

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

August 4, 1960

### **The Californian**

August was an interesting month in Monterey in 1846 for the reason that it was the birth month of California's first newspaper, the Californian, born on August 15, with the Rev. Walter Colton and Robert Semple as the publishers.

There appeared a prospectus as one of the features of this new paper, which Colton later admitted in his diary, "Three Years in California," was written by himself. It stated that further issues would appear every Saturday.

Colton wrote: "Little did I think when relinquishing the editorship of the North American in Philadelphia, that my next feat in this line would be in California. My partner is an emigrant from Kentucky, who stands six feet in his stockings. He is in a buckskin dress, a fox skin cap; is true with his rifle, ready with his pen, and quick at the type case."

Colton gives Semple further credit for the success of the first issues of the Californian. He reports that Semple created the materials of the office out of a chaos of a small concern, which had been used by a Catholic monk in printing a few religious tracts. The press was old enough, he declared, to be used as a curiosity. The type was rusty and all mixed up. It was only by washing and scouring that the letters could be made to show their faces.

The process of preparation for printing the paper continues: "A sheet or two of tin were procured, and these, with a jack-knife, were cut into rules and leads. Luckily there had been found with the press a keg of ink; and then came the main stretch - the search for paper. None could be found, except what had been used to envelope the tobacco of the cigar smoked here by the natives of that time. A coaster in the harbor supplied a small amount of this. It was in sheets a bit larger than what was known as foolscap." And Colton wrote: "And this is the size of our first paper, which was christened the Californian."

Though small in dimensions, this first number was as full of news as a black walnut is of meat, Colton wrote in his diary.

"We have received by couriers, during the week, intelligence from all the important military posts through the territory. Very little of this has transpired; it

reaches the public for the first time through our sheet. We have, also, the declaration of war between the United States and Mexico, with an abstract of the debate in the Senate. A crowd was waiting when the first sheet was thrown from the press. It produced quite a little sensation. Never was a bank run upon harder; not, however, by people with paper to get specie, but exactly the reverse. One-half of the paper is in English, the other in Spanish. The subscription for a year is five dollars; the price of a single sheet is twelve and a half cents; and is considered cheap at that." So ends Colton's notations for the first issue of the Californian.

On Saturday, August 22, Colton again wrote: "Our little paper, the Californian, made its appearance again today. Many subscribers have sent in their names since our last, and all have paid in advance. It is not larger than a piece of foolscap, but this foolscap parallel stops, I hope with the shape. Be this as it may, its appearance is looked for with as much interest as was the arrival of the mail by the New Yorkers and Bostonians in those days when a moon waxed and waned over its transit."

Among the collection of old newspapers owned by the Monterey History and Art Assn, and on loan to the Custom House for public display are two copies of the Californian. A copy of that historic publication - the first newspaper published in California dated Oct. 24, 1846, was presented by Everett Graff of Chicago. He bought it from John Howell of San Francisco, having seen that, at the time he visited Monterey, there was no copy of the paper on exhibit here. He presented it to the association and that organization had it framed.

Another copy of the Californian - an original issue dated Dec. 12, 1846 - is also at the Custom House on loan from the History and Art Assn.