

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Our Old-time Fleas

When the Rev. Samuel Hopkins Willey, one of the chaplains of the First Constitutional Convention held in Monterey in 1849, married Miss Martha Jeffers of Philadelphia in Monterey on Oct. 19 of the same year her sister reported in a letter home.

"Oh! What a time we had getting enough eggs for the cake Mrs. Gen. Riley, Mrs. Major Canby, Mrs. Capt. Kane and Capt. Wescott made it all as it would have been an utter impossibility to set a handsome supper table here to the creditable to the family some determined to have nothing but cake and wine an immense fruit cake and two large pound cakes, each two pounds round. They were all very nice and happened to be beautifully baked. Never were cakes more faithfully watched or more carefully made."

The bride had arrived in Monterey with her sister and brother-in-law Capt. and Mrs. George Westcott on board a government transport. The Rev. Mr. Willey reached Monterey on the steamer "California" on Feb 23, 1849, so was here to welcome his bride to-be as she disembarked. After four months of courtship, they were married here in Monterey and it is of that wedding that Mrs. Westcott wrote a detailed description to the relatives back home.

"The ceremony was at 8 o'clock and only the married officers invited, and the family included Gen'l and Mrs. Riley and Arabella, Major and Mrs. Canby, Capt. and Mrs. Kane, Capt. and Mrs. Burton, Dr. King and the three gentlemen with us, Rev. Mr. Hunt from San Francisco, and Rev. Mr. Douglass from San Jose, both also staying with us. The others of the company were invited at 9 o'clock Mrs. Riley and Mrs. Canby cut the cake Dr. King, Capt. Kane, and Capt. Burton (as the guests arrived and having paid their respects to the bride and groom), handed them cake and wine which was on a side table in the corner behind the door. Capt. and Mrs. Wescott of course received the guests at the door. Mrs. Canby's paring was also thrown open so, though we made no pretension in anything, we had a very pleasant evening and no stiffness or awkwardness as generally at weddings.

"We had a number of officers many of them members of the convention. Col. Fremont and his brother-in-law,

Mr. Jones, were among the guests. Mrs. Fremont was unable to come as she had poisoned her feet and was not able to walk with either shoe or stocking for several weeks."

From this bit of gossip concerning events in Monterey, Mrs. Wescott wrote of trouble in the household, "We could not get anyone to wash for us for less than \$6 a dozen and as a favor might wash one dozen only, and we have been in despair how we should get the sheets washed and the big tablecloths."

In another part of her letter Mrs. Westcott describes her Monterey home to her relatives in Philadelphia. "Imagine a white house high up on a hill overlooking the Bay of Monterey and commanding a view of the whole town and surrounding scenery, with two front doors in the middle and a window on each side and you have our house. Second story, four windows with one-story adobe 'lean' to for the kitchen back of it – two rooms downstairs, parlor has a fireplace the other none. My room is over the parlor, Mr. and Mrs. in the other. The whole house is a mere shell. only weather-boarded, neither lined or sealed, two staircases one in each room.

"We are, however, to have the house lined and a fence round the house. 'Poco Tempo' by and by, outside very forlorn, the joists plain to see upstairs, unbleached cotton tacked across the beams for ceiling, and knot holes all round the house to cool the atmosphere and let the rain in. No matter, here very bad for (?) of no consequence in California."

Continuing with her description of some of the houses in Monterey in 1849, Mrs. Westcott wrote: "Willie wrote Mattie that as near as he could remember the only decent house was occupied by Mr. Larkin. Our Alvarado house we lived in before was just In front of It on the next street their balcony looked out on our garden - but the fleas are biting me horribly - almost devouring me bodily. Which reminds me of a story you will not believe, but nevertheless, it is true as can be. One night Mattie and I had so many we decided to count them as we caught them. The number reached 136 and we at length crept into bed perfectly exhausted and half frozen and I could not sleep all night for their nipping."

There is still so much to tell about this wedding in Monterey 107 years ago and about the life of people

here in those early days, that we will continue our story
in the next issue of the diary.