

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The Californian

On July 7, 1846, Monterey was taken by a squadron of the U.S. Navy, in the War with Mexico, and Rev. Walter Colton, a Navy chaplain, a writer and a lecturer, was appointed alcalde of the town. This enterprising clergyman found an old press and put it to work again. With Robert Semple, a huge and picturesque frontiersman, aiding in its production, the first issue of The Californian appeared in Monterey 110 years ago tomorrow. The small sheet, eight and one-half inches by 12 ½ inches, printed on such odds and ends of paper as could be found, made the authentic start of the newspaper press in California.,

The four-page Californian was two columns wide, of 21 picas printed 1 with the Zamorano type. By the aid of translator William P. Hartnell, a portion of the paper was printed in Spanish. The type was placed right against column rules. There were terrible mistakes in spelling, grammar, and punctuation. A prospectus was in the first issue of The Californian, a part of which follows:

"This is the first paper ever published in California, and though issued upon a small sheet, it is intended, it shall contain matter that will be read with interest. The principles which will govern us in conducting it can be set forth, in a few words."

Paragraphs followed advocating freedom of speech and press, severance with Mexico, promoting California's interest- social, civil, and religious.

This press shall be free and independent; unawed by power and untrampled by party. The use of its columns shall be denied to none, who have suggestions to make, promotive of public weal. We shall lay before our readers the freshest domestic intelligence and earliest foreign news. We commence our publication upon a very small sheet, but its dimensions shall be enlarged as soon as requisite materials can be obtained."

The January 28, 1847 issue of the paper carried this account: "Our alphabet, our type, is a Spanish font picked up here in a cloister and has no W's in it as there is none in the Spanish alphabet. I have sent to the Spanish islands for this letter, In the meantime, we must use the two V's. Our paper at present is that used for wrapping cigars; in due time, we will have something

better. Our object is to establish a press in California, and this we shall in all probability be able to accomplish. The absence of my partner (Semple) for the last three months and my duties as alcalde here have deprived our little paper of some of those attentions which I hope it will hereafter receive. Walter Colton."

Colton wrote in his "Three Years in California" in 1850, that the material for the office of The Californian had been created out of the chaos of a small concern, which had been used in printing a few sectarian tracts by a Roman Catholic monk. "The press," he said, "was old enough to be preserved as a curiosity, the mice had borrowed in the balls; there were no rules, no leads, and the types were rusty and all in pi. It was only by scouring that the letters could be made to show their faces. A sheet or two of tin were procured, and these, with, a jack-knife, were out into rules and leads. Luckily, we found, with the press, the greater part of a keg of ink; and now came the main scratch for paper. None could be found, except what is used to envelope the tobacco of the cigar smoked here by the natives. A coaster had a small supply of this on board, which we procured. It is in sheets a little larger than the common-sized foolscap. And this is the size of our first paper, which we have christened The Californian.

"A crowd was waiting when the first sheet was thrown from the- press. It produced quite a little sensation. Never was a bank run upon harder; not, however, by people with paper to get specie, but exactly the reverse. One-half the paper is in English, the other in Spanish. The subscription for a year is \$5; the price of a single sheet is 12 ½ cents; and is considered cheap at that,"

We read in Herbert Fahey's little book on "Early Printing in California" that there were W's in the type, for a part of the first edition of the Californian uses the W and another uses the two V's. It is supposed that there were not enough W's to go around. He also states that the type was not Spanish, but an American type, with its full complement of letters. Wright also believes that the statement made by Colton that the press had been used by a Roman Catholic monk is pure fiction — just a newspaper man's dream of making the paper and the press more appealing to its public no doubt.