

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

May 4, 1956

### **Monterey Wedding, 1849**

Samuel Hopkins Willey, Chaplain of California's First Constitutional Convention held in Monterey in 1849, reached Monterey on the steamer California on her last voyage – on February 24 of that same year. He was unmarried, but before the year came to an end he had claimed as his new bride a young woman to whom he had said goodbye at the docks in New York as she embarked on a government transport to come around the horn to Monterey with her sister and brother-in-law, Capt. and Mrs. George Westcott, and their family. Her name was Martha Jeffers and her home had been in Philadelphia. When she disembarked at Monterey, the young Congregational minister was there to welcome her. Four months of courtship followed and then the wedding.

The March issue of the California Historical Society Quarterly contains a reprint of the news of the wedding as it was written in a letter to a younger sister, Fanny Jeffers, who came to California several years later and married George M. Backe, the original letter is in the Library of the San Francisco Theological Seminary in San Anselmo. Through the interest of Mariam Drury, it has been reprinted in the Quarterly under the title: "The Jeffers-Willey Wedding, including an Account of Monterey in the Fall of 1849." Mrs. Drury's husband, Clifford M. Drury, is professor of church history at the Seminary.

In her letter Mrs. Westcott gives a sparkling picture of the wedding not merely a family event, but of the military, political, social, artistic, and physical conditions surrounding the transformation of a Mexican province into an American state, as viewed in the house and streets in Monterey, the former provincial capital.

Our letter writer records the fact that, wives of high-ranking officers: Mrs. Bennett Riley, Mrs. Edward S. Canby, and others -- baked cakes for the wedding: members of the constitutional convention or their ladies, Rodman H. Rose and Mrs. Charles T. Botts, gave the happy couple presents, several of Chinese origin; and we are given the latest on dress and hat design. It is also interesting to note some personal facts about Thomas O. Larkin, and that Mrs. John C. Fremont is laid up with feet trouble: Mrs. Lansford Hastings is revealed as cutting in on the scarce servant supply; the

mountainous household washing has to be taken by the horns.

Mrs. Westcott also writes of the architecture of Monterey, the fleas, the delayed mail, and homesickness.

Now for the letter about the wedding which took place in Monterey October 19, 1849:

"A friend of Mr. W's - Mr. Douglas was sent for to 'tie the knot' -- At first it was intended to have a very private wedding -- only the officers-- but the 1st of September the convention assembled to form a Constitution for the State of California. Everyone kept open house as there were no hotels or places to lodge. We had three staying with us--besides at meals as many as we could accommodate--always setting the table for 10 or 12 every meal - sometimes more as it was considered the greatest favor and kindness. Mrs. Canby had also as many as she could put plates for. Every house in town was crowded and all hurry and bustle."

"The convention we expected would adjourn and everyone quietly leave for their homes before the wedding -- but the 19th came and the Convention was still in session and no nearer adjournment than two weeks before. It (the wedding) could not be postponed because we had written home about it . . . We must also invite the American families and one or two Spanish families who had been very kind to us, accordingly I wrote myself 58 invitations and about 50 came. The room was brilliantly lighted. The bride of course looked her prettiest - as brides usually do -her hair curled in front -- a white tarleton with lace around the sleeves and neck (bare neck and short sleeves, of course), no ornaments except a magnificent pair of bracelets -- Chinese of exquisitely wrought silver -- the most beautiful things I have ever seen, so delicate and pure looking. They were presented by Mr. Lyon, one of the gentlemen staying with us, and one of the secretaries of the convention. He sent to San Francisco for them and they came the every afternoon of the 19<sup>th</sup> by the Express.

"Mrs. Botts sent her a beautiful white rose made by herself of the feathers of the albatross, coming around Cape Horn. Out of compliment to her, Mattie wore it in her hair. Miss Bettie Botts sent her a little dressing box with fancy soaps and perfumes. Mr. Price gave her a large Chinese work box and I gave her a handsome

Chinese writing desk. The parson and Mr. W's friend gave her 8 ounces - \$48 - for silver and George and I both did writing for the convention at night to be able to have something to bestow."

We will continue with the story of this important wedding of 1849 in Monterey with the next Issue of the diary.