

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Bryant's Diary

It may be interesting today to tell a story about a pair of early California pantaloons, a true story as told by Edwin Bryant and described in "What I Saw in California," published in 1848.

Having letters of introduction to both General Vallejo and Jacob Leese, residing in Sonoma, Bryant delivered them as soon after his arrival in California as possible.

When Bryant's pantaloons began to show wear, he searched for a piece of woolen cloth to make another pair. He succeeded, after searching through all the shops he saw, in procuring some black cotton-velvet for four yards of which he paid the sum of \$12.

In the United States, he recalled, the same article would probably have cost \$1.50. For four dollars more, he succeeded in getting the pantaloons made by an American tailor who had entered the country with General Kearney's forces.

Bryant related in his diary on Oct. 15, 1846, that General Vallejo was a native Californian and a man of intelligence and taste far superior to most of his countrymen. The interior of his house presented a different appearance to his Eastern guest from any house occupied by native Californians that he had previously seen since entering the country.

Every apartment, Bryant wrote, even the main entrance hall and corridors, were scrupulously clean and presented an air of comfort which he had not seen elsewhere in California. The parlor he described as furnished with handsome chairs, sofas, mirrors, tables of mahogany framework and a fine piano, the first he had seen in the country. Several paintings and some superior engravings ornamented the walls.

Bryant's description of Senora Vallejo was very flattering. He wrote that she was a lady of charming personal appearance and that she possessed in the highest degree that natural grace, ease and warmth of manner that renders Spanish ladies so attractive and fascinating to the stranger.

The same afternoon in 1846, Bryant and his party visited the house of Jacob Leese, which was also furnished in American style, according to his diary notation. Leese was described as the proprietor of a

vineyard in the vicinity of Sonoma, and they feasted upon grapes as luscious as any the party had ever eaten.

The evening of the same day Bryant and his men had the pleasure of meeting Thomas Oliver Larkin, Esq., the first and last United States consul to California at Monterey. He had traveled by land from San Francisco to Sonoma that day.

The diary continued: "Mr. L. resides in Monterey, but I had the pleasure of an introduction to him in San Francisco. Mr. L. is a native of Boston and has been a resident of California for 15 years, during which time he has amassed a large fortune, and from the changes now taking place he is rapidly increasing it. He will probably be the first American millionaire in California."

To account for the fast traveling on horseback in California, Bryant found it necessary to explain the mode by which it is accomplished. A gentleman who started upon a journey of 100 miles and wished to perform the trip in one day would take with him 10 fresh horses and a vaquero. The eight loose horses were placed under the charge of the vaquero, and were driven in front at the rate of 10 to 12 miles an hour, according to the speed required for the journey.

At the end of 20 miles horses which had been mounted were discharged and turned into the caballada (group of horses), and the horses which had not been ridden and had been without weight were saddled, mounted and ridden at the same speed, and so on to the end of the journey.