

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

June 11, 1965

### **Monterey Bound**

Soon after E.L. Williams' arrival in Panama after his long trip from New York to Chagres and across the Isthmus, he again encountered Mr. Purdy and they compared notes.

Purdy was not satisfied with the French hotel at which he was stopping, so he joined Williams and two other men, all on the way to California occupying the fourth corner in a bare room with only floor boards for beds.

Mr. Williams wrote in his diary, "He said his object in coming was to buy from me the buckskin breeches which I had thrown down when taken off, crusted with dry mud and still with the wetting they had received in crossing the Isthmus.

"I told him to take them, but he would not without paying me something for them. I had borrowed from him a gold pen with which to write my letter home, and finally I kept the pen and he took the breeches.

More than 20 years afterward the two men met in Santa Cruz for a long chat. Williams asked if Purdy had brought the breeches with him. He replied that he had not, for he had heard in Panama that buckskin bags, in which gold dust was carried, were very scarce and high in price in San Francisco.

So, after he gotten the breeches from Williams, he procured silk thread and needles. On his way up the coast he cut up the breeches and made bags and upon his arrival in San Francisco sold the lot for \$600.

On Dec. 5, 1849, Williams boarded the steamer "California" bound for his destination, Monterey. The steamer he described as a sidewheel boat or the Howland and Aspinwall line of New York. Two steamers. The "California" and the "Pacific," were subsidized by the American government to carry mail from Panama to San Francisco, touching at San Bias, Acapulco, Mazatlan, San Diego and Monterey.

The "California" brought Monterey its first U.S. postmaster Capt. William Marcy, on Feb. 23, 1849. The steamer, by the terms of the subsidy, had for captain an officer of the U.S. Navy, and her speed was limited to eight miles an hour.

Of all the passengers Mr. Williams recalled, the one who stood out in his memory was J.B. Forbes, the purser,

with whom he spend many hours playing chess. Forbes became manager of a life insurance company in San Francisco.

As the California neared San Diego, Mr. Williams reported, he saw his first canoe. The beach had upon it an old hide house, all appearing just as described in Dana's "Two Years Before the Mast."

Ten or a dozen Americans with their horses clamorous and eager to get aboard to go to San Francisco, were informed of orders that no one was to be taken on. Countenances fell at this, Williams remembered.

They told of coming from a far-off port in Texas on horseback expecting to pursue their journey on the steamer, waited two weeks for the arrival, and endured many hardships and privations which their tattered clothes, their sallow and care-worn faces and the ribs of their horses plainly showed. Some wept of woe, according to our narrator.

At this point in the diary, Williams tells an exciting tale of helping a friend in need. As he stood listening to the plight of the gold-seekers, one man approached, called him by name and added, "I used to pass the house on Third avenue in New York where you lived every day and have seen you hundreds of times; I am Gildersleeve, the footrunner." He had been a noted runner of races, had defeated everybody in America and had done the same in England.

Williams pointed out the canoe, gave him a ticket to present to the officer at the gangplank. As the tears rolled down his cheeks Gildersleeve expressed his thanks and departed. Williams saw the canoe return and knew the plan had been successful.