

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

September 5, 1955

The Weather in 1849

From Langdon Sully in New Jersey have come copies of two letters which his grandfather, Lt. Alfred Sully, wrote from Monterey in 1849 and 1850 to his father, Thomas Sully, the noted artist and portrait painter.

Lt. Sully came to Monterey in 1849 with Col. L. D. Stevenson's regiment of New York Volunteers. Soon after their arrival a group, with dramatic aspirations, organized a group of players who opened first in the Cuartel and later persuaded Jack Swan to turn his sailor's rooming house into a theater. This old adobe building is now a State Historical Monument and is known as California's First Theater.

In the early 1850s, the young Yankee lieutenant fell in love with Senorita Manuelita Jimeno, the charming and beautiful daughter of Dona Augustias Jimeno and granddaughter of Don Jose de la Guerra of Santa Barbara. She died in Monterey on March 28, 1851, at the age of 17 years and her infant son followed her in death on the 15th of April.

Sully's first letter, as sent by his grandson, was dated Dec. 29, 1849, but according to information contained in the first line, the young officer had been stationed here before that date, for he writes: "By which you will see that I am back at my old station, but not at my old quarters at the Donias. I found her house filled with a party of Spaniards just in from the mines waiting for a steamer of the port to take them home, so am visiting in a little log house." He then stated that he was enclosing a sketch of the house.

There follows a description of the California climate as he experienced it, stating that the company was detained in San Francisco four or five days by winds and rains. "When it rains and blows here in California, it really does! But you ought to see San Francisco in the rainy season; it beggars description. Nothing but wind."

Sully was also interested in prices of the necessities when he wrote his father: "Boots rose up in price to \$35. My long boots worth \$100." On his return to San Francisco, he found that the town had grown out of his recollection in the short space of six weeks. After landing Capt. Lovell, lady, and company there to pass the winter at the barracks, he took charge of the rest of

the troops and sailed out of the harbor. They reached Monterey two days later after a hazardous trip.

Then Sully writes this short description of Monterey as it looked to him in December 1849: "Monterey looks beautiful. The rain has brought out the crops and all looks green and bright again. I think the winter is the best season in California. It is true it rains a great deal and blows great gusts, but when it doesn't, it is bright, just cool enough and delightful . . . that is leaving out the mud."

"But the town has changed." Sully continues, "It has become too Americanized and rowdy. We have now four hotels, gambling shops and drinking shops without number. In consequence, it does not look like home. When I was here before you could not get a dinner for money. Now money will buy anything. The Dona and Manuelita were very glad to see me, wanted me to live with them but I thought it best to mess with the rest of the officers." Manuelita is the girl who later became his wife.

After receiving a letter from his father in Philadelphia young Sully wrote back this information relative to the law of California: "At one time you had an idea that the rowdies of the country hunted the soldiers like wolves. "Whereas I think it would be better for me to have some concern about you and the rowdies of Philadelphia. We keep such people in good, order out here, shoot them down or hang them up before corrupt judges and inefficient laws allow them to escape to act again their rascalities. I am in favor of an armed police. You can walk the streets of the towns of California at all hours of the night, and although you will see all sorts of gambling and drunken men, never the least signs of a row."

Later on, in his letter the lieutenant tells of Christmas in California in 1849, writing: "With us Christmas was noisy enough. A Navy ship is in the harbor, commanded by Capt. Nevil. Christmas eve, we all assembled at Mrs. Captain Kanen's, drinking egg nogg. We went to Mass, but not to bed, spent the next day making calls and, in the evening, gave a dinner to the Navy officers. Generals Riley and Cuntry arrived that day from San Jose, where the general went to turn over his governorship to the elected of the people, thus terminating an office which he filled to the satisfaction and praise of all hands."

Then he refers to the theater and announces that the town is becoming civilized and that a theater is being

built in which he has been offered a position as scene painter which he refused. In consequence of which he is to be a "toucher up." He had ordered a coat from home which he cancelled if the garment had not already been sent, as a fellow officer, who was returning to the east coast, had given him his. He also complained at the length of the letters from home in this manner: "I must object to the shortness of your letters. Coming from such a distance they would look better if they were bigger."