

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **The Legend of Grizzly Adams**

"The Legend of Grizzly Adams", California's greatest Mountain Man, by Richard Dillon, is one of the new books on California's historic past. Coward McCann, Inc. are the printers. The book is dedicated to David Magee, Britannic bibliophile of San Francisco.

In this biography of California's great mountain man, Dillon recounts the rugged life of John Adams, nicknamed Grizzly after the bruin with whom he tangled and whom he tamed — a man whose daring exploits put him in a class with Daniel Boone and Wild Bill Hickok, according to a note on the jacket cover.

The Legend of Grizzly Adams is full of the adventure and color of the Old West — the cruel virgin land, vast, wooded, and mountainous, untouched save by elusive Indians and wild beasts; the Grizzly himself, a prototype of the men who chose to take on this wilderness.

Grizzly Adams was a buckskin-clad loner who fled the society of men which offended his puritanical sensibilities and exploited his naivete, his eccentric innocence in finance and the ways of the world.

Born in a quiet New England town, John Adams was a shoemaker by trade. In 1849, restless and dissatisfied with village life, he struck out for California. Although he took a variety of jobs to support himself, the introduction states, it was in the California mountains that he found his vocation — trapping and training the ferocious grizzly bear. Summer and winter, he roamed the Sierra Nevada, the Humboldt Range, the Rockies and the Tehachapi Mountains, capturing and training grizzly cubs along the way, until he acquired a considerable, if disorganized circus that included wolves, elk, pumas and wild dogs, as well as grizzly bears. It was in San Francisco that he formed an alliance with the great circus man Phineas T. Barnum, who took them to New York where he presented "California Menagerie."

Another very good, late book on California's past history is "The Buckeye Rovers in the Gold Rush." It consists of two diaries edited with an introduction by Howard L. Scamehorn and published by Ohio University Press, Athens, Ohio, in 1965.

Many people contributed to the volume. Mr. John G. Keller, Jr., of Columbus, Ohio, gave permission to

publish the Armstrong diary, which his father had given to the Ohio Historical Society many years ago.

Mrs. Wilma Wagenblast and Mrs. Edwin P. Banks made available and granted permission to publish the diaries of their grandfather, John Edwin Banks.

The book's chapters are headed: Lexington to Fort Kearney, Fort Kearney to South Pass, South Pass to Humboldt, The Humboldt to California, California, The American River, Ophir, and lastly, Pay Dirt, followed by the epilogue and notes.

When "California Fever" raced through southeastern Ohio in the spring of 1849, a number of residents of Athens County organized a cooperative venture for traveling overland to the mines. Known as the "Buckeye Rovers," the company began its trip westward in early April. The company traveled by steamer as far as St. Joseph, Missouri, where it purchased three wagons, eleven yoke of oxen, one yoke of cows, and requisite stocks of food. In early May the company left St. Joseph and began its trek of nearly two thousand miles across uncharted land.

When the company finally reached the gold country, it discovered that rich strikes had become extremely rare and that the greatest fortunes were made in much less exciting occupations than gold seeking, according to the diaries.

The story of the Forty-Niners from Athens County, a tale of adventure and disillusionment, has been preserved in diaries written by two members of the company. The more complete of the two is by John Banks.

Banks' main interests, judging from the diaries, were, in addition to theology; history, philosophy, botany, zoology and geology. Surprisingly little escaped his notice. He also was interested in the flora and fauna, the geography and topography in his immediate locale, and varied aspects of human relations in a strange land.

Both diaries are entertaining and educational and may be enjoyed by old and young alike. The price of "Gold Rush" and "The Legend of Grizzly Adams" are both \$5.00. The two books are to be added to the Memorial Library in memory of Frank La Cuaza, by the History and Art Association in Casa Serrano.