

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Our Mormon First Governor**

Some of us haven't known too much about our first governor of California, Peter H. Burnett. He has just been a shadowy figure way back there in our beginnings, . . . Yet in Utah he is remembered with warm affection as a great fighting lawyer who was ready to risk his life in defense of the American principle of a fair trial for everybody.

Burnett and William A. Doniphan were the defending lawyers for Joseph Smith Jr., founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and other Mormons when these members of the new sect were under arrest in the winter of 1838-39 in Liberty, Clay County, Mo. . . . It was a tense moment because popular feeling was running high against the Mormons.

Talk of lynching for both the Mormons and their lawyers was heard.

On the day of the hearing for habeas corpus, Burnett made an opening presentation and then sat with a cocked pistol ready to battle the muttering mob as his associate, Doniphan, made an eloquent plea in behalf of the defendants . . . Later, the case was remanded to another county and still later Burnett came West and ultimately was elected governor of California.

In 1850, while he was governor, the Mormons in Utah decided they wanted to enter the Union . . . Remembering their loyal ally, Gov. Burnett, they urged that their state be called "East California."

It didn't happen, but it was the accolade for a courageous leader, Peter H. Burnett.

In the manuscripts and papers existing in the various archives of the state are preserved many names of the Indian tribes and rancherias (Indian Village). For instance, the Indian name for San Juan Capistrano was Quanis Savit; San Gabriel or Torres Canga; Santa Clara, Thamien; Soledad or Taches, and San Carlos Carmelo or Esslenes.

The tribes who inhabited the vicinity of Monterey in 1784 were known as the Rumsenes and Esslenes. These rancherias were known as Ichxenta or Santa Teresa, all Indians within a circle of forty miles of Monterey.

It appears from some of the historic documents above mentioned, that Padre Palou, biographer of Junipero

Serra, was the priest of the Mission Dolores in San Francisco from 1778 to 1785 when he went back to Mexico and became the guardian of the College of San Fernando at the capital. It was Father Palou who gathered much of the written material regarding the Indian tribes of this region.

In the writings in the early issues of the Monterey Sentinel published here in 1855-56, there is a note saying that 20 or 30 rancherias of the Indians furnished neophytes to the mission of San Carlos de Carmelo. It appears from notes of the Padres that from June 1778 to March 1795, a period of 17 years, "1803 persons were confirmed in the mission church of Carmelo, three miles from Monterey." Of that number not more than 1,600 were Indians and the children of Indians, according to the Sentinel article. In 1795 the Indians of this vicinity had become so far domesticated as to serve the padres.

The writer goes on with the record: "It may therefore be taken as a basis, from these 1,600 confirmations, that probably there never existed more than 3,000 Parniagans, and the Echellats of San Francisco, Socorrondo of San Miguel."

In the valleys of the Salinas and Pajaro were the Sargentarucas, the Kathlentarucas, the Tebitiyias, the Poytoquis, the Pagchins, the Locoyustas Mutsuns, the Asparniagans, and the Imunigares and many others.

Those Indians living at Santa Barbara, Purisima, San Juan Capistrano, are said to have been of yellow complexion, handsome in features and exceedingly hospitable to the first Spanish explorers.