At preliminary meetings, Henry W. Halleck, an army officer of importance and later of Civil War fame, whose headquarters while in Monterey were next to the Larkin house on Calle Principal, was elected first president. Jacob Leese and J.C.L. Wadsworth were vice president and secretary, respectively. After the funeral procession and the first meetings of the new group, a regular election resulted in William D.M. Howard, the popular merchant, winning the leadership office and his partner, Talbot H. Green, treasurer.

Green, since his arrival in California in 1841, had held a variety of posts of financial responsibility, from that of business agent for Thomas Oliver Larkin to collector of

customs at the Port of Monterey. His name is first among the signers of the society's constitution and his name appears first on the list of paid-up members.

Jacob Rink Snyder, state constitution delegate to Monterey, and later treasurer of the San Francisco Mint, was elected one of the vice presidents. There were a dozen "county vice presidents," among them was Robert Semple, president of the Constitutional Convention. Abel Stearns and Mariano G. Vallejo, both delegates to the convention, and John Bidwell, for whom Bidwell's Bar in the Mother Lode country, was named. William E.P. Hartnell was elected secretary from Monterey County. The number of members of the society in those days is mown only as "upwards of 50," but it could not have far surpassed the number of officers and directors which totaled 58.

The California Pioneers were destined to again take part in a San Francisco celebration in the fall of 1850, when the California's sister ship, the Oregon, arrived in San Francisco with her masts covered with flags and her guns firing salutes, to announce the admission of California as the 31st state in the Union.

At the "Admission Festival" the Society of California Pioneers was so well organized and equipped that they took even a more prominent part than they had at the August funeral procession. Before them in the grand parade through the streets of San Francisco, they carried a banner which Lt. George H. Derby had designed for them. Derby later became a well known humorist, writing under the name "John Phoenix, Esq." He also played in the first theatrical productions at California's First Theater in Monterey while stationed at the Presidio here.