

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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John McHenry Hollingsworth

During these days when Colton Hall is being discussed as a possible addition to the historic sites and buildings in Monterey now owned and operated by the California Division of Beaches and Parks, we will repeat some of the historic happenings there and personalities which helped to found the state.

The handsome two-story building on Pacific street is now owned by the City of Monterey and is an outstanding attraction in the civic center which includes the Friendly Plaza, the Few Memorial Hall of Records, the old Brown-Underwood Adobe and El Cuartel.

First and foremost, it was built by the Rev. Walter Colton, first alcalde of Monterey. It was the gathering place of the delegates to the Constitutional Convention in 1849. It once housed the school, was the home of the police station and even a social gathering place. At present it houses the city museum where may be seen much material pertaining to the convention of 112 years ago when the State Constitution was drafted and signed and other objects too numerous to mention.

John McHenry Hollingsworth, one of the delegates in 1849, has had probably as little written about him as any of the group of men who attended that first Constitutional Convention, held in Colton Hall in Monterey. Yet he had one of the most distinguished backgrounds.

John McHenry Hollingsworth was born in Baltimore in 1823, the son of Horatio Hollingsworth and Emily Caroline Rodgely. His mother was the granddaughter of Samuel Chase, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, so it was most appropriate that his great grandson should help to frame the Constitution of his adopted state.

On August 31, 1846, Hollingsworth was mustered into service at Fort Columbus to serve for the war as a brevet lieutenant in Capt. Shannon's company of the Seventh Regiment (Stevenson's New York Volunteers). On May 2, 1847, he was transferred to Co. G, and mustered out with that company on Sept. 18, 1848, at Los Angeles.

After leaving the service, Lt. Hollingsworth remained in California in and around the southern mines and in 1849 he was selected as a member of the Constitutional

Convention from the district of San Joaquin, He took an active part in the deliberations of the convention, and after its adjournment, Gov. Riley selected him as a bearer to the government at Washington of the new California Constitution.

Although he was one of the first in the gold region, he accumulated no wealth, and after his return east was appointed collector for the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal. Sometime during this period, he moved to Georgetown where he became one of the officers of the Potomac Light Infantry, a crack militia company. On the start of the Civil War, this company became a part of the 1st Bn., District of Columbia Volunteers, with Hollingsworth as major. He was mustered out in July 23, 1861.

Ten years later Hollingsworth was appointed superintendent of Mt. Vernon, the home of George Washington on the banks of the Potomac. He retired because of ill health in 1885 and passed away April 15, 1889, leaving his wife, Virginia Nichols Hollingsworth.

In his journal of his voyage from New York to San Francisco and then to Monterey, Lt. Hollingsworth writes: "Arrived at Monterey April 7 after a sail of 24 hours and went into camp on the outskirts of the town called Camp Kearney."

Later that same day he recorded: "Camp Kearney Monterey, Wednesday: We all landed on the wharf by boats of the Columbus and other American armed vessels and after marching through the town encamped at this place - a beautiful spot of ground in front of the church. We arrived late and great confusion arose in consequence of not being able to get all the tents up.

"April 15: Went to a fandango last night and enjoyed myself very much looking on as I did not dance. I have not been introduced to a single lady since I got here. This dance was nothing in comparison to the great Navy ball."

"April 17: We went out to Carmel Valley on a gunning expedition with Bonny-castle - saw a number of quail, got only six out of a large number of them. We rode some 20 miles up the valley. It is a beautiful country for grazing, some romantic scenery. Hills covered with oats, headed already and all kinds of wildflowers. We visited Capt. Tompkins' camp. It had a guard of only about 15 men to take care of about 100 horses, the finest I have seen in the country."