

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Story Of The Dani Family

Today we present an historical story concerning the Dani family, a group of one of the first settlers down the coast in the Big Sur country, as given to me by Mrs. Ernest Delvey of Pacific Grove. Mrs. Elizabeth Dani was her grandmother.

She was born in Huddetsfield, England on September 6, 1845. Her mother's name was Hampshire and her father's name was John Brown. When she was about fifteen, she came with her sisters and family to America, her mother having died, and joined her other two sisters in Utah.

On her way to Utah, she met and married Gabriel Dani, who drove one of the ox teams. He was born in Vermont and was of Canadian-French parents. He had left home when he was about twelve years old and went to sea and was later on a man-of-war. While on the coast, he deserted ship and began driving ox teams.

Dani had been driving ox teams between Utah and California and finally decided he wanted to move to California, so he brought his family to Wilmington, near Los Angeles. They moved to Petaluma where they lived for a time, then to San Juan until the following spring when they moved to the coast so that they could homestead and have a place of their own.

They came to the Avila home at the foot of the mountain and, as the children came pouring out of the house, grandma thought it must be a school, according to Mrs. Delvey.

"There was snow on the mountain, so they stayed a month at the Avila place until the snow melted and they could cross the mountain. When they left, Mr. Avila went with them and carried the baby, so that Grandma would not have to.

"Mary was riding a horse whose saddle came loose and Grandpa lifted her off to tighten the saddle and set Mary down. She was so numb from riding, that her feet slid out from under her, and she rolled down the mountain until she hit a tree. A big Newfoundland dog they had, ran after her and grabbed hold of her clothes to hold her until Grandpa could get there to help her.

"When they reached the coast, Mr. Avila took them to a cabin that was already built on the place where, later

on, the Borondas lived. Mr. Boronda used the cabin to stay in when they came to the coast to look after the horses that they had there. While coming over the mountain Grandma thought the ocean looked so near that she thought she would go down and bathe her feet when she got to their destination, so after resting for a while, she started out and walked and walked but had to give up before she reached the ocean.

"They moved to the coast in 1876. Grandpa went to work in the harvest in the Salinas Valley and got an Indian woman to stay with Grandma.

"Mr. Avila and Mr. Lopez loaned Grandpa cows to milk and when he went to work in the harvest Grandma had to milk them. She managed to get enough milk to make cheese in a cupboard that Grandpa had built. One night Lopez' dogs came and were breaking into the cupboard so Grandma sicked "Watch.", the Newfoundland dog on them and he bit the dogs, and they went away.

"The next morning Mr. Lopez came and asked her why she chopped his dogs with an axe. Grandma explained that her dog had bit them when his dogs were trying to steal the cheese. Mr. Lopez was so angry that he took his cows away, saying that she was making them poor by milking them. He also said that Mr. Avila was about to take his cows away.

"He told Grandma that she should say Mr. "Diablo" instead of Avila, as that was his name. So, when next Mr. Avila came she said, "How do you do, Mr. Diablo." There was another man with him as interpreter and Mr. Avila asked him why Grandma had called him that.

"She explained that Mr. Lopez had told her that was his name and then she asked him if he came to take his cows away. He told her she could keep them as long as she wanted to, so Mr. Lopez' scheme to make her lose the milk cows did not work out.

"The year 1877, when he moved to his homestead, was a dry year and times were very hard. They had wild game to eat, and Grandpa worked for Mr. Slate at the hot springs. He was paid in dry peas and corn, which he carried home on his back. Grandma made bread from them after they were ground.

"Grandma had planted a garden, but she did not know much about gardening. She had very thrifty bean vines but they produced no beans. Mr. Lopez told her that she should whip the bean vines so they would have beans. She was suspicious that this was something with

which to make a fool of her again, so she was not going to try it on all of them, but did try it on a couple, and sure enough they set out young beans. So, she whipped the rest of them. They grew so well that they had to be cut back.”

More of these experiences of the Dani family will follow.