

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Stirring Events Recorded

A desire to place on permanent record some of the stirring events with each a group of men had been connected since their arrival in California on Feb. 18, 1849, led to the publication of the "First Steamship Pioneers" on the 25th anniversary of that date. A committee from these pioneers, "deemed it worthwhile to leave something of their individual impress on paper, as well as their united footprints on the pages of progress.

The preparation of the history of the voyage of the first three steamers from New York to the Coast and the autobiographies of the pioneers was entrusted to this committee, who supposing it would be a small task of a hundred pages or so in a pamphlet, undertook the labor as a volunteer service. At the time of their appointment, Feb 28, 1872 they requested and the members promised to furnish data pertaining to the individuals.

In 1873, members were no different than members are in 1965, for at the 24th anniversary meeting the committee reported progress, but no data from any member. The promise to furnish was renewed with enthusiasm. But after waiting to within three months of the time, they sent questionnaires to 52 who were known to be living and 44 responded. Dr. A.B. Stout, the surgeon of the ship and her only surviving officer—also life president of the association—prepared a chapter on the trip of the "California" from New York to San Francisco, Capt. W. Landon prepared the closing chapter, "California in 1849 and California in 1874."

Studying the volume "First Steamship Pioneers," and its 390 pages, it has been interesting to note how many of these original arrivals by ship from the East to the West Coast, spent some time in Monterey. Among the pioneers who answered the questionnaire of the volunteer editors of the history was Capt. John Patty who was in Monterey in the stormy political time of 1837-38. Moving rapidly as time demanded between places along the coast he reached San Francisco in December, 1837. Jacob P. Leese, the only American, and Capt. William Richardson, the only Englishmen, were there to welcome him. Leese arrived in Monterey, then the capital in 1838 and entered into the purchase and sale of mules.

In Leese's home in San Francisco the first celebration of the Fourth of July was held. He married the sister of General M.G. Vallejo in April of 1837 and their first child was born in "Yerba Buena" on April 15, 1838, was the first child born in what later became San Francisco and was named Rosalia Leese.

Dr. Robert Semple is the next on the list in "First Steamship Pioneers" to have left his mark in Monterey. He wrote in his autobiography to the committee of pioneers: "I first learned the trade of a printer and afterward that of a dentist." With "these two strings to a bow" he could travel anywhere and always find a "job."

Doctor Semple also reported on the Bear Flag: "Having obtained possession of Sonoma, they hoisted the celebrated "Bear Flag," which was merely a piece of white cotton cloth about six feet long. They bordered it about four inches wide, with red berry juice; then wrote in black, "The people's rights, and below this, sketched a grizzly bear, with a lone star."

Before peace was declared Dr. Semple arrived in Monterey and with Walter Colton issued the first number of The Californian, the first newspaper of any kind to be published in California. After that he laid out and was the acknowledged father of the town of Benicia.

On the assembling of the Constitutional Convention at Monterey in 1849, Semple was unanimously chosen as president of the body. In the later part of 1854 he was thrown from his horse, and received injuries from which he died on the 25th of October.

This story of the lives of the first steamship pioneers after their arrival in California, and the manner in which their lived affected history of their adopted land will be continued.