

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Our First Newspaper

In 1896, Miss Jessie Kay, the daughter of the publisher of the Monterey newspaper of that day, wrote in "Sketches of the Leading Places of Interest in Monterey," published by the pupils of the Monterey Public School, a story of *The Californian*, the first newspaper published in California.

Jessie begins her article: "As we wander curiously about this dreamy old town, which bears so strongly upon it the impress of its past, and suddenly come upon the paper boy delivering the mammoth dailies now published, a feeling of curiosity at once arises about the first newspaper ever published in California. Inquiry brings out the fact that it was *The Californian*, and, fortunately, we find a friend who has two early numbers that we are allowed to examine."

From these first editions she finds "that *The Californian* was published by Walter Colton and Robert Semple, a pioneer of Kentucky, and that it appeared in Monterey every Saturday morning. The first number came out Aug. 15, 1846, and the publication continued until the paper finally merged into the *Alta California*. It was a small sheet, about letter size. The terms for one year were \$5; single copies, 12 ½ cents. It was printed on paper originally intended for the manufacture of cigarettes, and the office was resurrected from the remains of a small concern formerly used in printing Roman Catholic tracts in Spanish, therefore, a Spanish font was used, and there being no 'w' in the Spanish alphabet, two 'v's' (vv) were used instead."

Among the interesting items found by our youthful writer of 1896 in the two copies of *The Californian*, were notices that reward of \$20 and \$50 would be given for the apprehension and delivery of certain U.S. Marines, deserters from the service, signed by Wm. Mervine, Fort Mervine on the Presidio Hill, was named for this officer. There was also a notice of a blockade on the western coast of Mexico, by authority of the President and Congress of the United States, signed by R.F. Stockton, commodore and commander-in-chief of the naval forces of the United States in the Pacific Ocean, and governor and commander-in-chief of the Territory of California; notice of the arrival of the U.S. Frigate Congress with the return of Commodore Stockton to his family and friends in Monterey, followed

by an account of his capture of Los Angeles during his absence.

There was also recorded in one of the papers a discussion of grievances between Mexico and the United States; a long article on certain outrages committed on Walla Walla Indian, including a letter from John A. Sutter; and an article in each paper printed in Spanish.

Two paragraphs from leading articles in these old Californians are both amusing and interesting today:

"The great mass of the people of California are quiet and inoffensive people, and but for ambitious leaders would remain on their ranches a contented and happy community, and under a good government would be valuable citizens; many of them are men of fine sense and high moral worth, though from the nature of their government they have been deprived of the means of education to a great extent."

"The ladies, who are numerous, are handsome and some of them beautiful, are very sprightly, industrious, and amiable in their natures, affectionate to their relatives and friends, kind to their neighbors, and generous even to their enemies; and we are much in hopes that their mild and genial influence will go far to bring about that amity of feeling which is so desirable between the old and the new citizens of this highly favored country."

The advertisements, according to Miss Kay, were also worth quoting:

"For Sale or Barter—A general assortment of Merchandise; also a large lot of Brown Mantas, for sale low for cash or hides. Talbot H. Green."

"Notice—The subscriber offers his services to the public as a general translator of all languages spoken and written in California. Call at his house in Monterey. W.E.F Hartnell."