

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

August 20, 1952

### **Hawaii's View of Our Gold Rush**

The Book Club of California, which has brought out some of the most interesting Californiana available, published in November, 1948, a letter written exactly 100 years previously to Thomas Oliver Larkin from Stephen Reynolds, Honolulu merchant.

According to Adele Ogden's introductory note, the Hawaiian Islands – American emporium of the Pacific – were the first foreign area to [be] aroused by the news of California's gold strike.

Two pounds of the precious metal arrived at Honolulu June 17, 1848, and one week later an editorial in the Polynesian confirmed spreading rumors. Conditions in the island kingdom favored an immediate response to the call of the diggings. The younger generation of Hawaiians their horizons broadened by education and travel stirred restlessly with a new spirit of enterprise, Resident U.S merchants, alert to new opportunities in the Pacific, had well-established mercantile connections with the mainland, sending cargoes of combined American, Oriental and Hawaiian products to California retail merchants and receiving in exchange hides, tallow, soap, lumber, horses and furs. Opportunely, at the time of gold discovery, Honolulu stores were glutted with accumulated goods rushed in to supply the American Navy during the Mexican War.

The gold fever quickly swept over the Hawaiian Islands. Natives and resident foreigners crowded California-bound vessels. Sailors deserted their ships, some leaving in small craft. One man set out in a whaleboat. The sudden demand for miners' supplies emptied island stores, bringing quick profits to Hawaiian merchants and speeding up the payment by Californians of longstanding debts. These debts were now paid in gold dust instead of hides – the latter having become obsolete as an exchange medium.

Larkin and his friend Reynolds, both natives of Massachusetts, had both gone into the shipping and retail-store business; one man in Monterey, the other in Honolulu. Although his 66 years kept him at home, Reynolds profited from consignments shipped to the Gold Coast and from payments made suddenly by opulent debtors. As Reynolds supposed, Larkin 20 years

his junior, had "much to do," simultaneously directing cargo ventures, land projects and mining operations,

Hawaiian mercantile fortunes were kept somewhat clipped by the increased application of U.S. revenue laws in California ports, writes Miss Ogden in the foreword to the Book Club publication. King Kamehameha III tried to remedy the situation but did not "get just what he wanted," for the reason that Gov. Mason had no power to conclude international agreements of the type proposed.

Most American merchants in the Hawaiian Islands profited from the gold rush, as likewise did some of the natives who went directly to the diggings. Many, however, agreed with one islander who, upon returning to the rich agricultural area of Kula in Maui, said "California is yonder in Kula. There is gold without the fatigue and sickness of the mining country."

"Your great and unparalleled gold regions ..." Stephen Reynolds wrote Larkin on Nov. 12, 1848, "I conclude give you so much to do and to think of – that you forget your old acquaintance.

"I am anxious to hear how the Minister of His Majesty Kamehameha III has succeeded in his Embassy – how he was received by Gov. Mason, by Comm. Jones and his countrymen – how he has 'doubled' the Governor – and obtained 'just what he wanted.' You must look out for the ci-devant Kanaka Yankees – I need not give you caution, I know, but the false pretenses may screen the Wolf in lambskin.

Were I 20 years younger, I should put myself in the way of taking the 'Yellow' fever – by going to California – but too old next Saturday 18<sup>th</sup>, 66 years. Doct. Judd it is reported has had charges preferred against him, by one of the Clerks of the Minister of the Interior – accusing of – not Honesty!

"Wishing you every good wish I am Your Obt. S.,  
Stephen Reynolds."