

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Some Travel Notes From 1849**

"A Narrative of a Voyage from New York to Monterey via Panama in 1849," by E.L. Williams, former resident of Monterey and grandfather of Paul Pioda, a Salinas attorney, we have been privileged to read and enjoy in the past. Now we hand it to our readers do the same.

In the lengthy diary Mr. Williams describes the steamer "Crescent City," upon which he sailed from New York for Chagres, and his fellow passengers or cabin-mates, "one a Yankee sea captain and the other a printer from Cincinnati."

Two fellow passengers and Williams decided to get to shore as soon as possible and hire a boat to take them up the Chagres River and share the expense. There were 609 persons waiting on shore to be transported all in a hurry to get to California. "I paid over the \$50 asked for, all in dimes, eight to a dollar, so I really paid \$50."

One of the passengers who had a brother in New York in the canning business, was on his way to San Francisco to establish an agency. Besides his large trunk, he had six boxes containing two dozen each of canned oysters, clams and lobsters.

The other man had an equally large trunk. All of this did not leave much room for Williams and his small bundle and the three boatmen with their poles and paddles.

On Tuesday Nov. 27, 1849, Williams and his fellow passengers arrived at Crucesat having been 90 hours on the river and "boated about 90 miles."

"With what delight I stepped ashore and considered I was 23 miles from Panama and there would commence my sea journey to Monterey," he wrote.

After describing Panama and its inhabitants, Mr. Williams had this interesting bit to tell: "We were obliged to wait the arrival of animals from Panama with some two millions in gold and silver in bars exposed to view and the gold in boxes, two of either composing a mule load.

"And now came a party from California on their return to New York. One of them I knew. He was very disappointed and dissatisfied. He had on a pair of buckskin breeches, which he had pulled off and gave to me, saying that I would need them when crossing the

Isthmus of Panama. They were bespattered with mud, I took them and we parted.

"On the 29th, at 6 a.m., I was on board a small horse with the buckskin breeches on and in company with Mr. Purdy, who later became lieutenant governor of California. We set out and such a road! The mud up to the horses' girth. We could not go faster than a walk and it was very tedious when about 5 o'clock we were in sight of Panama.

"Just inside the wall around the city I was met by a man who asked me if I had a ticket to California. He said "I will give you five hundred dollars for it." (I had paid \$100 for it in New York.) Then he offered \$750, to which I still said no.

"I met another man very soon who asked the same question and received the same answer. He finally said "I will give you one thousand dollars for your ticket." I told him no, I would not sell at any price and added there were hundreds of passengers behind me who would gladly sell, and so it turned out, tickets were selling as high as \$3,000."