

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Hawaiians in California

We have heard very little about the Hawaiian colony in California, though while it was the smallest. It was probably the most colorful both before and after the gold rush. William Heath Davis, who played such a prominent part in the life of California as an author and a merchant, was a Kanaka, Richard Henry Dana's best friends in California, so he wrote, were the Kanakas camped on the beach at Santa Barbara.

Davis, as a boy of 10, sailed into San Francisco in 1831, aboard Capt. George Woods' bark Louisa, This Hawaiian lad became one of the founding fathers of the city and the most wealthy and respected Hawaiian outside the Sandwich Islands. He was known to his shipmates in those early years as "Kanaka Bill" Davis. Young Davis, we were told in an article written by Richard H. Dillon in *Westways*, the excellent magazine published by the Automobile Club of Southern California, liked California at once and declared that he would return someday. San Francisco was then known as Yerba Buena, to which Davis returned two years later, on board the Boston bark Volunteer. He again returned, this time to establish a home in California, in 1838, when the brig Don Quixote sailed through the Golden Gate.

Davis was not the first islander to settle in California although he was probably the most important. For years, Yankee whalers had put into Honolulu to pick up supplies and replenish their crews from the Kanaka population, to replace New England crewmen who had either died or jumped ship.

In 1839 John Sutter, a Swiss, arrived at Yerba Buena, with a few followers, on board the brigantine Clementina. He engaged Davis, the young Hawaiian, to command his little fleet of two schooners and a four oared boat up the Sacramento to start a colony. The colony included three Hawaiians and their wives. The trip took eight days. They landed at the site which later became Sutter's Fort, and still later, Sacramento.

It is told that a nine-gun salute was fired as the Hawaiian, William Heath Davis, began his eight-day trip back to Yerba Buena. At the end of the journey back down the twisting and unchartered Sacramento River they were nearly starving, with brown sugar their only remaining food. Fortunately, they reached the site of

modern Martinez and there they found a herd of cattle belonging to a Mexican rancho, a friend of Davis'. A steer was killed and butchered, cooked and eaten.

Nathan Spear was Davis' uncle, so upon his return to Yerba Buena he worked in the latter's store there and in Monterey. In 1842 he became super-cargo of the Don Quixote, at first trading up and down the California coast and later sailing to Hawaii with a full cargo of hides, otter and beaver pelts.

Dillon tells us that in Honolulu Davis purchased a one-third share in the English brig Euphemia, filled her with Boston and European trade goods, and sailed her to San Francisco under the Hawaiian flag, arriving in February 1846. He traded that year in Monterey where one of his innovations was an 80-foot table at the Custom House on which he displayed samples of his cargo to the "Californianos" and their "senoras" who did not wish to crowd aboard the ship.

Davis became one of the most prominent merchants in San Francisco after taking over Spear's store when the latter moved to Napa. When the Euphemia returned to San Francisco from Honolulu it became the first ship to pay U. S. duties in the San Francisco harbor. The ship supplied Commodore Sloat's squadron with tea, coffee, flour, sugar, boots and clothing, liquors, beers, and wines.

William Heath Davis married Maria de Jesus Estudillo, daughter of one of California's most landed gentry.