History of the Celebration
of the
Fiftieth Anniversary
of the
Taking Possession of California
and
Raising of the American Flag at Monterey, Cal.

by

Commodore John Drake Sloat, U. S. N.,

JULY 7TH, 1846.

Held under the auspices of the Associated Veterans of the Mexican War, assisted by the U. S. Army and Navy, the National Guard of California, the Sloat Monument Association, the California Pioneers, the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of California, Boards of Supervisors, Fraternal Societies, Public Schools, and Citizens of the State.

Held at Monterey, California, July 7th, 1896.

Also of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Raising of the American Flag at San Francisco, California, July 9th, 1846, by

Captain James B. Montgomery, U. S. N.,

Commanding the U. S. Sloop of War Portsmouth,

Held July 9th, 1896.

Preceded by the Account of the Celebration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Raising of the Bear Flag at Sonoma, California, June 14th, 1846,

Held Saturday, June 13th, 1896.

Prepared by direction of the Committee appointed by the Associated Veterans of the Mexican War, approved and ordered printed.

Comrades James Layton, Colonel Joseph Stewart and Charles Lange.

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Part I.

The Celebration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Raising of the Bear Flag at Sonoma, California, June 14, 1846.

The Committee of Arrangements of the Associated Veterans of the Mexican War, having invited the people of Sonoma to take the necessary steps for the celebration of this event three weeks prior to the raising of the American flag at Monterey by Commodore Sloat, the invitation was promptly accepted.

The following prominent citizens of Sonoma formed the Executive and Sub-Committees:

Executive Committee — Fred. T. DuHRing, Chairman; Robert P. Hill, Robert Hall, George O. Campbell, Daniel D. Davison, George Breitenbach, Executive Secretary, and Benj. Weed, Secretary of Sub-Committees.

The Chairmen of Sub-Committees were as follows: Finance, Hon. Robert Howe; Newspaper Correspondence and Press Invitations, N. H. Granice; Decorations, G. N. Holts; Transportation, Daniel D. Davison; Grounds, G. S. Harris; Reception, Henry Seipp; Donations, Henry Hartin; Parade, J. K. Poepe; Reception of Ladies, Mrs. J. P. Weems.

The success of the celebration at Sonoma was greatly due to the efforts especially of Mr. Daniel D. Davison and Mr. Fred T. DuHRing.

The following account taken from the Examiner, Call, Chronicle and other newspapers of the following day, together with what is herein given by Major Edwin A. Sherman, he having been invited to serve as Grand Marshal of the occasion. It is proper to state that the Hon. William M. Boggs, of Napa, was elected and served as Councilman, and Major Edwin A. Sherman, was elected and served as the first Clerk of the town of Sonoma when the late Gen. M. G. Vallejo was Mayor, and they two are now the only survivors of the first city government of Sonoma in 1851.

SONOMA, June 14th.—Brave men and fair women joined in-day in a mighty cheer as the original Bear Flag was run up to the peak of the same flagpole that bore it just fifty years ago, when it heralded the bloodless victory that divorced California from Mexican dominion and wedded her to the best of all the nations on which the sun shines. An enthusiasm worthy of the occasion marked the throngs that assembled here to-day to honor the little band of American patriots that rode into the hamlet of Sonoma at daybreak of June 14, 1846, made a prisoner of General Vallejo and flung to the breeze the emblem of the new republic.

From early morning every avenue which gives the town communication with the outside world was thronged with those who would attend the anniversary exercises that were to begin at 11 o'clock. Excursion trains from the metropolis brought a large delegation of pioneers, several officers of the Grand Parlor of the Native Sons of the Golden West, and five hundred or more Native Sons and Native Daughters. From Healdsburg, Santa Rosa, Petaluma, Napa and other near-by towns came a hundred of excursionists to swell the crowd. Never before in the history of the town had so many people assembled at one time, because, perhaps, there has never before been so great a source of attraction.

The entertainment provided the great assemblage, as well as the ceremonies of the day, were worthy the occasion. The beginning of the day was marked by the firing of anvils, the sharp reverberations awakening echoes along the inclining hills and giving notice to rustic and townsman that the time for the much-talked-of celebration was at hand. At intervals throughout the day the firing was continued, accentuating the cheers of the multitude around the speakers' stand and adding to the demonstration the essential element so dear to the American heart. Everything was as it should be, and the prepared programme was carried out without a break of any kind.

As the delegations arrived from San Francisco and other points they were met at the railway depot by a committee of citizens and there formed into a procession (by Major Edwin A. Sherman, a former citizen of this place of forty-six years ago and the first City Clerk in 1851 under Gen. M. G. Vallejo as Mayor.)

The procession marched through the principal streets and around the plaza to the corner where a stand for the accommodation of the speakers had been erected beside the sturdy flagpole that has withstood successfully the destroying element for more than half a century. There, when all had assembled, Frederick T. DuHRing, one of Sonoma’s prominent citizens, introduced Mayor Henry Seipp, who delivered an address of welcome. Mayor Seipp said:

Mr. President and Citizens of California:—On behalf of the people of this valley and city I welcome you to our hospitality. Though the boundaries of our corporation are not extensive, and the possibilities of our wealth and population are not many, we feel high pride in the part this valley has taken in the growth of the State.

It was here the first step was made that brought this region under the Stars and Stripes. It is here, after a lapse of fifty years, we meet under that banner to pay homage to the spirit of adventure which has since the earliest time been the genius of our development. From
the vantage point of these fifty years we may review the events of our growth.

The June of 1846 smiled upon an almost virgin soil. Communication with civilization was irregular and infrequent. The natives were vastly in the majority, and the conditions of progress were wanting. Now the peaceful homes of our people are seen on every hand. The fruitful soil bears rich burdens of plenty. The occurrences of yesterday are the subjects of our conversation to-day. The Indian is a thing of the past.

So great have been the changes that it is with difficulty we comprehend the gigantic strides with which the present has been reached. The first signal of the grand march of progress was by the patriots of our high destiny unfurled from yonder. They could not see the present, but, urged on by supreme confidence in the goddess of our fortunes, they placed an empire at her feet. Swiftly dormant energies quicken and the wild became tame. The institution of liberty and law soon found foothold and the hopes that were are the realization of to-day.

So it is well we remember our birth into the republic of liberty and pay tribute to the spirit that ploughed into the vast wilderness of the West and built this empire of the Pacific. Well did you welcome. The freedom of the city is yours. May your sojourn in our midst long be pleasantly remembered. Honor to the Bear Flag! Hail to you all!

Henry C. Gessford, president of the day, followed the Mayor, prefacing his remarks by saying that his duties were not those of an orator, though he could not refrain from giving brief expression to a few of the thoughts called into life by the occasion that brought his hearers together. Continuing, he said:

History is a record of man's achievements and their results, and it is the pride of every Californian that to the early pioneers is traced the first beatings of the great heart of this commonwealth, and that in the magnificence of the California of to-day we see the proud results of the victories of these vanguards of our Statehood. We honor ourselves in paying homage to the memory of these men, most of whom now sleep beneath the oaks of these valleys. We have with us on this occasion survivors of that heroic band who will now raise aloft the rude banner which, born in revolution, hailed by age and endured by time, is an inspiration to every man who cherishes the history of this great State and reveres the memory of those heroes of '46.

As the speaker closed, two of these survivors of the Bear Flag party, B. F. Dewell and Henry Beeson—the others, Harvey Porterfield, of Napa county, and Thomas Knight, of San Francisco, were present—attached the tattered old flag to the suspended halyards and slowly hoisted the symbol to the top of the staff. The act was greeted by continued cheering.

Following this ceremony came the reading of a historical essay by Robert A. Thompson, of Santa Rosa. He dwelt at length on the achievements of the men who proclaimed the California republic.

"Of that gallant band of thirty-three that captured Sonoma," he said, "only four are now known to be living, and two of them are with us to-day. The rest have passed away, but if ever the spirit of the departed returns to the most potent scenes of its earthly activity, then, though all unseen, the spirits of those brave men are in our midst to-day. But I see in the future a monument to their memory. It stands upon this plaza, a late but deserved tribute to their valor. The typical grizzly guards its base; upon the polished surface of its four-square shaft are embazoned the names of the Bear Flag men, and it is crowned with a statue of their beloved California."

Merton C. Allen, orator of the day, paid a brilliant tribute to the memory of those who were first in the struggle to relieve California from Mexican dominion. He said:

"Nearly nineteen centuries ago a new star arose in the far East. It was a star of hope that guided the shepherds, who watched their flocks by night, to a humble manger where lay the Christ-child at Bethlehem. The light of that wondrous star has come down through the centuries. It illuminates the pages of history, and now, as in days of long ago, points the way to Him all people know as the Savior of mankind.

Standing on this platform, under the influence of a thousand memories which are called to mind by the day and the occasion, another star confronts me. It is the lone star of the California republic. I see it emblazoned on that historic Bear Flag which floats so proudly over our heads. In every line and fold of that old banner I read a lesson that should be dear to every California heart. To me the lone star is a source of inspiration. It renders a little more dear the knowledge of my nativity, and reminds me that as the star of Bethlehem guided men in olden times to the birthplace of Christ, so did the star which first flashed into view on that old flag inspire the men of another day to a deed of heroic valor, to which we owe the fact that to-day this great territory of California is a part of the United States."

The speaker reviewed the history of the Bear Flag movement, defended the views of those who participated, and presented the unjust criticisms of prejudiced historians, and added:

"Be history written as it may, the Bear Flag has a permanent place in the affections of that growing body of young men who call themselves the Native Sons of the Golden West. They love the banner of '36 for the principle of American independence which it typifies, and as long as the Order lives, the men who helped to raise the banner of the bear and star are assured an honored place in the sacred album of memory.

The Bear Flag stands for home and native land. It became all the more dear to California hearts on that memorable 9th of September, 1850, when the lone star of self became merged in the constellation of national unity, and California was proclaimed the thirty-first State in the American Confederation."

The speaker paid a high tribute to the patri-
otic spirit of Californians and congratulated his audience upon the wonderful growth and advancement of the State since the days of the Bear Flag, and concluded in these words:

"No words could enlarge a fame that is destined to endure as long as history. Sufficient be it that in passing I raise in honor of the departed pioneer a simple shaft of kindly thought. About the column I enwrap the two historic flags which his hand helped to raise for the good of mankind. May the tears of angels water the flowers of tender memory which grow about him; and the breezes of heaven chant a requiem over his grave."

Major Sherman being called upon, spoke briefly but eloquently of the history of the men of the old town of Sonoma, paying a just tribute to the memory of Gen. M. G. Vallejo, who was in favor of California becoming a part of the American republic and opposed to its being made British territory by being sold by the Central Government of Mexico to pay the English debt. Here in Sonoma was where the Headquarters of the Pacific Division of the U. S. army in 1850-1-2-3 were located, with Gen. Persifer F. Smith in command, with his staff, composed of Lieut.-Col., afterwards Gen. Joseph Hooker, who was then Assistant Adjutant General; Major Hiram Leonard, Paymaster, Major Phil. Kearney, also afterwards General, the first at the head of his command to enter the City of Mexico before its surrender, and to lose his arm at the Gate of Hellen. Here also was Lieut. George Stoneman, afterwards General, and later to become the Governor of California. Also Lieut. George H. Derby, of the Engineer Corps, who was the prince of wags, known as "John Phoenix" and "Squibb," whose name and fame is known throughout the breadth and length of the Pacific Coast and wherever the army button is worn.

Here was where the pretty Missouri girls lived who had recovered from the alkali of the plains, whose cheeks were like roses, their eyes shining with the blue depths of heaven, and whose ruby lips were wet with nectar and honey-dew upon which the humming-birds delighted to feed, as well as other birds without any feathers, though the down might be growing that would develop into hirsute appendages.

But the girls of those days were now grandmothers, were now too old to kiss, and he would have to look to the younger generation for the ancient refreshment of Platonic love upon the lips while "Pond memory brings the light of other days around him."

He returned his thanks for the kind remembrance and the honor conferred upon him in inviting him to come from his home in Oakland to act as Grand Marshal upon this historic occasion, which was an honor indeed unexpected and most gratefully appreciated.

His remarks were received with hearty applause.

At the close of the speech-making every one so disposed repaired to the tables built under the trees of the plaza, and all were there served with barbecued meats from smoking pits where the fires have been going since Friday morning.

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THE REVOLT AT SONOMA.

Love of Liberty Moved the Men of '46 to Cut A drift From Mexico.

A day an hour of virtuous liberty
Is worth a whole eternity of bondage."

Let those who will, allege that the raising of the Bear Flag was a precipitate act, the sentiment of these lines of Addison is all the justification that need be offered, if indeed any be required. The men of '46 raised the symbol in the cause of liberty

The raising of the Bear Flag at Sonoma just fifty years ago—June 14, 1846—precipitated unquestionably the entry of California into the Union. The time was ripe. A strong arm was needed to blaze out the path of a more enlightened civilization. Mexico, so deeply engaged with her own affairs, had neither time nor interest sufficient to pay heed to the requirements of her department—California. The civil and military authorities here were continually at swords' points, and as a result crime stalked unchecked; justice, unknown as a reality, was a name only; education was neglected, and there was a well-grounded belief that the Mexican authorities intended, sooner or later, to expel the foreign settlers from their adopted homes. It but required some such suggestion as that made by the heroes of Sonoma to center attention on the path to reform. The rest came naturally.

Early in January, Capt. John C. Fremont, of the United States Army, in command of an exploring expedition, entered California via the Truckee route and encamped at the latter place he had a conference with Thomas O. Larkin, who was the Consular representative, as well as the confidential agent of the United States Government in California.

Commandante José Castro, who, with Pio Pico, the Governor, divided Mexican authority in California, could not fail to learn that Fremont was at Monterey and had left a body of army at Sutter's Fort. He demanded from Consul Larkin an explanation of the visit. Castro was informed that the object of the "pathfinder" was to survey a route from the Pacific to the Pacific. It was also stated that Fremont and his party were going north to Oregon.

The Captain and his men did not at once take up the trail northward, but marched south via Santa Teresa, over the Santa Cruz mountains, and via Los Gatos to Santa Cruz, and then inland to the Salinas valley. This took place immediately after the conference with Consul Larkin, and José Castro joined Prefect Manuel Castro in a demand that Fremont withdraw at once. The Captain declined absolutely, intrusted himself on Gabian Peak, and for the second time the Stars and Stripes were hoisted by an American soldier in California. This was on March 6, 1846.

Castro mustered a couple of hundred men
with the idea of dislodging the Americans, but thought better of it and gave up the plan. Fremont leisurely withdrew from his peak and marched north.

Another representative of the United States Government then put in an appearance—Lieutenant Archibald H. Gillespie, of the United States Marine Corps. He was sent to cooperate with Larkin and Fremont in the peaceful annexation of California.

Gillespie went after Fremont with letters from the Government as well as from Larkin, reaching Lassen’s rancho on May 24th. Even Hubert Bancroft in his ingenious description of the career of Fremont in these days admits that the policy of the United States was clearly made manifest to Larkin, Fremont and Gillespie, and that the policy was to seize California in the event of war with Mexico.

To the rumors that were current in the northern part of the State at that time, as a result of the clash between Fremont and Castro, were added stories, more or less founded on fact, of threatening proclamations issued by General Castro against Americans. So it happened that when a report reached Fremont’s camp that Castro was gathering an army to drive the foreign settlers from the country, a small and courageous body of men under Ezekiel Merritt set forth from Fremont’s camp determined to check any advance or perish in the attempt. On Sunday, June 14, 1846, with a following of perhaps thirty-three men, Merritt marched to Sonoma, quietly took possession and hoisted over the city the standard of the California Republic; known ever since to history as the Bear Flag.

The act may have been precipitate, but there was every incentive for the men to strike for their homes and inaugurate what they hoped would be a better state of affairs.


Of this party there are but four survivors—Harvey Porterfield, Benjamin Dewell, Henry Beeson and Thomas Knight.

Mr. Dewell answered a few days ago the questions propounded by Bancroft, to-wit: "Who furnished the cotton? Who the flannel? Whence came the red paint? Was the cloth new or old? Had the flannel graced the undergarment of a fair and patriotic lady, or had it filled a humble station as a part of a man’s red shirt?"

Mr. Dewell’s answers describe the flag graphically. "The pioneer does not remember who furnished the cotton, but cotton was plentiful.

Red flannel was very scarce, however. Mrs. J. Grigby and Mrs. W. B. Elliot furnished the red flannel. The latter supplied all she could from a petticoat, and then from the leathern-shirted throng a committee of one was chosen to call upon Mrs. Grigby for the remainder."

It happened that the lady was in the act of cutting up red flannel for an expected baby Grigby. She yielded, however, to the exigency of the hour and denied herself and her unborn babe that the flag might be completed.

"The flag was made," said Dewell a few days ago, "in the front room of the barracks, just at the left of the door, and most of the sewing was done by myself. Bill Todd painted the bear and star with black ink. The colors—red, white and blue—were used because the were the colors of the United States flag. The bear was selected as representing the strongest animal found in that section of the country. The language of the flag was: ‘A bear stands and a star and as long as the stars shine we stand for the cause.’"

Mrs. Dewell, who was a daughter of the petticoat-sacrificing Mrs. Elliott, remembers the flag well. She says it consisted of nine or ten stripes alternating in white, red and blue, with a blue square in the upper corner next the staff, a black star on the first white stripe, and a black bear on the second white stripe. Underneath the bear were the words, "California Republic." The bear and lettering were in ink, Thomas Cowie helped Dewell in the sewing, as they were both saddlers by trade. The result of their labors may not have been a work of art, but it stood for the grandest sentiment which can inspire men to noble thoughts and deeds; it stood for liberty.

With the hoisting of the flag an accomplished fact it was but natural that these men should desire to be known as something else than a mere party of filibusters, and so they supplemented the declaration which the Bear Flag itself made with a proclamation. This pronunciamento was written by Ide himself and bore the date June 15, 1846. The original is in the possession of the Society of California Pioneers, and its text is as follows:

A PROCLAMATION TO ALL PERSONS, CITIZENS OF SONOMA AND COUNTRY ABOUND REQUESTING THEM TO REMAIN AT PEACE AND TO FOLLOW THEIR RIGHTFUL OCCUPATION WITHOUT FEAR OF MOLSTATION.

The commander-in-chief of the troops assembled at the fort of Sonoma gives his inviolable pledge to all persons in California not found under arms that they shall not be disturbed in their persons, their property or their social relations one to another by men under his command. He also solemnly declares his object to be, first, to defend himself and his brave companions in arms who were invited to this country by a promise of land on which to settle themselves and families; who were also promised a Republican government; who, when having arrived in California were denied even the privilege of buying or renting land of their friends; who instead of being allowed to participate in or being protected by a Republi-
can government, were oppressed by a military despotism; who were even threatened by proclamation from the chief officer of the aforesaid despotism with extermination if they would not depart out of the country, leaving all their property, their arms and beasts of burden; and thus deprived of the means of flight or defense, we were to be driven through the deserts, inhabited by hostile Indians, to certain death. To overthrow a government which has seized the missions for its individual aggrandizement, which has ruined and shamefully oppressed the laboring people of California by their enormous exactions on goods imported into the county, is the determined purpose of the brave men who are associated under his command.

He also solemnly declares his object in the second place to be to invite all peaceable and good citizens of California, who are friendly to the maintenance of good order and equal rights, and I do hereby invite them to repair to my camp at Sonoma, without delay to assist us in establishing and maintaining a Republican Government which shall secure to all civil and religious liberty; which shall encourage industry, virtue and literature; which shall leave unshackled by fetters, commerce, manufactures and mechanism.

He further declares that he relies upon the rectitude of our intentions, the favor of heaven and the bravery of those who are bound to and associated with him by the principle of self-preservation, by the love of truth and by the hatred of tyranny—for his hopes of success.

He further declares that he believes that a government, to be prosperous and happy in its tendencies, must originate with its people who are friendly to its existence; that its citizens are its guardians; its officers are its servants and its glory their reward.

WILLIAM R. IDE, Commander.
Headquarters Sonoma, June 15, 1846.

This narrative of the stand-taking by brave men may be closed with a quotation from one of their number, Robert Semple:

"A single man cried out, "Let us divide the spoils." but one universal, dark, indignant frown made him shrink from the presence of honest men, and from that time forward no man dared to hint anything like violating the sanctity of a private house, or touching private property. Their children in generations yet to come will look back with pleasure upon the commencement of a revolution carried on by their fathers upon principles high and holy as the laws of eternal justice.

Thus the celebration of the raising of the Bear Flag at Sonoma on June 14th, 1846, was brought to a happy close, the fitting prelude to the celebration of a greater event but far less perilous to the participants in the raising of the American flag at Monterey by Commodore John D. Sloat, on the 7th of July, 1846, a little more than three weeks afterwards.

In speaking of this affair of the Bear Flag Revolution and the proclamation of the Republic of California, they had only repeated what General M. G. Vallejo had himself done at Monterey in November, 1838, in declaring California independent of Mexico, and was made Commandante General of the Republic of California. This distinguished, able and patriotic gentleman, soldier and statesman and lover of California, his native soil, had the remarkable career of having lived under no less than five separate and distinct national flags and without leaving his native State. He was born under the flag of Spain; became a soldier, general and statesman under the flag of Mexico; raised his own standard of the California Republic at Monterey in 1838; was captured and made prisoner under the Bear Flag and paroled; and lastly by the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo became a citizen of the United States without having to be naturalized. He helped to frame the first Constitution of California, served in its first Legislature and helped to name the twenty-seven counties into which the State of California was first divided. He gave the name to the city of Vallejo, at one time the State Capital, and the name of his wife to Benicia. He was the first Mayor of Sonoma, of which the writer was the first City Clerk, and a more liberal, kind-hearted, patriotic and gentle spirit never lived. Hospitable to the extreme, polite and urbane, and broad-minded, he permitted his daughters to marry American, Hungarian as well as Mexican gentlemen, and thus turn the streams of his own blood into the channels of the nationalities of the world. It was the misfortunes of civil war, made necessary by the perilous exigencies of the times, when self-preservation, the first law of nature, came into force, which made him a prisoner of war; when, if he himself had been in supreme command in California, the Bear Flag Revolution would not have occurred, and three weeks after the Bear Flag was hoisted, he would have gracefully surrendered California to the demands of Commodore Sloat, in accordance with his previously expressed convictions in regard to his choice, preferring to be a free sovereign American citizen under a republican form of government rather than to be the subject of any European monarchical power.

Having served in an official capacity under him as City Clerk of Sonoma when he was Mayor of that place nearly half a century ago, and having enjoyed his confidence as a trusted friend, socially and otherwise, I deem it but just to pay this tribute to his worth and memory, which will be endorsed by many an American pioneer who had the pleasure of his gentlemanly intercourse and acquaintance.

EDWIN A. SHERMAN.

[Copy of letter received.]

SONOMA, CAL., June 15th, 1846.

Maj. E. A. SHERMAN.

MY DEAR SIR:—On behalf of the Executive Committee, I wish to thank you for your services as Marshal of the parade. We look upon your speech at the foot of the flagpole as one of the events of the day. Your obedient servant,

Sec. Ex. Committee.