

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Sutter Lured to New World

Carroll Hall, the curator of Sutter's Fort at Sacramento, writes in the foreword to "Sutter's Fort," as compiled for the Division of Beaches and Parks: "It was to John Augustus Sutter's stronghold, founded under the Mexican flag, that many covered wagon pioneers made their way from 1841 on. There were men and events responsible for the finding of that first bit of precious ore in the tailrace of the sawmill which Sutter and James Wilson Marshall were constructing at Coloma. Here came the first wave of gold seekers, and the first storekeepers, blacksmiths, and other tradesmen to outfit them for the mines. Sutter's eldest son ordered the first survey of the City of Sacramento, in the latter part of 1848. And the elder Sutter became a member of the first Constitutional Convention held in Monterey in 1849 which prepared the way for admission of California as the 31st State.

"The reconstructed fort, owned and maintained by the State of California, is now a museum of California's early days, where may be seen objects of many kinds used by the settlers in building the empire envisioned by Sutter and his fellow pioneers."

Sutter was born Feb. 15, 1803, in Kandern, Baden, Germany, a few miles from the Swiss border. His father and grandfather were paper makers, but young Sutter strayed far from family tradition. In his early manhood he apprenticed to a firm of printers and booksellers in Basle. It is interesting to note that while he was clerking in a draper's shop in Aarburg, he met his future wife, Annette Dubeld. They married in that city on Oct. 24, 1826, when Sutter was 23 years old.

After several failures in commercial ventures, the lure of the new world became increasingly alluring, and hoping to improve his condition, Sutter sailed for America in 1834, leaving his wife and five children for the next 15 years.

One year after Sutter's arrival in New York he joined a party of Santa Fe traders, an adventure which he repeated in 1836. In 1838 he joined a caravan, sponsored by the American Fur Company, and accompanied it to Fort Laramie. From there he went to Fort Hall in Idaho, and on to Fort Walla Walla, and The Dalles.

Instead of coming direct to California, Sutter sailed on the Hudson Bay's ship Columbia for the Sandwich (Hawaiian) Islands, where he landed on Dec. 9, 1838. Eventually he sailed as supercargo on the trading ship Clementine to the Russian Colony at Sitka, Alaska; and then to Yerba Buena (San Francisco), where he arrived on July 1, 1839. Mexican officials ordered the Clementine to Monterey, official port of entry, and Sutter came ashore at the Custom House two days later, with letters of introduction from various influential persons met on his travels.

It is historically known that Sutter conferred with Governor Alvarado here about the possibilities of establishing himself in the country. He then visited General Vallejo, then in command of Mexican forces at Sonoma, and then on to Fort Ross, the Russian colony.

Bach in Yerba Buena he chartered the schooner Isabella, from the firm of Spear and Hinckley, and two smaller vessels. On Aug. 1, 1839, Sutter, in a four-oared pinnace manned by Kanakas who had come from Honolulu, led the schooner up the Sacramento River. The captain of the Isabella was William Heath Davis, the author of "Seventy-five Years in California."

Davis had arrived in Yerba Buena, and immediately went into the employ of Nathan Spear as his managing active businessman. He was a native of Boston, brother of Paul Spear a prominent apothecary of Boston. He had visited Monterey as early as 1823 in the American schooner Rover, together with Capt. J.B.R. Cooper. Spear was one of Monterey's first merchants and owned two schooners, Isabel and Nicholas, which he used to carry goods from Monterey to Yerba Buena.

(To Be Continued)