

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Grappling With a Bear**

We are indebted again to Victor Mossop for some old time stories of early days in California. The tales were related by J.M. Chambers, a distant relative of Mr. Mossop, and were published many years ago in the Hollister newspaper.

These reminiscences deal with the life and adventures of the late Henry Chambers, the father of J.M. Chambers, and members of his family and their neighbors. Chambers, subject of these stories, was born in Kentucky in 1827, and his parents moved to Texas while he was a small boy and that state still a Mexican province.

Before he reached manhood Chambers went to Little Rock, Ark., and got a job on a Mississippi River boat. That was in the days, he told his son, when the boatmen on the Mississippi were about the hardest and toughest lot in the country, leading highly adventurous lives, and a man had to be hardy, two-fisted fighter to hold his own among them.

After this adventure Chambers went back to Texas and married Sarah Akers in 1851. She had been born in Texas in 1832. With alluring reports of the great gold strike heard on every hand, they decided to take a honeymoon trip to California, via the covered-wagon route. They started on the long trek in the spring of 1852, with an immigrant train made up largely of members of the Akers and Chambers families, including Henry Chambers and wife, Mr. and Mrs. Akers and all 10 of their children, a man by the name of Stroud and another names Hughes.

J.M. Chambers, the son of Henry Chambers, told this fascinating story of some of the family's adventures as they proceeded by wagon train from Texas to California. It is another bear story.

"In 1852 Pa and some of his relatives, mother and several of her relatives, and a number of unrelated people, started from Texas to the gold country. The train consisted of oxen and wooden-axle covered wagons. They were about one year on the road, passing through the savage Indian country without any trouble whatsoever.

"Pa, being a good hunter, walked and hunted nearly all the way to California, so he told his children in later

years. When he would return to the road after a cut-off, it would be after dark and he would not know if the train had passed or not. He told of killing a deer one morning and carrying it on his back all day, overtaking the train at night."

Finally the company came to a valley called Bull Valley where there was nothing but wild bulls. They stopped there a few days and killed and dried some meat. Provisions were getting short at the time, so they started on and came to Pimo Village, a home of a tribe of civilized Indians, where they bought and traded for some provisions.

Crossing the Colorado River near Fort Yuma, they came to Tejon Mountain. There they discovered a bear on the side of the mountain, so they stopped the train and three or four of the men in the party went to kill him. They found him and wounded him. "One of the men," Chambers related, "Hethen by name, a Methodist preacher, had a chance to shoot the bear, but did not offer to fire. A man by the name of John Hughes, hollered at him, 'Shoot, you all lop-eared so and so.' Hethen shot and lodged a bullet patch on Hughes shoulder. It was never known whether he shot at the bear or Hughes."

They followed the bear and he came for Hughes and clinched with him. Both went rolling down the mountain until they came to a level. The bear landed on top and made a grab for Hughes' head. Hughes being a very strong man, threw up one hand and caught the bear by the throat and held him off until the bear quit and went away. They finally killed the animal.