

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **A Man From Virginia**

The Monterey Museum Board, under the chairmanship of Rollo Peters, is planning the unveiling of a Walter Colton memorial plaque at Colton Hall Museum on the 180<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the U.S. Army's Chaplains Corps. The ceremony will be conducted jointly by the City of Monterey and the U.S. Navy at 11 a.m. next Monday.

Because of this event it is interesting to note today some recollections of one of the men who was in California in 1849 and came to Monterey from San Diego as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention, helped to draft that document, and signed it along with the other important delegates. That man was Maj. Henry Hill of the United States Army, and the notes are from his obituary recently added to the historic records in Colton Hall as a gift from Ben F. Dixon of San Diego, formerly connected with the Serra Museum in that city. Hill was stationed in California for about a year and a half. He was a 33-year-old Virginian in 1849 at the time of the Convention. We cannot find that he ever had any other connection with California after the convention.

Our interest in the major today is the news as contained in the obituary as printed Sept. 27, 1866 in the Religious Herald, Richmond, Va. Walter Colton, in his "Three Years in California," lists Hill as "Henry Hill, born Virginia, residence Monterey, aged 33 years." In 1949, at the time of the Constitutional Convention Centennial, all that was known of Hill was the fact that he was a delegate from San Diego and that he was a native of Virginia, so it is with satisfaction that we announce the acquisition of a copy of his obituary.

The newspaper article concerning Hill's death tells these facts concerning the man who helped to draft California's constitution and signed the finished document: "Col. Henry Hill, third son of Capt. A.P. and Frances Hill, born in Culpeper County, February, 1816, and consequently was in his 51<sup>st</sup> years when he died. He was educated with reference to the mercantile life and his education was more thorough than extensive. When a youth he entered one of the accounting houses in Baltimore. He acquired some knowledge of the business and subsequently, in connection with his brother-in-law, Thos. O. Flint, commenced business as a merchant at Culpeper Courthouse. In 1832 he professed conversion and was baptized by Rev. Jas. Garnet and

joined the church at Gourd Vint, but afterward removed his membership to Culpeper Courthouse, where it remained until his death."

Speaking of Hill's life in the East, the newspaper reporter noted that he was appointed postmaster under Mr. Van Buren's administration. "He discharged his duties successfully and to the entire satisfaction of the community so much so that when Gen. Harrison came to the presidency in 1841 and party feeling ran very high and party proscription was almost universal Col. Hill could not be removed from office."

Testifying as to his service to his country, the obituary goes on to relate his many activities in the Army throughout his lifetime. "Hill retained his postmastership until 1846 when he resigned to accept an appointment from President Polk to an important clerkship in Washington. This position he kept until 1846 when he resigned to accept another assignment of Major and Postmaster in the regular Army of the United States. In this position he rendered valuable service in California during the Mexican War and afterward in Texas and New York City. To this last office he was very warmly attached and peculiarly fitted. He held it till the summer of 1861 when, his native state having withdrawn from the Federal Union he returned his commission, and all public property under his charge to the proper Federal authorities and returned to Virginia."

The report of Col. Hill's death states the fact that "he was emphatically a social man. He delighted in the society of his friends. His manner was child-like. The sports of child and youthhood were dear to him. The children were his pets and he their admiration. As father and husband he was everything that could be demanded or desired."

So the life history of one of the signers of California's Constitution has come to Colton Hall to be filed among the historic records there. Previous to receiving this story as printed in the Religious Herald in 1866, little was known here about Col. Hill, except his name among those who spent several weeks in Monterey in 1849.