

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

October 30, 1961

Story Of A Wedding

The friends of Bancroft Library have done it again!

They have sent to the membership a delightful book, "The Ralston-Fry Wedding and the Wedding Journey to Yosemite." The story is dated May 20, 1858 and is taken from the diary of Miss Sarah Haight. It was edited by Francis P. Farquhar, first chairman of The Friends and noted Sierra author, and designed and printed by the Grabhorn Press in San Francisco - all of which make for a collector's item of the future.

Miss Sarah Haight later became Mrs. Edward Tompkins' and was the "charming bridesmaid" of the wedding party. She was the daughter of Judge Fletcher M. Haight, who came to California in 1854, and at one time owned property in Carmel Valley.

Her brother, Henry Huntley Haight, was governor of California from 1867 to 1871. Haight street in San Francisco was named for her uncle. Mr. Farquhar quotes William H. Brewer's "Up and Down California, 1867-1864" in writing: "Judge 'Haight is a fine old man, a man of much intellect, lives in a comfortable house, has with him two daughters, most lovely young women, of perhaps 18 and 22 years - pretty, agreeable, cultivated, and sensible." He had visited them in the valley.

When Miss Sarah was married to Edward Tompkins, by the Rev. Thomas Starr King, on Dec. 23, 1881, they had quite a different honeymoon from the Ralstons. They went to San Jose, and were caught in the floods of that year, following which she and her husband joined a field party of the State Geological Survey, led by Prof. Josiah Dwight Whitney, on an excursion to the summit of Mt. Diablo, which included Rev. David Starr King.

It was their daughter Miss Elizabeth Knight Tompkins who preserved her mother's diary and presented it to the Bancroft Library. She died only a few years ago, 1955, at her home in Pacific Grove at the age of 90.

Francis P. Farquhar begins his preface to the keepsake book with these questions: "When has such a thing ever happened before? Has such a thing every happened since? The bridegroom inviting the entire wedding party to join him and his bride on their honeymoon! But that is what William C. Ralston did when he married Lizzie

Fry in San Francisco on May 20, 1858. Ralston was 32 years old at the time; his bride 21."

Mrs. Elizabeth Fry Ralston was the last to go. For many years she lived in a peaceful cottage near Georgetown in the foothill country of the Mother Lode. She died in San Francisco, Nov. 30, 1929, at the age of 92 years.

Her daughter, Mrs. Arthur (Emelita Ralston) Page, lives to enjoy the "souvenir of the wedding" of her father and mother. It was Mrs. Page who loaned portraits of her mother and her father which were reproduced in the annual keepsake of the Friends of the Bancroft Library.

Josh Henry, who accompanied the wedding party on the frolic to Yosemite, wrote the following account for The Wild West, one of the Sunday papers.

"The event of the week was the wedding on Thursday last, as everybody knows, a certain banking firm extended their business by taking in a new partner (probably not a silent one.) . . . The gathering at Dr. Scott's church on Thursday to see the happy couple united was very large, and crinoline abounded. We don't know when we have seen so strong a turnout of the 'beauty and fashion' of our city. It was an exciting occasion to them, and the numbers who crowded the church gave evidence of the interest taken in the prominent actors in the scene. Daylight was excluded, and the happy conceit of lighting the church with gas gave great effect - it was a brilliant idea and a good one.

"It is unnecessary to remark that the bride looked beautiful and was gracefully supported through the trying scene by her charming bridesmaid - and how staunchly she was supported. The ladles were all there, and we can't tell them anything about it. They know more in a minute about such matters than we can tell them in a month.

"The happy couple left on the 'Helen Hensley' at 4 p.m. for Stockton, accompanied by a large party of friends, some of whom continue on with them to the Big Trees thence to Yosemite Falls. As the boat left the wharf, three hearty cheers were given, and a salute was fired from the steamers Sierra Nevada and Orizaba. The Helen Hensley and several other boats were dressed in flags, and the Orizaba and Sierra Nevada spread their bunting from hull to topmast."