

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Newlyweds on Horseback

The month of June being the month for brides it is most appropriate that we relate to our readers the description of a wedding held in Monterey in 1846 as taken from the personal diary of the Rev. Walter Colton, written at the time that he was Alcalde of Monterey.

"It is said that Californians are born on horseback; it may also be said that they are married on horseback. The day the marriage contract is agreed on by both parties, the bridegroom's first care is to borrow or buy the best horse to be found in the vicinity.

"At the same time, he must get, by one of these means, a silver mounted bridle, and a saddle with embroidered housings. This saddle must have also as its stern, a bridal pillow, with bead aprons flowing from the flanks of the horses. These aprons are also embroidered with silk of different colors and with gold and silver thread. Around the margin runs a string of small steel plates, alternating with slight pendants of the same metal.

"These as the horse moves, jingle like a thousand mimic bells.

"The bride, also, comes in for her share of these nuptial preparations. The bridegroom must present her with at least six entire changes of raiment, nor forget, through any sentiment of delicacy, even the chemise. Such an oversight must frustrate all his hopes; as it would be construed, into a personal indifference – the kind of indifference which a California lady will forgive. He therefore hunts articles with as much delicacy as the Peri, the gift that was to unlock Paradise. Having found six which are neither too full nor too slender, he packs them in roseleaves which seem to flutter like his heart and sends them to the lady as his last bridal present. She might naturally expect him to come next.

"The wedding day having arrived, the two fine horses, procured for the occasion, are led to the door, saddled, bridled and pinioned. The bridegroom takes up before him the Godmother and the Godfather of the bride, and thus they gallop away to church. The priest, in his richest robes, receives them at the altar, where they kneel, partake of the sacrament, and are married. That over, they start on the return but now the gentlemen change partners. The bridegroom, still on the pillion, takes up before him his bride. With his arm he steadies

her on the saddle and in his left hand he holds the reins. They return to the house of the bride's parents, where they are received with a discharge of musketry.

"Two persons stationed at some convenient place, now rush out and seize the bridegroom by his legs, and, before he has time to dismount, deprive him of his spurs, which he is obliged to redeem with a bottle of brandy.

"The married couple then enter the house where the near relatives are all waiting in tears to receive them. They kneel before the parents of the lady, and crave a blessing, which is bestowed with patriarchal solemnity, on rising, the bridegroom gives a signal for the guests to enter and another for the harp and guitar to strike up. Then commences the dancing which often continues for three days, with only brief intervals for refreshments, but none for slumber; the wedded pair must be on their feet, their dilemma furnishes food for good-natured gibes and merriment.

"Thus, commences married life in California. This stream it is hoped, is much smoother than its fount."