

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The First Ten

We wonder how many, if called upon to answer, could name the first ten governors of California, beginning with Peter H. Burnett who was elected at the first constitutional convention held in Monterey in 1849 and inaugurate first American constitutional governor of California at San Jose on Dec. 20 of the same year. He had emigrated from Missouri to Oregon in 1843, arrived in California in 1848 and became attorney for John A. Sutter.

On Jan. 9, 1851, Burnett resigned as the first governor of the state and was succeeded by Lieut. Gov. John McDougal, who was not so popular an official. Burnett retired from public life and continued the practice of law. He died in San Francisco May 17, 1895.

The third American constitutional governor of California was John Bigler, who was inaugurated Jan. 8, 1852. He was a native of Pennsylvania, became a printer, editor and lawyer and emigrated to California in 1849. He entered the state assembly in 1850, beginning as its speaker, later joining forces with David Broderick which resulted in his election as governor. He was reelected Sept. 7, 1853. He died in San Francisco Nov. 20, 1871.

John Neely Johnson was the first candidate of the native "American," or "Know Nothing" party. He was inaugurated California's fourth American constitutional governor on Jan. 9, 1856. He was a native of Indiana, born Aug. 2, 1825, studied law, came to California in 1849, was elected to the legislature in 1853 and governor in 1856.

John B. Weller succeeded Johnson as governor Jan. 8, 1858, as fifth governor. Milton S. Latham was inaugurated California's sixth governor after the American occupation. He held office but a few days, for the day after his inauguration the Legislature chose him as U.S. senator to fill the office left vacant after the death of David C. Broderick. Weller had succeeded Fremont as U.S. senator in 1852 and became governor in 1858.

The seventh governor was John D. Downey whose inauguration took place in Sacramento on January 14, 1860. He was a native of Ireland who came to California in 1849 and opened a drug store in Los Angeles - the only establishment of that sort between San Francisco

and San Diego. He was universally commended as governor of the State of California during that first period of Gold Rush days. During his administration, the Pony Express and Overland Stage was established, and California adhered to the Union during the Civil War. He ran for governor again in 1863 but was defeated by Frederick F. Law. He died in Los Angeles in 1894.

California's eighth governor was none other than Leland Stanford, founder of Stanford University. He was a native of Albany, New York, who came to California in 1852. He was the first president of the Central Pacific Railroad Company and was California's "war governor" during the Civil War. He was considered an exceedingly competent executive.

Number nine in the list of California's first governors is Frederick F. Law who was inaugurated on Dec. 10, 1863. He was born in Frankfort, Maine, Jan. 30, 1828 came to California in '49, engaged in mining and was one of the founders of the California Steam Navigation Company, and established a banking business at Marysville. Law died in San Francisco on July 21, 1894.

The tenth governor inaugurated Dec. 5, 1867 was Henry H. Haight, a native of Rochester, N.Y., a graduate of Yale, studied law, and was admitted to the bar in 1847. He came to California in 1850. Haight died in San Francisco in September of 1878.

It is interesting to note that there was only one of the California governors, up to No. 10, who had been born in Europe. He was Downey, a native of Ireland; Ohio had two, and New York two, Maine one, Indiana one, and Missouri one and no natives of California.