

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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'A Secret Journal'

Several years ago, the Bancroft Library of the University of California purchased in England a noteworthy manuscript. It is a small volume, crudely bound in sheepskin, and bears no other label than the word "Secret" lettered on its front cover.

So reports Dr. John Hussey, regional historian for the National Park Service in San Francisco and author of the recent volume, "The History of Fort Vancouver."

The manuscript which Dr. Hussey describes is "The Voyage of the Racoon: A 'Secret' Journal of a visit to Oregon, California and Hawaii, 1813-1814." The Book Club of California has published the manuscript in book form as its fall publication for 1958, as a work of outstanding interest and importance. James D. Hart is president of the Book Club of California, and Dr. George P. Hammond, director of the Bancroft Library, is chairman of the publication committee.

The author of this lively, humorous - and sometimes racy - narrative was a member of the crew of His Majesty's sloop-of-war Racoon, the vessel sent by Great Britain to seize John Jacob Astor's fur-trading post at the mouth of the Columbia River during the War of 1812. Reaching Astoria late in 1813, the ship's company was bitterly disappointed to find that no fighting would be necessary, since the American post had already been sold to a Canadian firm. But the crew enjoyed a series of adventures, some of them romantic, while waiting for their captain to take formal possession of the Oregon country.

Outward bound across the dangerous bar of the Columbia, the Racoon severely damaged her bottom and was forced to put into San Francisco Bay for repairs. The hull was patched with the help of the Spanish authorities and the North West Company's ship, the Isaac Todd; and the Racoon moved southward to pay a courtesy call at Monterey. Then she sailed for the Hawaiian Islands to hunt down Yankee merchantmen before beginning the long voyage, home.

Complimenting the text is a notable series of illustrations. The author of the journal fancied himself an artist and he frequently occupied spare moments by sketching scenes observed during the voyage. Two of his pencil sketches, one of the Presidio of Monterey and

the other of San Francisco, make their first public appearance in this newest publication of the California Book Club. The publishers think that these drawings make a major contribution to the pictorial record of Spanish California. Only 400 copies of the book are being published which will very soon make "The Voyage of the Racoon" a collector's item.

Nowhere in the log does the author reveal his name. The journal begins on Nov. 9, 1812. with the Racoon anchored at Spithead, off the coast of England. She was commanded by Capt. William Black, who later retired as a rear admiral. The Racoon sailed from San Francisco April 19, 1814, and three days later anchored at Monterey. He wished to pay his respects to Gov. Jose Joaquin de Arrillaga, and he desired to strengthen his crew by recovering several men who had deserted from the Isaac Todd. Adverse winds on a second try forced the vessel to head for the Hawaiian Islands, after picking up but one deserter at Monterey.

According to Spanish records. eight men had deserted from the Isaac Todd and three others had been left behind to recover from scurvy. One of the latter was John Gilroy, the first permanent foreign resident of California.

There is this delightful description of Monterey and the surrounding country: "At 5 p m. we came to anchor in Monterey. Saluted the fort with 13 guns, who returned it with 15 guns. Went on shore for a ride and see the place. Dined with governor, captain, 2nd lieutenant, purser, and doctor - rode to the Mission, about four miles - beautiful riding on the down. Shrubs and trees all the way, like a nobleman's park. This mission is on the same establishment as the others, about 1,500 Indians here.

". . . The country here surpasses in beauty all I have yet seen on the coast, the whole of it in view being by nature diversified with rows of trees on gradual ascents and in streams of murmuring rills through shady valleys. There is a farmer's family here consisting of several male and female (besides the parents) children, three of the latter of which would not disgrace an English noble. They really are charming girls.

"The governor is an old man and a perfect gentleman in his manner. He treated us with great civility, also the inhabitants. This port abounds in cattle of all description and game of all kinds. I forgot to mention the partridge

as a particular bird. They are very small a very pretty
dun color with a top knot.

"The mission of this place is very neat, resembling in
miniature a country village in England. It is a beautiful
place altogether, affording much amusement to the
speculative mind, having many curious windings in the
different roads, interspersed with small woods from
which warbling birds send forth a melodious harmony
to the passengers."