

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Runaway Sailors**

The first wagons to arrive in California were those brought by the Stevens party. They lay buried in the snow in the mountains until the spring of 1845, when Moses Schallenberger, Elisha Stevens, the captain of the party, and others went up and brought some of the wagons down to the Sacramento Valley.

Schallenberger settled in Santa Clara Valley and became a very prominent citizen. When the last two men made desperate effort to escape over the mountains into California, Schallenberger tried to go with them, but was unable to bear the fatigue, and so returned about fifteen miles to the cabin they had left near Donner Lake (as it was later called), where he remained threatened with starvation, till one of the party returned from the Sacramento Valley to rescue him.

Two of Mr. Schallenberger's descendants were educators in San Jose in later years. Dr. Margaret Schallenberger McNaught was for a number of years a member of the faculty of the Old San Jose Normal school later the State College. Miss Frances Schallenberger was a beloved San Jose teacher for many years and affectionately known as "Aunt Fan."

Elisha Stevens was from Georgia and had worked there in the gold mines. He started across the plains with the express purpose of finding gold. When he got into the Rocky Mountains, as Bidwell was told by his friend Dr. Townsend Stevens said, "We are in gold country." One evening after they had camped for the night, he went into a gulch, took some gravel and washed it and got the color of gold, thus unmistakably showing, as he later did in Lower California, that he had considerable knowledge of gold mining. But the strange thing is that afterwards, when he passed up and down several times over the country between Bear and Yuba Rivers, as he did with the party in the spring of 1845 to bring down their wagons, he should have seen signs of gold where subsequently the whole country was found to contain it.

Among the early California residents were many runaway sailors. Many if not most, thought Bidwell, changed their names. For instance, Gilroy's ranch, where the town of Gilroy now is located, was owned by an old resident under the assumed appellation of

Gilroy. Of course vessels touching upon this coast were liable, as they were everywhere, to lose men by desertion, especially if the men were maltreated. Such things were so common that it is not difficult to believe that those who left their vessels in early days had cause for so doing. In those days to be known as a runaway sailor was no stain upon a man's character.

It was no uncommon thing for sailors to hide from ranch to ranch until the vessel they had left should have sailed away from the coast. History tells us that at the Amador ranch, a sailor boy named Harrison Pierce, age 18 or 20 years, concealed himself till his vessel had put out to sea. He managed to escape recapture and so remained in California. He later lived at Dr. Marsh's ranch.

With few exceptions the vessels that visited the coast at that time were from Boston, fitted out by Hooper to go to the west coast and trade for hides. Dana gives an excellent description of this trade in his "Two Years Before the Mast." San Francisco at that time was the principal harbor, with Monterey next. There was then an anchorage off San Luis Obispo; the next was Santa Barbara, the next San Buenaventura, then San Pedro, and lastly San Diego. The hides were generally collected and brought to San Diego and there salted, staked out to dry and folded so they would lie compactly in a ship, and then shipped to Boston. Goods were principally sold on board the vessels, as there were very few stores on land; that of Thomas O. Larkin, at Monterey was then the principal one, according to John's Bidwell's writings in 1890.