

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

September 5, 1956

### **Willey Founds University**

Samuel Hopkins Willey, a young graduate of Dartmouth, reached Monterey in February 1849, just as the gold fever was mounting to its dizzy height, bearing a commission from the Home Missionary Society of the Congregational church. In the autumn of that year, he was made a chaplain of the historic Constitutional Convention, meeting in Colton Hall, Monterey. He also served as chaplain at the Presidio, and for six months he conducted a pioneer school here.

Mrs. Charles L. Davis of Santa Cruz, the eldest daughter of the eldest son of the Rev. Samuel H. Willey, has recently presented to the Colton Hall museum two original letters, one inviting Willey to become pastor of the First Congregational church of Santa Cruz (1871), and the other the clergyman's "thank you" for a copy of "The Surf" reporting news of church in 1899.

Mrs. Davis was visited a short time ago by Mrs. Pauline Barbour, curator of the Colton Hall museum, at which time she was given the two letters to add to the collection of interesting and historic documents fast accumulating there concerning the men who gathered in the building in 1849 to draft California's first constitution. This granddaughter of one of California's first schoolteachers was the daughter of Harry Ide Willey. Her maiden name was Roberta Willey. She has also promised to present to Colton Hall a number of books and other items of interest concerning Mr. Willey.

Samuel Hopkins Willey is best known for his fruitful endeavors in the field of education. He had been planning for a college or University even before the end of 1849. Adverse conditions at that time brought delay but not defeat.

In 1855 the charter for the College of California, was granted. It was dedicated in 1860, and later became the University of California. While never the president of this great college, Willey served as actual head administrator of the college of California for eight years. He was regent for 50 years and lived to be 97. In one of the gift letters, written in 1899, he told his pastor friend: "I have discovered that one's working days come to an end. I did not think how I should behave when

that time should come with me. I am trying to learn that now."

In appearance, Willey was "handsome, dark-eyed, ruddy, tall, and of athletic build." He had not been long in California before he married Martha Jeffers, "a charming maiden of adventurous spirit" who had accompanied her sister, the wife of Capt. Wescott, to Monterey. Their marriage took place in Monterey on Sept. 19, 1894.

In addition to all his other interests, Willey found time to start the first library in Monterey for the English-speaking population.

It was three years after the charter for the College of California had been granted in 1855, that Berkeley was formally chosen to be the future site of the college. In 1935 a plaque was placed, with fitting ceremony, on one of the oldest oak trees of the campus. It bears this inscription:

**In grateful dedication to the memory of**

**Samuel Hopkins Willey**

**1821-1914**

**One of the Founders of the  
College of California, from  
which this University sprung.**