

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Year Of American Travel**

"A Year of American Travel" a narrative of personal experience by Jessie Benton Fremont had just been printed by the Book Club of California.

Jessie Benton Fremont, wife of the famous soldier and explorer, John Charles Fremont, was a person of considerable attainment in her own right. The daughter of Senator Hart Benton of Missouri, Jessie had spent most of her formative years in Washington, and when she first met her future husband she was a highly educated, young lady of sixteen, already versed in the political scene and accustomed to the sophisticated atmosphere of the nation's capital.

"A Year of American Travel" is, in the main, an account of her visit to California in 1849-50. Young, observant, critical, she was quick to see both shortcomings and possibilities of this new country, and she wrote of it with a keen if not always kindly pen. Perhaps no other woman, with the exception of "Dame Shirley," has painted such a vivid picture of California in those days when the presence of an American lady was a rarity amid the rough-and tumble of the Gold Rush.

"A Year of American Travel" was first published in 1878 by Harper's in their "Half-Hour Series." It is a very small book, which may account for its scarcity today, for it seldom appears on the market. To give this much needed reprint the handsome format it deserves the Book Club commissioned Saul and Lillian Marks of Plantin Press in Los Angeles to print the book.

The book has 135 pages, illustrated with splendid and unusual engravings by a talented Southern California artist and engraver, Ernest Freed. An interesting and most informative introduction has been provided by Patrick Manahan, editor of "Westways." The price is \$12.50.

Patrick Manahan, author of the introduction to "A Year of American Travel," states: "The only copy of this diary of Jessie Benton Fremont I have seen came from J. Gregg Layne's collection, now in the library at the University of California at Los Angeles. It is a little book, less than five inches long and about three inches wide, known in book circles as a 32mo. It has 190 pages, a paper cover and sold for 25 cents."

We came across several paragraphs in the diary concerning Mrs. Fremont's life in Monterey. She wrote: "Bayard Taylor has celebrated the noble pine trees that border the Pacific at Monterey." Continuing she wrote: "Domestic matters were even more upset here than in San Francisco where Chinese could be hired ... The major general in command of the post was his own gardener. He came to me, proud and triumphant, with a small basket on his arm containing vegetables of own raising. An as we would bring roses of our cultivation so he brought me a present of a cabbage, some carrots, and parsley.

"Mrs. Canby, wife of one of the officers, sent me daily a fragrant loaf of fresh bread wrapped in a clean napkin and on a beautiful china plate.

"Monterey was quite a town, with many good houses built with a disregard of space, a long front to the street, and short wings running back at either end, while the remainder of the square was large garden, shut in by a high adobe wall with coping of red tile.

"The only cow in the town belonged to one of the American ladies, and she sent me daily a portion of milk because I too had a little child."