

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **A Salty California Pioneer**

The Book Club of California's Quarterly News Letter has announced that the Fall book for the membership is to be a printing of John A. Swan's manuscript, "A Trip to the Gold Mines of California, 1848." Swan was the builder of California's First Theater, one of Monterey's most prized possessions and a State Historical Monument

He arrived in Monterey in 1843 and built the long, low adobe building in the summer of the following year.

"A Trip to the Gold Mines of California," one of the treasures of the Bancroft library at the University of California, is by no means "just another gold rush journal." John Swan was one of the saltiest of California's pioneers, in fact before his death in the county hospital in January 1896, he had for several years worn a band about his hat reading "Pioneer of '43."

A self-taught writer, his language reflected his long life in the fore-castle and galley: and his outlook on events was that of a common sailor, and the runaway or furloughed soldiers with whom he batched at the mines. As a result, his narrative has a breeziness that is refreshing, and it brings out aspects of life in the diggings which were often neglected by other chroniclers of the days of 1848.

We are taking the privilege today of quoting from the portion of his manuscript which appeared in the Book Club Quarterly, knowing that it will give our readers a thoroughly different idea of Jack Swan from that which we possibly have had as the builder of the First Theater, as selling pies from a basket on the streets of Monterey, and once in awhile writing a brief article for the local newspaper.

Characteristic of Swan's writing is a sketch, "Tooth-Drawing in Monterey," which was published in the San Jose Pioneer for May 4, 1878. As a forecast of the good things to come, we reprint a part of this earthly anecdote.

During many years at sea as a boy and young man, Swan was frequently troubled by toothache. While at Mazatlan in 1840 he read in a medical book that the use of tobacco would sometimes cure this affliction, but he did not attempt the remedy until several years later. In

April 1844, he found himself in the harbor of Monterey on the schooner "California," J. B. R. Cooper, master. While there he wrote, "I had the toothache very bad, from a decayed double tooth, and Captain Cooper advised me to on shore and get old George Allen to draw it. George Allen did most of the tooth drawing then; he had an old fashioned instrument with a hook at the end of it, but it was old like himself, and sometimes when he had a good hold of the molar the instrument would slip, and the patient would knash his teeth in rage and xe-ation.

"Well I went on shore and paid George a dollar to draw the tooth. I went with him into the back yard, behind T. O. Larkin's store, and sat down in a chair, while old George performed the part of a dentist. After lancing my gums he applied his instrument. I though he was going to wrench my head off, when the hook slipped. The next time he was more successful, not only bringing out the tooth, but a portion of the Jaw bone sticking to it; and a small, sharp piece of the Jaw bone was left, which pricked my tongue every time I used it, and it began to fester after I went on board the vessel; so I had to go on shore again and go to Dr. Den, from Santa Barbara, who, with a small pair of tweezers, broke the point off, and my tongue healed up, and as I took up smoking soon afterwards I have not been troubled much with toothache since . . . Some people say smoking is a bad habit - so is having a toothache, a bad habit, and I would sooner have the smoke without toothache, than have the toothache without the smoke."