

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Captain Bralee's Landing**

When Miss Lucy Morse wrote of her visit to Monterey in 1898, the year before she died at Stanford in 1899, she talked at length with Captain Bralee, an Englishman by birth, who had come to Monterey as a sailor in 1846 and settled here to remain the rest of his life.

Bralee's part in the landing of Commodore Sloat's men and the Custom House episode in California history, he described to Miss Morse and she jotted down the following story:

"Yes, I helped raise the American flag at the Custom House. No, the soldiers did not have anything to do with it. I was a sailor. The sailors did it. We just sailed up and took it. We took it because our country had declared war on Mexico and was winning victories everywhere. It was in 1846 Commodore Sloat was in command. Besides his flagship 'Savannah' we had two transports. We had been coasting along Peru and stopped awhile at the Sandwich Islands. After leaving the islands we went to Mazatlan and laid there at anchor seven months awaiting orders."

An amusing description of the watchfulness of the English, Bralee told to Miss Morse: "Admiral Seymore, in command of the English ship 'Collingwood' watched us pretty close. The Collingwood carried 80 guns. He followed us out of the harbor several times but we fooled him and came back in. At last when we did get out he thought we were still fooling him and did not get here (Monterey) until 12 days after we had raised the United States flag."

The reunion of the two officers Bralee remembered: "Seymore and Sloat met and had a good time. You see those officers don't have any enmity toward each other. Seymore asked Sloat what he would have done if he had come in and found the English flag on the Custom House. 'I would have put a shot through it if I had gone to the bottom next minute and left my government to settle the bill.'"

"I expected that answer," replied Seymore, "but there is not a man serving her Britannic Majesty who would dare take that responsibility." Sloat replied to that remark with: "But you see I am not serving her Britannic Majesty, I serve Uncle Sam."

Then Bralee told Miss Morse how the Custom House was used by the newly arrived Americans. "We used the Custom House for a barracks. The officers occupied the upright part and the men the other part. We swung our hammocks just as on shipboard. We built the old fort."

"Yes, I know they call it Fort Fremont, but Fremont had no more to do with it than I had. Not so much for I helped build it. We called it Fort Mervine. Some wanted to call it Fort Stockton but Stockton said he would not have such an apology for a fort named after him. We built a stockade of pine trees in the form of a square. The Blockhouse, which had three 42 pound guns, was in one corner."

Mr. Bralee illustrated the Fort with his pencil for Miss Morse and she included this drawing in her manuscript which is now in the archives of the Stevenson House – a gift to the History and Art Association from her nephew, George E. Morse.

"The men's quarters were log houses within the stockade," Bralee continued. "These were burned by tramps a few years ago. We dug a ditch around the stockade."