

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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A Bartender Preaches

From three newspaper clippings, undated and unidentified, among the files in Colton Hall concerning Lansford Hastings, one of the delegates and a signer of the California Constitution, which was drafted and signed in Colton Hall in 1849, we find these interesting notes which Mrs. Pauline McCleary, the museum curator has kindly loaned us for this story.

L. W. Hastings, who wrote the "Emigrant's Guide to Oregon and California" published in 1845, was one of the earliest of California promoters, "a man of great ambition" John Bidwell said of him: "His purpose in coming to California was to see the country and to write a book and induce a great number of emigrants to come here, declare the country independent and become its first president."

It did not take him long to learn that the Mexican government was in the habit of granting large tracts of land. Not knowing how long it might take to establish here an independent republic, and having an eye to business, according to Bidwell, Hastings at once took preliminary steps, with the intention of securing a large tract of land of 10 or 12 square leagues lying on the west side of the Sacramento River, between Colusa and Knight's Landing, and to that end employed Bidwell to make a map of it. This was kept a profound secret.

True to his promise, Hastings made his way through California, Mexico, and Texas to the United States. On his way he conferred with Sam Houston as to aid and cooperation from the Lone Star Republic. It is evident that he received little encouragement from Houston.

Hastings was not discouraged, for he completed a book of two or three hundred pages, picturing California in the most glowing colors, and eventually secured its publication. The book actually encouraged six or seven hundred to cross the plains in 1846.

Hastings preceded his party of emigrants in 1845, to be ready to lay the foundation for his republic. "The next spring, he went to meet his large party, but the Mexican War in that year blasted all his fondly cherished dreams," wrote John Bidwell in his recollections of those years in California.

In Hastings' "Emigrant's Guide of 1845" we find this paragraph: "California is destined in a very few years to

exceed by far (the commerce) of any other country of the same extent and population in any portion of the known world. We are necessarily driven to this conclusion when we consider the vast extent of its plains and valleys, of unequalled fertility, and exuberance; the extraordinary variety and abundance of its productions, its unheard-of uniformity and salubrity of climate; in fine its unexhausted and inexhaustible resources . . . there is no country in the known world . . . which is so eminently calculated . . . to produce the unbounded happiness and prosperity of civilized and enlightened man."

After Hastings had written his glowing account of California in an effort to induce settlers to come and then make the area an independent republic, he had difficulty in raising money with which to have it published.

Attempting by every means to raise funds, he undertook a series of temperance lectures in Ohio and neighboring states. During this tour he met a Methodist preacher named McDonald and they became fast friends.

Then, late in 1846, according to historians, Hastings arrived in Yerba Buena, which later became the City of San Francisco, during a drenching, cold rain. By strange coincidence, McDonald had arrived here before him, had found no other work, and had accepted a job attending the only bar in the settlement at that date.

Temperance lecturer Hastings, wet and shivering, went to the bar and ordered brandy. When he was about to drink McDonald recognized him and said:

"My temperance friend, how do you do?"

Hastings shook his hand and replied:

"My dear old preacher, I'm glad to see you."