

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

November 23, 1960

Site of the Convention

Because the California State Division of Beaches and Parks met last week in Colton Hall in Monterey we have thought again of the Importance of this charming old building and its great history both past and present. Have you, our readers, passed by it recently in the evening when the flood lights are on it bringing out the pink and white coloring, the architectural features, and even the charming double stair cases leading one to the second floor where the first Constitutional Convention was held in 1849 and where the Constitution was signed? It is a grand and sentimental sight and one of the city's great heritages.

Bayard Taylor writes in his noteworthy volume "Eldorado" "The building in which the convention met was probably the only one in California suited to the purpose. It is a handsome, two-story edifice of yellow sandstone, situated on a gentle slope, above the town.. . The upper story, in which the convention sat, formed a single hall about 60 feet in length by 25 feet in breadth. A railing, running across the middle, divided the members from the spectators. The former were seated at long tables, the president occupying the rostrum at the further end, over which was suspended two American flags and an extraordinary picture of Washington, evidently the work of a native artist. The appearance of the whole body was exceedingly dignified and intellectual, and parliamentary decorum was strictly observed. A door in the center of the hall opened on a square balcony, supported by four pillars, where some of the members, weary with debate, came frequently to enjoy the mild September afternoon whose hues lay so softly on the blue waters of the bay."

The delegates met at Colton Hall, September 3 and the next day elected Robert Semple of the district of Sonoma, president and Captain William G. Marcy of the New York Volunteer Regiment, secretary.

Rev. Samuel H. Willey, better known as one of the principal founders of the University of California, and Padre Ramirez served on alternate days as chaplains of the gathering. J. Ross Browne, distinguished in later years as traveler, lecturer and writer, kept an official transcript of the proceedings and his report of the debates in "The Convention of California, 1849" is a chief source of information on the assembly. This small

booklet was published in 1949 by the Huntington Library at San Marino, Calif., with an introduction by Robert Glass Cleland, and we are happy to say that we have an autographed copy signed by the late Dr. Cleland.

We also have in our library a copy of "Reminiscence, Dartmouth 1840-1845" by Samuel Hopkins Willey, a member of the class of 1845, published in 1955 from the report written by the Rev. Willey and now in the archives at the Dartmouth College Library.

Robert Gordon Sproul wrote, as president of the University of California: "The University of California owes much to Dartmouth College, became the man who first conceived and promoted the idea of a university in the State, was the Reverend Samuel Hopkins Willey, a Dartmouth graduate who arrived in Monterey on February 23, 1849.

Dr. Willey organized the movement which led to the establishment of the Contra Costa Academy in 1853, and the chartering of the College of California on March 23, 1868. The trustees, of the college, of whom Dr. Willey was one were also largely responsible for establishing the character of the university.

Dr. Willey conducted his first services two days after his arrival in Monterey. He became chaplain to the local military detachment of the army headquarters here and later served, also, as chaplain to the convention. Not only did he establish and teach school in Monterey, but he set up, as well probably the first public library in California. He died in Berkeley on Jan 21, 1914, just three week after his 93rd birthday.