

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **The Rare Forty Niners**

Not all who joined in the California gold rush made their stake by day labor in the mines. Some fortunate and farsighted souls made their pile, quite legitimately, out of the miners.

It is one of those rare Forty-niners whose story is told through publication of the Mexican and California letters of Daniel W. Coit, entitled "Digging for Gold — Without a Shovel." The publication is composed of the letters of Daniel Wadsworth Coit, written from 1849-1851.

No stranger to Latin-America, the Connecticut-born Coit went to Mexico City early in 1848 as business representative of his cousins, who operated as Howland & Aspinwall. Coit's letters to his wife from the Mexican capital offer a fresh and stimulating viewpoint on our southern neighbor in the era of the Mexican War, after the battles had ended and while the occupation forces were waiting for a peace treaty to be ratified. He describes political and social unrest and gives delightful personal glimpses of a great city struggling to recover from the effects of war.

News of the discovery of gold reached Mexico in mid-1848, and Coit saw opportunities in the lack of a medium of exchange in California. He won the backing for a gold-buying venture, crossed Mexico to San Blas on the Gulf of California and caught a steamer, the Oregon, for San Francisco, where he established himself in April 1849. From quarters near Portsmouth Square, he had an excellent vantage point from which to observe what was going on in "the City" and in California, which he recorded in numerous letters until he went home to his family in 1852.

Dr. George P. Hammond, director emeritus of the Bancroft Library of the University of California, and author of dozens of books pertaining to California and Latin America, writes of Coit: "He was not only a good businessman, he was an accomplished artist, who had studied with European masters to perfect his technique. Both in Mexico and in California, he occupied leisure hours sketching scenes, and representatives of the country — churches, buildings, street scenes, and people. Many of these sketches have been preserved, and the eighteen plates in this book present some of

them, illustrating his letters. They are valuable as art and invaluable as social documentation of an extraordinary era."

The book was designed and printed by Lawton and Alfred Kennedy. The edition is limited of 1250 copies, 156 pages and priced at \$22.50.