

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

January 16, 1953

### **More About Pattie**

Sylvester Pattie, about whom we began a Diary on Wednesday, was born in Kentucky on Aug. 25, 1782. At the age of 42 he began a cross-country trek to California, accompanied by his 21-year-old son, James Ohio and three companions, to enter the trapping and trading business in the far Southwest. This was in the Spring of 1824.

At the early age of 19, he had married and moved from Kentucky to St. Charles, Mo. As a lieutenant of rangers he gained fame in the war of 1812. Some years later he was so deeply stricken by the untimely death of his wife that his health became impaired. This brought on business reverses. Then it was that he decided to make the long trip across the continent. Six of his seven children he entrusted to the care of relatives.

The small party of five, equipped with traps, guns, knives, blankets, food and abounding energy, soon joined a larger expedition for New Mexico, the entire party numbering about 116 persons, according to historians. Sylvester Pattie, who was an ancestor of the late Thomas W. Norris of Carmel, was chosen as the captain. On Aug. 6 they started on the long, hard trip.

Three years later, Pattie was made captain of a band of American trappers who set out from Santa Fe for the waters of the Colorado River. They had fair success until internal dissension arose. The party divided and some of the members went northward. The Patties, with six others, followed the Gila River, reaching the junction of the Colorado Dec. 1. There the Indians stampeded, captured their horses and left the trappers without means of transporting furs. Then it was that a decision was made to try to reach the Mexican settlement on the seacoast.

The group began at once to construct crude catamarans, or long narrow rafts made of logs, often with outriggers. These they used to transport their furs down the Colorado. They were the first trappers ever to visit that part of the river. Great upheavals of the stream were encountered and the situation became more and more perilous until they dared proceed no farther. Therefore they decided to cache their cargo and prepare for an overland march.

Dr. Rockwell Hunt of the College of the Pacific, in his "California Stately Hall of Fame" writes: "It was Feb. 16, 1828, when they set forth on their grueling westward trek across the bleak desert. At times the very limit of desperation seemed to be reached; but the sight of snow-covered mountains helped to keep them from giving themselves up to die. After appalling suffering the trapper band succeeded in reaching the Mission of Santa Catalina, Lower California, on March 12, totally exhausted and in a pitiable condition."

Immediately upon their arrival Gov. Echeandia ordered the eight armed Americans arrested and brought before him in San Diego. They were, of course, without passport. James Otis [Ohio?] Pattie, acting as interpreter, recounted their hardships and distressing experiences and sought to convince the governor that they had come to California only under the necessity of unfortunate circumstances. But all the entreaty in the world could not stop Echeandia from promptly thrusting the Americans into prison, each one in a separate cell.

Some authorities say that unquestionably he had reason for alarm at the presence of the trappers; and his own security perhaps depended on his upholding a stern policy toward strangers.

The terrible sufferings on the desert, followed by the poor fare and harsh treatment in the prison cell, proved too much for the elder Pattie and he was taken with a serious illness. His son was denied all access to him. And so the brave captain died, "beside the Western Sea, far from the land of his own people and the grave of her whom he had loved with so deathless a love."

(More on Monday)