

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

January 21, 1953

### **A Great Vaccinator**

After the death of Sylvester Pattie, the noted trapper and explorer who started out from Missouri in 1782 to come to the west coast, his son James Ohio Pattie, although still a prisoner of the Mexican governor, found opportunity to act as interpreter for the government.

In the meantime the dread smallpox began to rage in the upper part of California and many deaths were reported as far south as San Diego. The governor was besought "to devise some means to put a stop to the disease, which seemed to threaten the country with destruction." This was the time when Pattie was judged to be a very important prisoner. When the governor learned that the youth's father had brought with him a limited amount of vaccine, he promised the younger Pattie a year's passport and compensation on condition that he would vaccinate the people on the coast. The amateur surgeon demanded such terms as threw the Mexican governor into a rage; he even threatened his life. But bad news from the north brought further concessions, and on Jan. 18, 1829, James Ohio Pattie, young American trapper, "sometime surgeon extraordinary to his excellency the Governor of California," began to vaccinate.

According to Hunt's "California Hall of Fame," in less than a month Pattie reported that he had vaccinated all the people of the fort and the mission Indians of San Diego. Then he proceeded north on his unique mission, not stopping, it is said, until some 22,000 persons, scattered over Alta California, had been vaccinated by him!

No wonder the instrument by means of which such miraculous results were achieved was called the "magic needle"; and no wonder this bold, bombastic young American trapper was called the "Magic Man."

As a special compensation for his services he was to receive from the padre at San Francisco 500 cows and 500 mules and land for their pasture – after he should become a member of the state church and a Mexican citizen.

He was struck dumb by this demand – "My anger choked me," he is reported to have said. Throwing to the winds all considerations, "I would not change my

present opinions," he replied, "for all the money this mission is worth."

Monterey was his next stop. As was to have been expected, he was ordered to leave at once. Quickly purchasing a horse he set out for Monterey, where he boarded a vessel which made a coastwise cruise of several months, final returning to Monterey. It was then that Pattie, with other Americans in California, became a participant in the revolt of Joaquin Solis against Governor Echeandia, who had been his persecutor.

History tells how Solis threatened to expel all Americans. It was then that the foreigners in Monterey quickly reversed their attitude, and Solis was himself captured. For Pattie's part in putting down the revolution, Echeandia was most gracious; but he was "nonplused" when the haughty young American spurned his offer of Mexican citizenship and his promise "of something handsome to begin with." If he would remain in California! Instead young Pattie demanded his passport to the United States via Mexico City. And so it was that this brave trapper left California. He arrived in New Orleans in August, 1830.

In 1831 Timothy Flint published the first edition of Pattie's "Personal Narrative." His adventurous spirit stayed with him and he later was numbered among the hordes of gold hunters who came to California.

Reuban Gold Thwaites, who has edited the "Narrative," tells us that the Patties had been frontiersmen for three generations. "They longed for new adventures in the mysterious West, that allured them with its strange fascination. Brave, honest, God-fearing, dependent on their own resources for food and for defense, the Patties belonged to that class of Americans who conquered the wilderness, and yearly pushed the frontier westward."