

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

May 31, 1954

### **Joseph and Sarah Aram**

The first thought that comes into my mind as I start this day's Diary is that it will be a sad day when the descendants of the signers of California's Constitution, which was drafted and signed in Colton Hall in Monterey, no longer realize, when they visit the old Capitol, that their ancestors played a part in important history of the West.

Not so with two visitors which Monterey enjoyed and they in turn visited with pride and enthusiasm—Mr. Frederick Aram Holmes of San Francisco and his sister, Mrs. Carl Nelson Miller of Enterprise, Ore. Their great-uncle on their maternal side was Joseph Aram of San Jose, the first signer of the Constitution of California. His wife, Sarah Ann Aram, found gold while washing clothes in the American River in 1847, before Marshall's discovery at Sutter's Mill. Her dust was assayed and proven to be pure gold.

Mrs. Miller and her brother, Frederick Holmes, were in Monterey recently traveling along the historical route as laid out a number of years ago by the Monterey History and Art Association and maintained by the City of Monterey. They visited and talked with the curators of all the building which are open to visitors and eventually arrived at Casa Soberanes. They were charming persons tremendously interest in Monterey and its history and especially in Colton Hall where their great-uncle's picture is under glass on one of the tables where the convention delegates were supposed to have sat in 1849.

From the visitors, from historical data on the convention and those who signed the Constitution, we have gleaned information concerning the man who was the first signer of this important document. Joseph Aram, upon his arrival in California, stepped immediately into the stirring events of the American occupation of the territory in 1846.

Born in 1810 in New York State, Aram as a boy was a post rider and stage driver. He first moved westward to Ohio, then to Illinois, and came to California by wagon train from St. Louis, Mo., by the Mormon trail.

Reaching California, he found Col. Fremont on the American River, and on his advice, Aram went to Santa Clara and took possession of the mission buildings

there. A home guard company of 33 men was formed with Aram as the captain.

When it was disbanded in 1847, Capt. Aram first came to Monterey and later settled as a farmer in San Jose. His wife, the mother of the first child born to overland American immigrants (Eugene Aram, later a prominent Sacramento attorney) is said to have found traces of gold in a creek before the other famous discovery at the sawmill.

In 1848 Aram washed gold at the famed Dry Diggins, and in 1849 mined on the Tuolumne until the fall, when he returned to San Jose, where he was elected both to the convention and to the first legislature.

Until his death in 1898, Aram was a prominent citizen of San Jose. He was a trustee of the College of Pacific in San Jose upon its reorganization in the 1850s, and seven times a member of the city council.

Mrs. Devendorf, the mother of Frank Devendorf, one of the founders of Carmel, married Joseph Aram after the death of her first husband. The later years of her life were spent as a resident of Pacific Grove.