

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

April 2, 1965

Lt. Revere's Monterey Notes

Lt. Joseph Warren Revere (USN), a descendant of Paul Revere of Revolutionary War fame, had a tour of duty in Monterey before the Gold Rush.

He must certainly have had a great appreciation of the beauty here as well as that of California. His diary comments are all reprinted in "A Tour of Duty in California." A small book published in New York and Boston in 1849.

Revere wrote: "The fresh morning air was redolent of the sweetest perfume ever wafted to the celestial 'daughter of the dawn.' It was none of your commonplace Atlantic atmospheres, but laden with fragrance; soft and voluptuous, yet not enervating, but gently bracing.

"In truth, there was a pervading reality in the sweet gales which wooed us, seemingly to impart to them immense vitality, and to establish sympathy, if familiarity, with the viewless spirits who people the sunbeam'."

Revere was also interested in our adobe brick structures, He wrote; "The adobe is the chief building material of the Californians. They are made of mud, mixed with chopped straw and then dried in the sun. Each adobe is about two feet long and one foot wide—consequently the walls of the houses are of great thickness.

"They serve a very excellent purpose in the climate of California and are very cheap besides. Those who carry out frames of houses will probably find it quite as expensive and difficult to erect and finish them, as to procure the adobes and have a house build for them. These movable houses are mere balloons and are a constant source of expense in the way of paint and repairs. I should prefer to rely on the adobe."

Philo White was a traveler, newspaper man, politician and keen observer whose intimate unpublished journal now comes to light in his narrative of the "Cruise in the Pacific" (1841-1843), edited by Charles L. Camp and illustrated with two watercolors in full color and three plates in black and white by William H. Meyers, together with a portrait of the author.

White joined the Navy as a purchasing agent on the west coast of South America in 1830 and spent four years on that tour of duty. In 1841 he sailed again around Cape Horn as purser on the justly famous U.S. sloop-of-war "Dale." He spent the next two momentous years along the South American coast and in California.

War with Mexico threatened. The midget Pacific squadron of the United States, forerunner of the great battle fleets of later years, ranged the widest oceans, far removed from and out of touch with its home base, in a state of supreme apprehension and readiness.

Its fiery little commodore, Thomas ap Catesby Jones, fidgeted under an almost intolerable burden of uncertainty and responsibility, knowing he must forestall the English navy off the California coast whenever war should break out. He unfortunately mistook the right moment for this action, and the "capture" of Monterey came too soon.

Other topics discussed in detail in "Cruise in the Pacific" are the decay of the mission and decline of the Indian, sea-borne trading at Monterey, reflections and documents on Jones' abortive "conquest" and the romantic run-away marriage of Rafael Pinto.