

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Chaplain Colton

In the History of the Chaplain Corps of the United States Navy, compiled by Clifford M. Drury and loaned to us by Chaplain Capers of the Naval Post graduate School, we came across a great deal of information about the life of Walter Colton in Monterey, which we will pass on to our readers today.

We quote: Walter Colton, one of the best known Navy chaplains of the nineteenth century, launched a gallant fleet of books which spread his reputation throughout the reading public. Colton's unique experience as governor of a large part of California in the early days of its history under the American flag, added to his other achievements, won for him a prominent niche in California's hall of fame."

Colton was born in Rutland, Vermont, May 9, 1798. He received his B. A. degree from Yale in 1822 and was graduated from Andover Theological Seminary in 1825. He was ordained in the Congregational church. For three or four years Colton served as Professor of Moral Philosophy and belles-lettres in the Scientific and Military Academy at Middletown, Connecticut. He became editor of the American Spectator and Washington Chronical in Washington, D. C., in 1828 and as such attracted the attention of President Jackson who offered him an appointment as a naval chaplain. Colton accepted it and remained with the Navy until his death in Philadelphia on Jan. 22, 1851, according to statements made in Drury's Sea and Sailor."

After Colton's first duty on the Vincennes in the West Indies, he went to the Mediterranean aboard the Constellation. Out of this experience came the two books which proved him to be extremely observant traveler. "A Visit to Athens and Constantinople" and "Ship and Shore."

Upon his return from the Mediterranean in 1834, Colton appears to have been without regular naval duty of several months. During the winter of 1835, he lobbied on behalf of the proposed law to increase the pay of naval officers, including chaplains. Congress approved this law in March, 1835. After that he remained in Boston for two years. After the spring of 1837 he was appointed Historiographer and Chaplain to the South Sea Surveying and Exploring Squadron and

carried on special studies for a year preparing himself for this work. But because of ill health he was excused from this expedition.

Colton was a forceful writer who sought to put his Christian principles into practical every - day purposes. He was told by the new secretary of the Navy that his connection with a political newspaper (Independent North American) was considered "Inconsistent with your position as a chaplain in the Navy."

The first time the Navy department provided an organ for a chaplain was for Walter Colton when he was chaplain at the Naval Asylum in 1845. This instrument, known as a Packard Organ, manufactured by the Fort Wayne Organ Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana, is still in use at the Naval Home.

Walter Colton, at the age 47 years, had married Cornelia Baldwin of Philadelphia. In 1845, a year later he received orders for duty aboard the Congress. He bade farewell to his wife and started on a cruise that was destined to keep him away for nearly four years, most of which was spent in Monterey.

Chaplain Colton was among the first to send to Eastern newspapers the news of the discovery of gold in the Sacramento Valley in January 1848. His letters appeared in the Independent North American and the New York Journal of Commerce.

On December 10, 1942 a Liberty vessel, the Walter Colton, was launched by the Kaiser Shipbuilding Company at Richmond, California, in honor of this Navy chaplain who played such an important role in the early days of California history,

It was Walter Colton, the patriot and at the same time the spiritually-minded Navy chaplain, who penned the quotation: "The American people love valor. But they love religion also. They will confer their greatest honors only on him who combines them both."