

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Birthday Celebration

Today we will continue our report of the signing of California's Constitution as a reporter of the Sacramento Union wrote it for his paper in September 1849 - 110 years ago.

The historic document had been signed in our last report, the guns had saluted the new State, the delegates had congratulated each other, the old Spanish town had celebrated, but business still had to be attended to by the delegates who had traveled by foot, horseback, muleback, and any other means of transportation obtainable in those days, to be present, so the report continues.

Our unknown newspaper reporter writes: "But the most interesting and affecting part of the proceedings of the day was the call by the delegates, after the adjournment, upon the Governor. The veteran pioneer, Captain John A. Sutter, had been appointed by unanimous resolution, to address General Riley, on behalf of the contention, and on its dissolution, the delegates, with the sergeant-at-arms at their head, preceded in a body to the mansion of the 'Hero of Contreras.' Arrived there they were welcomed by a kind salutation and a cordial shake of the hand; after which Captain Sutter thanked the General, in a short and neat speech, for the aid and assistance he had so freely given to the Convention in the prosecution of its labors, and trusted that the people of California would be as fortunate hereafter in obtaining a Governor whose firmness, moderation and patriotic exertions for their welfare had won for him greater glory than had come to him from the blood-stained fields of Mexico." These comments were followed by a report of the General's reply, described as one of the "happiest efforts of the kind we have ever listened to."

"It could not be called a speech; for it bore no relation to the 'fustian' of which such articles are usually manufactured; but it was simple, fervent and eloquent recital of a patriotic desire for the good of California. He did not profess to make a speech - he had never made a speech in his life - and even if he were a professed speech-maker he did not doubt that the occasion and the expression of the convention's thanks would overcome him, as it did now, and prevent his utterance of the emotions of gratitude with which his heart was

full. He had labored to the utmost of his ability to promote the interests of this country, and though he did not expect to be one of her citizens, he felt it to be the proudest day of his life when he could say that he had assisted in laying the foundation of that glory and greatness which he foresaw would soon be the portion of the new State of California.

"No: Not even amid the smoke and carnage of battle, or the enthusiasm and glory of victory, had he ever felt so full of devotion to his country and her progress, so desirous to promote and defend her interests and her fame, or so grateful that he had permitted to become an humble instrument in the advancement of the greatest of modern republics."

At the conclusion of General Riley's remarks, three cheers were given for the "Governor of California," three for "Captain John A. Sutter," and three more for the "New State," and then, after partaking of the refreshments provided by the hospitality of the Governor, the company separated to make their final preparations for departure for their respective homes.

"Such was the day, such the ceremonies, and such the auspices under which California struck her first blow for admission to the Union. It was a day that can never be forgotten; for with it is linked all of the good and evil that is to befall her in her new and untried path. The day itself was typical of the feelings of those who were entrusted with the high mission of forming a Constitution. When the morning sun rose in the mist and gloom, doubts and sadness filled their minds. They felt that theirs was a heavy responsibility: that the instrument they were about to sign must become the source of power, greatness, and fame to the mighty State, or the impediment to all these, or perhaps its ruin. And they were thoughtful and anxious, though they were assured in their hearts that they had acted honestly and patriotically. But, as the day grew older, the chilling fogs disappeared, and with it went all fear and gloom, and there grew up instead a firm resolve to go forth and labor well and patiently for the accomplishment of that destiny which is to make the United States the greatest of the republics, and California the Empire State of the Pacific."