

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Stars And Strips Hoisted

There is still more to tell about the various flags which have flown over California since the very earliest navigators sailed along the Pacific coast, some to claim the land for their country, some to fish for otter, some to colonize, some to Christianize the Indians and others to establish homes in the Far West.

The Russian - American Co. (Circa 1812-1842). The eighth flag to fly over California was raised by an insurgent group in the area above San Francisco Bay in 1842. This was a group of fur traders known as the Russian - American Co. and had been organized as a counter venture to the Russian colonies which all had some official backing of the czar, writes Mr. Coates of Carmel in his article, "Flags, Frogs and Bears."

Pecor, the lifer at Folsom Prison who painted the murals about the history of the California flags in the civilian mess room at the prison, captions this mural on the eighth flag thusly:

"When Kuskof put up his fort, the czar pulled a fast one - he came out with the Russian-American Co., supposedly a business angle but later uncovered as a stall to flatten Russian colonies. They put up a flag, but the play was ranked, and the flag jerked in 1842."

The Russians made a deal with Capt. John Sutter, a Swiss national, who purchased from them the area known as New Helvetia and who also bought their holdings along the coast and the Russian River, so the Russians furled their flag and left.

Next comes the Fremont Flag, 1844. Pecor says of this invasion:

"While the Mexicans in California were dumping each other, Capt. John Fremont, out to cool off hostile Indians for the Army, pulled in another flag - a road banner with a peace pipe on it as a shill so the Indians wouldn't get tough."

As Capt. John C. Fremont traveled up and down the coast, he carried with him not only the flag of the United States of America but his own banner. It was a large white flag with a "peace pipe" displayed in the center. It was hoped by Fremont that this expression of peaceful procedure would soothe not only the inner hostility of the various tribes but might fool the

Mexicans as well. He once flew both flags on what is now known as Fremont peak, in the Gabilans to the east of Monterey.

The First Bear Flag:

Politics were boiling and both Mexican Californios and the American settlers who were more numerous in California, were agitating for the overthrow of Mexican rule and the annexation of the land to the United States of America. At last a group marched upon the home of Gov. Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, took him prisoner, and in Sonoma declared California an Independent republic, and raised the Bear Flag on June 14, 1864. This event is recorded by Pecor with his painting of the scene and the caption:

"The citizens of Sonoma, figuring the Spanish-Californian big shots were getting out of line with them, raided the garrison, guzzled the officials, and hung out the first Bear Flag. The bear on the flag resembled a pig. Fremont switched it for an American Flag."

Now we come to the landing of Adm. John Drake Sloat at Monterey.

He landed with his troops and took the territory of California for the United States of America. This was the final and conclusive act of hoisting of our flag that on so many previous and unofficial occasions had been raised and lowered over California.

By the action of Adm. Sloat in taking possession of California and the raising the Stars and Stripes designated the 11th flag of assorted nationalities who more or less disputed the possession of the land. This monumental event is reproduced in vivid color by Pecor and his picture is captioned thusly:

"When the Mexican-U.S. War came up, two fleets, American and English, charged in to grab California. The Americans, under Cmdr. John D. Sloat, beat the British to the punch and hoisted the Stars and Stripes over the Custom House at Monterey."