

April 6, 1953

Flag raising In California

Dr. Rockwell D. Hunt is the director of the California History Foundation of the College of the Pacific at Stockton, and it was our privilege to see him and talk with him at a recent meeting of the members of the Foundation, and representatives of historical societies throughout California at the sixth annual Institute of the Foundation recently.

Dr. Hunt is a native Californian, now past 80 years of age, but still active both mentally and physically. He has been a guest speaker at several meetings of the Monterey History and Art Association and has a number of devoted former students living on the Peninsula, one of whom is Fred Moore, former Monterey Chief of Police. Dr. Hunt retired as dean of the Graduate School of the University of Southern California, in 1945, after 25 years of service. In 1947, he accepted his present position with the Stockton college, his Alma Mater.

Dr. Hunt received his Ph.D., in 1895, at John Hopkins University, his thesis was entitled "The Genesis of California's First Constitution (1846-49)", which should bring him very close to Monterey.

He also wrote "California the Golden"; "John Bidwell Prince of California Pioneers"; "California an American Commonwealth"; "California Ghost Towns Live Again"; and "A Short History of California" in which he collaborated with Nellie Van De Grift Sanchez, also well known in Monterey. His latest "California's Stately Hall of Fame" was published by the College of the Pacific in 1950, as a publication of the California History Foundation.

"The First Flag" is an instructive column written recently by Dr. Hunt, and of historic interest to residents of Monterey—both old and new—which is so historically correct that we are repeating it in today's diary.

"When did the stars and stripes first float over California soil?

"The confident reply from thousands is: It was July 7, 1846, for on that morning Midn. William P. Toler, under instructions from Commodore John Drake Sloat, raised the American flag over the custom house at Monterey. The event signalized the American conquest of the province of Alta California.

"But wait: Capt. Fremont antedated Sloat in raising our flag; for it was in the early spring of that year that he entrenched himself on Gavilan Peak (near San Juan) on receiving Castro's order to leave the country. He hastily constructed a fort of logs.

"While this was being built, he wrote in his memoirs, a tall sapling was prepared and on it, when all was ready, the American flag was raised amid cheers of the men."

This episode occurred on March 5, 1846, preceding the raising of the Bear flag at Sonoma by several months.

Yet Fremont was not the first to raise the stars and stripes over California soil. Dr. Hunt continues his story with the tale of Commodore Jones' part of this history. In the autumn of 1842 Jones, of the U.S. Navy, was led to believe that Mexico had declared war on the U.S., and rumor said that California was about to be ceded to Great Britain for safekeeping. Therefore, on Oct. 19, 1842, the Mexican flag was hauled down and the stars and stripes hoisted at the Monterey custom house. Being convinced the next day that war did not actually exit, and that the seizure of Monterey was premature, Jones pulled down the flag, restored the place to the Mexicans, with apologies and retired.

"Wrong again," wrote Dr. Hunt: At the historic house built by Jacob Leese in Yerba Buena (San Francisco) there was an enthusiastic celebration of the 4th of July, 1836. On that gala day an American flag was unfurled to the breeze, a full decade before Sloat's appeared in Monterey.

"Once again! In 1829 Capt. James Arthur visited California on the Brookline. Arthur's party went ashore to cure some hides—it was a lonesome time for the men. The idea occurred to them to prepare and raise a flag for the purposed of attracting attention of a vessel that occasionally sailed in the offing. The flag was made of men's shirts, which furnished the colors red, white and blue."

Capt. Arthur afterwards wrote: "These men raised our national ensign not in bravado, nor for war and conquest, but as honest men to show that they were American citizens and wanted company."