

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

October 11, 1963

Constitution's Reporter

J. Ross Browne, the reporter of the Constitutional Convention held in Colton Hall, Monterey, the latter part of 1849 - wrote to his wife, Lucy, on Aug. 15, 1849, an account of his trip from San Francisco to Monterey and then went on to tell her of his business arrangements with those in charge of the convention.

"Mr. Ord, a gentleman with whom I spent the evening, says there is \$500,000 in the treasury for the purpose of paying the expenses, and that they will have no hesitation in paying me handsomely. Judge Demmick, late alcalde of San Jose, asked me what I intended to charge. I had not thought much on the subject, but said I presumed about \$200 each for the 50 delegates would be a fair compensation. He said if that was all, there would not be the slightest difficulty about it. Since then I have concluded that if \$10,000 can be had so easily, I had better hold out for \$20,000 which would make it an object of some importance. You must bear in mind that this will not be the only pay. I intend retaining a copyright and expect to make as much or more out of that."

On Aug. 23, 1849 he wrote again: "Monterey is a small place of no commercial importance. It is the present capital of California, but the seat of government will probably be removed to San Jose. There are but few houses in Monterey and not many Americans except the officers of the military establishment. I have become acquainted with most of them.

"It is now night. I am seated at a table in a little log hut belonging to Capt. Halleck. I have a room and a bed in Halleck's house, which costs me nothing, and I pay only \$11 a week for board at an eating house, which is unusually cheap for California. At present Halleck is secretary of state."

Browne's next letter to his wife, written Aug. 26, 1849 reports: "I like the climate of Monterey. It is cool and bracing. The thermometer has scarcely varied from 65 degrees since I arrived here. The mornings, and evenings are generally foggy. The most delightful parts of the day are lost, sunrise and sunset. During the rest of the day the temperature is extremely pleasant and the sky clear and mild. I greatly prefer Monterey to San Francisco. It is rather a dull place to a stranger, but

when one is acquainted the time passes pleasantly enough.

"The Spanish families living here are said to be the best and most refined in California. Many of the ladies perform on the guitar and piano."

On Sept. 21, 1849, Mrs. Browne was informed by her husband that the convention had that day made him an appropriation of \$10,000 for reporting its proceedings. It would take four or five months he thought, but he planned to do much of the work after he returned home.

Following the adjournment of the convention on Sept. 23, Browne set about getting subscribers to the report - Dr. Semple, the president, promised to take 300 copies himself, according to Brown's letter.

In the postscript on Oct. 1, 1849, Browne wrote to Lucy: "The question of the right of suffrage of Indians which occasioned so much trouble on Saturday, and which it was feared would end in the withdrawal of the Spanish delegation and the consequent breaking up of the whole convention, has just been decided to the satisfaction of all parties. My fears, therefore, on that subject are at an end. There is now no doubt but that the convention will adopt the constitution as written. So, you may regard my success as a 'fixed fact'."

Browne's contract with the convention was to furnish the State of California with 1,000 copies in English and 250 copies in Spanish of a stenographic report of its proceedings, together with other documents specified in the agreement.

Browne wrote again to his wife: "I have shipped the money in gold dust by Simmons, Hutchinson & Co., of San Francisco to their agents in New York, Q. E. Robbins & Son, who are to pay it to me at the mint, or in case of my death, to you, my wife. I have paid the freight and insurance here.

"Pay all my debts, which probably amount to \$500, and invest the remaining \$1500 in a house and lot."

He arrived home safely, wrote much, traveled greatly, but returned to California, built a home near Oakland, and there passed away at the age of 54 on Dec. 9, 1875. "He was a remarkable man and an ardent Californian," according to the editor of "Muleback to the Convention," published by the Book Club of California and printed by the Black Vine Press.