

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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John Hollingsworth

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

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, 117 years ago this month, he was mustered into the service at Fort Columbus to serve for the war as a brevet lieutenant in Captain Shannon's company of the 7th Regiment (Stevenson's New York Volunteers). On May 2, 1847, he was transferred to Company G and was mustered out of that company on Sept. 18, 1848 at Los Angeles. With the volunteers he served at Monterey.

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 the 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 to the East Coast he was appointed collector of 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. At the start of the Civil War, this company became a part of the 1st Battalion, District of Columbia Volunteers, with Hollingsworth as major.

Ten years later Hollingsworth was appointed superintendent of Mount Vernon, the home of George and Martha Washington on the bank of the Potomac. He retired because of ill health in 1885 and passed away

April 15, 1889, leaving his wife, Virginia Nichols Hollingsworth.