

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Drake "Firsts"

A few "firsts" as gleaned from a lecture by John Howell, bookman of San Francisco, in "Pacific Voyage of Sir Francis Drake", at Pacific House, Treasure Island in San Francisco Bay, on Aug. 11, 1939, during the World's Fair held there.

Sir Francis Drake was first in notable enterprises as follows:

The first Anglo-Saxon to set foot on the West Coast of North America, landing in California, 1579, and in his 100-ton ship, the famous "Golden Hind."

The first to use the English Bible, and Hymnal on the Pacific Coast. The Prayer-Book Cross in Golden Gate Park in San Francisco commemorates this.

The first Englishman to go through the Straits of Magellan.

The first to circumnavigate the globe in his own ship.

The first real estate agent doing business in North America, posting his claim on a durable "Brass Plate" for Elizabeth the Queen, and her successors.

The first great commercial traveler, delivering English round-shot to the Spaniards, and trinkets to the natives, collecting generously from both.

The first Englishman to open trade relations with the Spice Islands, the Moluccas, and to land in the Philippines.

The first man to introduce the potato (batata), resembling the sweet potato, into Europe.

The first man to introduce tobacco (Tobah, Indian Tabaka) to England.

The first great English collector, particularly of coins and treasure.

The first English navigator to present his sovereign with a great captured treasure, over a million pounds.

The first great navigator of England and really the Father of the British navy, helping to raise England from a fourth-rate power to the first place. Ever since the defeat of the Armada in 1588, in which engagement Drake was vice admiral in command of the "Revenge," "Britannia has ruled the waves."

Drake's "Plate of Brass" was found near Drake's Bay, Marin County, in 1936 and is now in the Library of the University of California. It reads:

"Bee it knowne unto all men by these present, June 17, 1579 By the Grace of God and in the name of Herr Majesty Queen Elizabeth of England and Herr successors forever I take possession of this Kingdome whose King and people. freely resigne their right and title in the whole land unto Herr Majesties keepeing now named by me an to be knowne unto all men as Nova Albion.

Francis Drake

We have come across this interesting writing concerning the disastrous fire in San Francisco in May of 1851, written by our beloved resident, Rev. Walter Colton, the builder of Colton Hall:

"As in the case of the aftermath of the fire of the previous December, new buildings rose on the cooling ashes of the old. After the fire, Walter Colton said: "This town has been laid in ashes, but the young Phoenix has arisen on ampler wings than those that steadied the consumed form of its parent. It must be the great commercial emporium of California in spite of competition, wind and flames. Its direct communication with the sea. Its magnificent bay, and internal communications have settled the question of its ultimate grandeur. Three years ago, but a few shanties sprinkled its sand hills. Now, even with its heart burned out, it looks like the skeleton of a great city. That heart will be reconstructed and send the lifeblood leaping through the system."