

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Eventful Voyage

E.L. Williams' narrative of a trip to California has been used in this column several times. This report of one incident during his trip has come to light because he wrote it down. It is an historical event for the reason that one of the leading characters became a resident of San Francisco and a victim of the Vigilante Committee.

Williams found his cabin on board the schooner "California" in 1849 already occupied by a sick man. So the young man took the hammock he had purchased in Panama and swung it on the forward part of the ship near the bow.

There, he explained, there was a hatchway opening into the hold and at each corner of the hatch at a post overhead was a similar hatch opening on deck. He swung the hammock to two of the posts so it hung on the bias. The only light here came from the full moon. A wind sail sent down, now and then, a very little air.

Williams explained in considerable detail the closeness of his sleeping quarters and the closeness of his sleeping fellow passengers. He had been asleep but a short time when he was awakened by some one on his left shouting at him and saying: "Get out of here."

He paid no attention when a second time the person, with a volley of coarse oaths directed toward him, said, "If you don't get out from there, I will cut you down. You are keeping the air from me."

Again, he paid no attention but at that moment the person jumped out of his bunk and approached the head of Williams' hammock with a large long knife open in his hand.

From the boy's righthand side a pistol gleamed in the moonlight. Behind it was a long brawny arm, and further behind a determined voice which said, according to Williams' memory: "You attempt to cut the boy down and I will blow a hole through you, you infernal blackleg Southerner. I know you. You used to run a gambling game in New Orleans, and you robbed everybody. Get away from that boy!"

Soon Williams was the center of a cyclone. The passengers all crowded forward, and finally the officers of the steamer came to restore order.

It turned out that the man with the knife who proposed to cut the boy down was named Cory. It was reported that he and his three companions had \$40,000 and intended to start a gambling bank in San Francisco.

Charles Cory, after his arrival in California, shot down in cold blood and killed a United States marshal named H.W. Hutchinson, for which he was hanged by the Vigilante Committee.

In the early 1900's Mr. Williams recalled that a newspaper writer commenting upon the acts of the committee justified the hanging of Cory and said that he was a bad man from way back.

On his way to California in 1848 from Panama, he wrote, Cory had endeavored to stab a young man who had not given him any provocation and would have done so had he not been prevented by other passengers. Evidently the writer had been one of Williams' fellow travelers.

After the tumult mentioned, Williams reported in his diary, "I slept soundly in my hammock until daylight." Anyone accustomed to a hammock will roll out feet first, but fortunately for the young man he looked before he leaped. To his surprise and horror there was a deep, black gulf beneath him. Some person had removed the hatch during the night.

At San Blas, the hero of our narrative had another exciting experience. It was dark when they arrived, and the stay was short. After the paddle wheels had made not more than two revolutions loud and strenuous cries were heard from the paddle box.

It was opened and there was brought out a half drowned native who had concluded he could get to California's gold by stealing the paddle wheel. He had escaped death by a miracle and was sent ashore.