

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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California Conquest Related in Letters

We have before us an intriguing historical comment on the life and work of Capt. S.F. Du Pont, including extracts from private journal-letters of the captain written while in command of the Cyane, during the war with Mexico, 1846-1848. These extracts were privately printed by his family in 1885, in 444 pages, eight volumes, and advertised recently for \$200 for the set. We mention the price for the reason that collectors of Californiana and Americana have a real worthwhile investment in books and manuscripts. These Du Pont books are newly discovered and are a highly important source of material concerning the conquest of California.

An edition of fewer than 50 copies was printed, type distributed, and no copies offered for sale. Although the work contains a rich mass of first-hand source material, it has remained virtually unknown and entirely unused to this day. The Union Catalogue has a record of but one copy in the Delaware Historical Society. Unknown to Bancroft, Winslow, Larned, Haferkorn, Hanna, Royce, Cowan, etc.

Capt. Du Pont (later Rear Admiral) was one of the most prominent and active leaders in the conquest of California; and besides recording his own noteworthy achievements, his journals and letters show him to have been in almost constant contact with Fremont, Stockton, Sloat, Kearney, Larkin, Biddle, Shubrick, LaVallete, Gillispie, Jones, and Mason, whose movements throughout the conquest are meticulously narrated by Du Pont as they came under his notice. The narrative is usually full of

Du Pont sailed from Norfolk in October 1845 as a commander of the frigate Congress, flagship of Commodore Stockton. He arrived in San Francisco about July 1, 1846. The Mexican War was in progress, and Stockton proceeded to Monterey where he took charge of the naval forces in the Pacific and placed Du Pont in command of the sloop of war Cyane. The author then took on board Fremont and his battalion and landed them shortly afterward at San Diego. Proceeding hence down the coast, he reached San Blas where, as on numerous occasions, his crew substituted for marines and his landing party spiked the guns of the Mexicans.

Entering the Gulf of California, he seized La Paz and at Guaymas burned the Mexican fleet. Within a few months he cleared the gulf of hostile ships, destroying or capturing some 30-odd.

November, 1847 he aided Commodore Shubrick (who had succeeded Stockton) in occupation of Mazatlan. Later when the enemy attempted to recapture its lost possessions, Du Pont led his "troops" to the rescue of the besieged and defeated American forces at the Mission of San Jose. Subsequently he organized and led various similar inland expeditions and succeeded in clearing the country of hostile troops.

On his return to Norfolk in October, 1848, Du Pont was publicly congratulated by the Secretary of the Navy on his "safe return after a long cruise, in which the services of the officers and crew of the Cyane were so highly distinguished for gallantry, efficiency, and skill."

In a small booklet entitled "San Francisco Street Names," edited by Henry C. Carlile and published by the American Trust Company, we found this reference to Capt. Samuel F. Du Pont: "Du Pont street now Grant avenue; U.S. Officer during conquest of California. In command of the USS Congress, which brought Commodore Robert F. Stockton to California in July, 1846. Transferred to the USS Cyane, Du Pont during the next several months took an active part in the conquest of California, transferring troops from port to port. The name of the southern end of the street was changed to Grant avenue in the late 70's and 80's. The name Du Pont for the north end of the street persisted until a much later date."