

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Side-wheeler Tragedy

Number four in the California Book Club's series of Keepsakes is the history of Brother Jonathan, one of the Gold Rush steamers which traveled up and down the West Coast from 1852 to 1865, until she was wrecked in a storm at Point St George, about 10 miles from Crescent City.

"Brother Jonathan" was built in 1850 by Perine, Patterson & Stacks, with engines installed by Morgan Works, N. Y., at a cost of \$190,000.

"Brother Jonathan" was a side-wheel steamer, measuring 1,360 tons, two decks, two masts, and a sharp bow fitted with short bowsprit. Her main saloon was 70 feet long with 12 staterooms on each side, and she had berths for 365 passengers in all.

The wooden side-wheel steamer spent nearly a year in trade in the Caribbean, after which she was withdrawn from service in the winter of 1851-1852 for extensive rebuilding from which she emerged built up solid, her guards raised, her passenger capacity increased to 730. She was advertised to sail from New York to San Juan de Nicaragua on Feb. 26, 1852 but did not sail until the 28th. After this voyage, she was sold by Mills to "Commodore" Cornelius Vanderbilt.

She cleared New York for San Francisco under Capt. C. H. Baldwin in May of 1852 and was placed in trade between San Francisco and San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua, in competition with the Pacific Mail's service to Panama. "Brother Jonathan" shuttled back and forth between California and Nicaragua until 1856, first under the Vanderbilt's house flag and then that of the New York & California Steamship line.

John T. Wright bought "Brother Jonathan" on July 7, 1857, when she was placed on her local coastwise route under the name of "Commodore." Wright sold her to the California Steam Navigation Co. in 1858 who gave her back her original name "Brother Jonathan." In 1861 she was completely rebuilt in John G. North's yard in San Francisco. On July 28, 1865, she sailed from San Francisco for Portland with over 200 passengers aboard and 54 officers and crew. She was very heavily loaded, and encountering heavy water off the northern California coast, she found her head way practically

stopped and Capt. De Wolf attempted to run into Crescent City for shelter.

On July 30 she struck a submerged rock off Point St. George. Although there was no panic aboard, all but one of the ship's boats were swamped in the heavy seas, and only 19 passengers and crew survived when the ship went down about 45 minutes after striking. Fabulous stories were told of the great wealth in gold lost with the ship, and many attempts have been made to locate the wreck.

Accompanying this number of the gold rush steamers series is a reproduction in color of an oil painting made in 1851, painted by James Bard and apparently overpainted. In the lower right-corner there is this inscription: "Painting by Lugar J. Tommilson, Block maker. Originally painted by James Bard, N.Y., 1851, 686 Washington St., N. Y."

The painting now hangs in the Griswold Inn in Essex, Conn., and is reproduced by the kind permission of the owner, A. L. Lovell. Elwin M. Eldredge of Clearmont, N. Y., wrote the script which gives the history of "Brother Jonathan."