

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Raising the Flag**

At the January meeting of the board of directors of the Monterey History and Art Assn., the members voted to make this year's observance of the 110th anniversary of the raising of the American Flag at the Old Custom House, on July 7, truly a patriotic and historic event. J. F. van Loben Sels, the president of the association, appointed Allen Knight as chairman of the planning committee.

Although the raising of the Stars and Stripes at Monterey on July 7, 1848, marked, the largest conquest ever executed by forces of the United States, the event probably has received less recognition than countless minor league historical acts.

In fact, the dramatic seizure of California by Commodore John Drake Sloat has received widespread recognition in memorial services but seven times in the past in Monterey - in 1886, 1896, 1905, 1936, 1946, 1954, and 1955.

In 1946 the celebration was the greatest because of the 200th anniversary. It was in 1886. that a group of California citizens first banded together to do honor to Commodore Sloat - with the added and perhaps more selfish motive of calling attention to a more personal project.

That year the Associated Veterans of the Spanish War of California were attempting to pass through Congress a general service pension bill and they used a celebration at Monterey, so the newspaper reporter of that date told us, to recall to the country one of the most important outcomes of the war in which they fought.

The bill was passed, giving veterans of 62 years of age or more a pension of \$8 a month.

The celebration also brought forth a fine and gallant gentleman, "Gen. Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, who 40 years before had been held captive by the Americans and who had surrendered the vast Western Empire to them."

Vallejo was called upon to raise the American Flag over the Custom House for this observance of the fall of his government, Mexico, four decades before. He did so with these words: "This flag will float here forever."

A Monterey paper of that date had this to say of the grand old man: "Gen. Vallejo's conduct in burning his uniform and shaving his beard hardly needs explanation. He had fought for his country, Mexico, and lost. He had not heart to keep about him the relics of his past glory. Even his beautiful place at Sonoma is named Lacrymae Montis (Tears of the Mountain). But the grand old man adopted the patriotism of his conquering foe and has since been one of the most useful and honored public men of California.

This flag-raising celebration also led to the formation of the Sloat Monument Assn, of California, a militant group dedicated to the purpose of erecting a monument to Commodore Sloat near the place where his forces first raised the flag of the United States over California.

That movement bore fruit in 1896 when the semi-centennial celebration was highlighted by the laying of the monument's cornerstone, as well as the reenactment of the raising of the flag at the Custom House.

Although the proponents of the plan had been trying to get state and federal aid for the project for several years, money for the monument came chiefly through private donations. The memorial was finally completed atop the Presidio bluff overlooking the old anchorage and unveiled at a ceremony June 14. 1910. Now in 1956, the officials of the Presidio have honored Sloat still further by placing a spotlight which illuminates the monument each night.

Some of the events enacted at the semi-centennial were a free Mexican picnic, exhibition drills by Navy units, a firemen's parade and tournament, band concerts and street dancing in the evening and literary exercises at the Custom House.

July 7 began with a grand march of "civic societies and all patriotic people" down Alvarado street and up to the site of the Sloat monument. Another parade in the afternoon down Del Monte avenue ended at the Custom House where the flag was raised again. There was a wild west show in Lyceum Park in the evening.