

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Books of Early West

A review is due today about books and their contents for there are so many good ones which are reciting early Western history in the best possible way, by writers who have done a great amount of research.

The San Mateo County Historical Association is announcing "Sawmills In The Redwoods." Dr. Frank Stanger, county historian, has completed, the fascinating tale of the redwoods, 1849-1967, which tells for the first time the complete story of the county's original industry. The reader will be delighted to meet characters of the woods, and to follow the development of the sawmill from waterpower to steam and from "sash" and "gang" to circular saws and automatic shingle machines.

"Gold Rush Diary," the journal of Elisha Douglas Perkins on the Overland Trail in the spring and summer of 1849, edited by Thomas D. Clark, is a remarkable first-hand account from the great trek westward, when the entire nation was caught up in the golden excitement of California. Among the hundreds captivated by the vision of quick riches was Perkins, a tall, handsome youth from Marietta, Ohio, who with five companions calling themselves the Marietta Gold Hunters set off on May 7 for the gold fields.

Although Perkins himself found in California not gold, but disappointment and death, he has left in his diary an unusually full and intimate record of his response to crossing the plains and mountains of the Great West, and to living in the days of El Dorado.

Thomas D. Clark is widely known for his many books on the South, and the frontier. He is a distinguished professor in the department of history at the University of Kentucky.

The "Gold Rush Diary" manuscript itself has had an intriguing history. The journal, with its stained and blurred pages, was given by the dying Perkins to either John Weaver of Ohio, or his brother-in-law, Dr. George O. Hildreth. This document was taken home to Perkins' wife Harriet, who out of deep sentiment made a fair copy in a notebook that resembled the original. For many years the copy, given to the University of Kentucky by Harriet's granddaughter and grandson, was believed to be Perkins' own manuscript.

By chance it was discovered through a letter mistakenly delivered to the history department of the University of Kentucky that the original was actually in the Henry E. Huntington Library in San Marino. It was fortunate that Harriet had made a copy for her version contained material that is now illegible or missing from the original.

Perkins died Dec. 28, 1852 and was one of the first to be buried in the newly opened Sacramento City Cemetery. Harriet journeyed to California in 1882 with her daughter to visit the grave of her husband, crossing the continent in less than five days, whereas Elisha Perkins had measured a day's journey in terms of 12 to 30 miles.