

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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'This Discordant Mass'

James Henry Gleason wrote from Monterey in 1846 to his sister, Frances, in Plymouth, Mass. Trying trying with his best ability to describe to her the life in California in those early days before the Gold Rush. Among the letters there was a note attached by Duncan Gleason, the noted marine painter of the present day, when he published the letters and journal of James Henry Gleason in Quarterly of the Historical Society of Southern California.

"The vessels best adapted to the California trade were brigs, barks or ships of 65 to 90 feet length. Their small size enabled them to anchor nearer the shore to facilitate trading. They were copper sheathed, the invention of Paul Revere, and mounted with two or more small muzzle loading cannon.

"A store was fitted up in the steerage (the space occupied by the boat steerers on whalers) 'tween decks just forward of the great cabin and here on long tables were displayed a great variety of merchandise."

"The waltz was introduced in California in 1823," declares Duncan Gleason, "by gay blades who arrived on the schooner Rover and, finding the fandango and jota not to their liking, taught the señoritas to dance the waltz. Soon the whole department was whirling to the time of 1-2-3 in close embrace. The padres appealed to Gov. Arguello to pass a law prohibiting the new form of ecstasy but the governor was at the time too busy learning to waltz himself to bother with the new law"

Continuing with the story of hot skirmishes in Monterey, James H. Gleason write this to his uncle, John Paty in Oahu, Sandwich Islands: "Last evening we expected to have a hot skirmish in this place. It seems that a Californian, being a friend to the Americans, informed Mr. Larkin, the American consul that a secret meeting was to be held that night, among the authorities of the place to see whether it would be advisable to seize him as a prisoner. About twilight he (Larkin) sent round word to his friends to have their firearms ready for immediate use, and should there be a report of firearms in the night to hurry to his house. It seems that the Californians did not deem it prudent to make the attack. It is supposed that they wished to

make prisoner Larkin to influence the release of the prisoners in possession of Ide and Sonoma."

It is difficult to realize that that happened in this community. The Larkin home is still an historic landmark at the corner of Jefferson and Calle Principal, and owned and occupied by his granddaughter, Mrs. Harry Toulmin.

James beaks the news of his engagement to his sister Frances in Plymouth in a letter dated "Monterey, U. States of America, and July 25, 1846:

"I once thought the Sandwich Islands was a delightful place but now give me California, with its beautiful sky and its lovely señoritas. They have given me a name here of "Patito Chicito" (little Paty) because I look so much like Uncle John. If I go again it shall be as a married man. Do not spread your eyes at the hint for to be honest about it, I am engaged to the Belle of Monterey! Miss Kate Watson. They are find people all of them and my Kate is beyond compare. Her father, Mr. James Watson, is a great honest-hearted man, who is quite well off, being worth about \$60,000. He is very hospitable and his house at the rancho near town is the stopping place for all his friends."

"Our new Alcalde in the person of Rev. Walter Colton enters on the duties of his office today. It is a wise appointment, he is a good Christian gentleman, capable, just, kind hearted, but firm in his conviction of the right." Gleason wrote to his uncle on July 30, 1846.

Searching a first edition of Walter Colton's diary "Three Years in California" published in 1850, we have found this note entered on the 30th day of July, 1846: "Today I entered on the duties of my office as alcalde of Monterey: My jurisdiction extends over an immense extent of the territory, and over a most heterogeneous population. Almost every nation has, in some emigrant, a representative here—a representative of its peculiar habits, virtues, and vices. Here is the reckless Californian, the half-wild Indian, the roving trapper of the West, the lawless Mexican, the licentious Spaniard, the scolding Englishman, the luckless Irishman, the plodding German, the adventurous Russian, and the discontented Mormon. All have come here with the expectation of finding but little work and less law. Through this discordant mass, I am to maintain order, punish crime, and redress injuries.

(To Be Continued)