

May 27, 1952

The Wrong Steer

Yesterday we told of John Bidwell's stay at the Livermore and Amador ranches in the Livermore Valley after his arrival in California before the gold rush. Today we will continue with the exciting experiences in this new and unsettled country.

Robert Livermore owned most of the land around what is now the town of that name and Amador owned a rancho at the extreme west end of the Livermore Valley. In those days the ranchero marked and branded their cattle much as the cattlemen do today, that they may be distinguished by their owners. But in the middle 1800's it was not possible to keep the cattle separated owing to the lack of fencing and fences. One would often steal cattle from his neighbor and think nothing of it. Livermore in this way lost cattle to his neighbor Amador.

In fact it was almost a daily occurrence for the ranchers to race to see which owner could get and kill the most of the other's cattle. Cattle in those days were often killed for the hides alone. One day, it has been told, a man saw Amador kill a fine steer belonging to Livermore. He rushed away, a distance of 10 or 15 miles, to tell Livermore what he had seen at Amador's. When he arrived there he found Livermore skinning a steer which had the mark of Amador on the hide!

Bidwell added to his story additional information concerning the several immigrant parties who came to California both before and after the gold rush and the party of which he was a member. Every year after Bidwell's arrival in 1841, other parties came across the plains, except in 1842 when they went to Oregon, most of them coming hence to California in 1843. A party arrived in California in 1841 composed of about 25 persons who had arrived in Westport Mo., too late to proceed with the first group, and so went with the annual caravan of St. Louis traders to Santa Fe, and thence via the Gila River into Southern California.

Among the more noted arrivals are mentioned:

1841—Commodore Wilke's exploring expedition, a party of which came overland from Oregon to California, under Captain Ringgold.

1842—Commodore Thomas Catesby Jones, who raised the American flag at Monterey.

1843—First, L. W. Hastings, via Oregon. He was ambitious to make California a republic and to be its first president, and wrote an "Iridescent" book to induce immigration. He came in 1864—but found the American flag flying when he returned with the immigrants he had gone to meet. Also among the noted arrivals in 1843 was Pierson B. Reading, an accomplished gentleman, according to Bidwell, and the proprietor of Reading's ranch in Shasta County, and from whom Fort Reading took its name. Samuel J. Hensley was also in the same party.

Second, Dr. Sandels, "a very intelligent man."

In 1844—First, Fremont's first arrival in March; Mr. Charles Preuss, a scientific man, and Kit Carson with him.

Second, The Stevens-Townsend-Murphy party, who brought the first wagons into California across the plains.

1845—First, James W. Marshall, who, in 1848, discovered gold.

Second, Fremont's second arrival, also Hastings's second arrival.

1846—largest immigration party, the one Hastings went to meet. The Donner party was among the last of these immigrants.

John Bidwell wrote in his article entitled "Life in California before the Gold Rush," the following description of Monterey: "Monterey, when I first saw it (in 1844), had possibly 200 people, besides the troops, who numbered about 500 persons. The principal foreigners living there were Thomas O. Larkin, David Spence, W.E.P. Hartnell, James Watson, Charles Walter, A.G. Toomes, R.H. Thomes, Talbot H. Green, W. Dickey, James McKinley, Milton Little, and James Stokes. The principal natives or Mexicans were Governor Micheltorena, Manuel Jimeno, Jose Castro, Juan Maraline, Francisco Arce, and Don Jose Abrego.

Larkin received his commission as American Consul for California, at Mazatlan in 1844, related Bidwell in history of Monterey. On Larkin's return to Monterey the woman who washed his clothes became ill with smallpox. Larkin's whole family came down with the illness; it spread to others, and a number of deaths resulted. It was estimated that over 80 residents lost their lives before the disease was conquered.