

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

February 4, 1957

Early San Franciscans

We have been presented with a copy of "Yerba Buena, 1846," a description of San Francisco with an account of its early inhabitants by John Henry Brown, containing a lithograph in colors from Rev. Walter Colton's "Deck and Port." The Grabhorn Press prepared the four-age copy for the American Library Association in 1939, when the members met in San Francisco in annual convention.

John Henry Brown was an Innkeeper who wrote "Reminiscences and Incidents of Early Days in San Francisco" first published in 1886, Brown begins his narrative with the statement that there were no streets in San Francisco when he arrived, and that there were but two white ladies in the town in the days of which he writes.

Among the early residents of the place, he states, may be numbered: Alexander Forbes, his wife and three children living on Montgomery street near the corner of the present Clay street, in a house built by Jacob Leese, afterward sold by the Hudson Bay Co., to William M. Howard, together with four 50-vara lots. Leese formerly lived in Monterey.

Jacob Fuller, an Englishman, who followed the occupations of both butcher and cook, owned two 50-vara lots on Sacramento and Kearney streets, on which there were two houses and an adobe brick oven. One house was occupied by the family, the other had a store in it, kept by Captain Leidsoff (Leidesdorff) a native of the Isle of St. Thomas.

Nathan Spear and family, formerly of Boston, lived on Montgomery street, corner of Clay. Finch and Thompson had a blacksmith shop and dwelling on the corner of Kearney and Bella Union Theater now stands (1846), noted Brown.

"Jesus Noe and family lived on the corner of Stockton and Clay streets where he owned a house and one 50-vara lot. Mr. Noe was the Alcalde or, Justice of Peace. An Englishman, generally called 'Jack the Soldier' his proper name being John Cooper, lived with his wife on a 50-vara lot on the corner of Jackson and Kearney streets. He was a regular 'Jack of all trades' and worked at whatever he could find to do." Brown named a number of other men and their house locations

including Briones, Deneke (baker), Tom Smith, a shoemaker; John H. Brown, bartender; Sherback (Sherreback), carpenter; Busam, an American, clerk for Leidsoff; John Sullivan, teamster; Captain Lidrick (Rodriguez), Custom House officer; John Cuzins, cook; Kline, a German, a locksmith.

At Mission Dolores there resided the following persons: Francisco Guerrero, Francisco Sanchez and brother Andrew Hoepfner, a Russian, gardener, and music teacher; a Mexican named Valencia, a musician, a family named Beannel (Bernal), add several Indians and Mexicans."

The accompanying-colored map printed the year Brown wrote the description, shows about that number of houses and a glimpse of the Mission Dolores. Brown published his reminiscences in 1886, calling the names of the streets as they were known in that year and as they are identified today. Noe street was probably named for Alcalde Jesus Noe.

While re-reading the former minutes of the Monterey Foundation we came across this recording by the secretary in 1946 : "Miss Margaret Jacks discussed with the trustees the advisability of attempting to make a public park of the Washerwoman's Bay area. She stated that, Miss Vida Jacks had intended, before her death, to make some provision in this respect. Miss Jacks said that this was the place in the very, early days where the Mexicans and Indian women did their laundry, and it became more or less of a public place at which all the gossip of the town and neighborhood was spread. She also stated that there, is a legend that whenever a crime was committed in Alta California the peace officers would visit Washerwoman's Bay, gossip with the women, and thereby obtain enough information. to solve their problem."