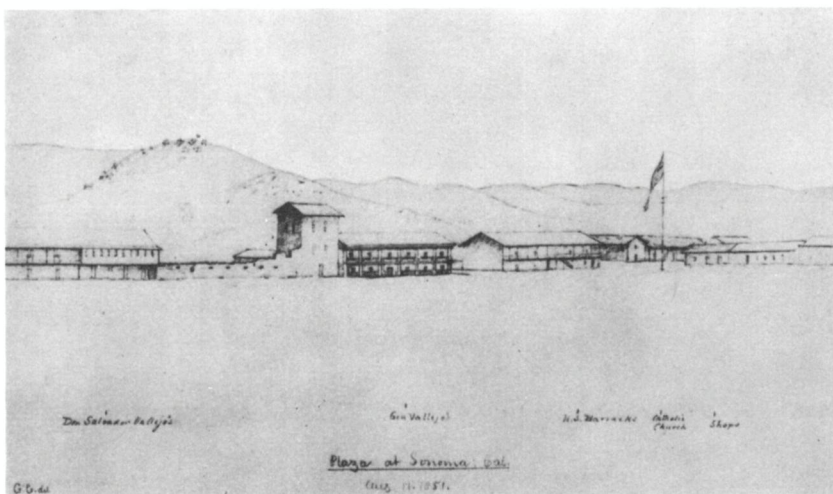


# John C. Frémont and the Bear Flag Revolution:

A REAPPRAISAL

BY JOHN A. HAWGOOD



*Sonoma, August 11, 1851*

A contemporary drawing of the north side of the Plaza at Sonoma, showing the Casa Grande, the residence at the time of Salvador Vallejo's house and the Mexican barracks, both of which still stand. The Solano Mission building ("Catholic Church") is behind the flagstaff and is in an excellent state of preservation. (Reproduced from David I. Bushnell, Jr., ed., "Drawing by George Gibbs in the Far Northwest, 1849-1851," *Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections*, 97 (1938), Plate 12, facing page 14 of the text.)

Upper California (northward from San Diego) was established as a Spanish colony in the year 1769 and became a province or state of the Republic of Mexico in 1821. From about 1825 onwards, immigrants from the United States, coming at first mainly by sea, but after 1840 in larger numbers across the prairies and the mountains, began to take a prominent part in the life of Alta California. The inability of the Mexican government—disorganised by civil disorder and frequent changes of administration—to exercise any proper control over this distant province, the inefficiency and poverty of the governors sent there, and the unruliness of the native Californians of Spanish descent, caused the foreign settlers

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and traders to desire more and more ardently a less unstable government, perhaps independent of Mexico and possibly under the protection of one of the leading powers. The immigrants from the United States, more numerous and more aggressive than any others, finally took matters into their own hands, with momentous consequences.

One of the most dramatic and controversial episodes in the history of Western America was the establishment of an independent Republic of California at the little town and former mission of Sonoma, north of San Francisco Bay, on June 15, 1846, by a party of twenty-four United States citizens, who had recently settled in the Sacramento valley on land under Mexican sovereignty. The "California Republic" was short-lived, for the Bear Flag flew over Sonoma only until July 9, 1846, nor can this regime of three and a half weeks be said to have swayed the destinies of California to any marked extent—the attack upon and the heroic defence of the Alamo in San Antonio had, for instance, played a far greater part in securing the independence and the ultimate absorption by the United States of Texas—but the protagonists in the Bear Flag Revolution, as well as contemporary reporters and later historians, have written so copiously about it, and made so many claims and counter-claims concerning its origins, its course, its nature and its importance, that its few simple events, though happening little over a century ago, have been buried in a mass of mythology almost as thick and intertwining as if they belonged to the early history of Greece or Rome. It seems that no pioneer's child was suckled by a she-bear on the road to Sonoma, and no heroic backwoodsman—not even the seven-foot Semple—stood off ten thousand Mexicans single-handed with his long Kentucky rifle at the Straits of Carquinez, but it would not have been surprising if such claims, too, had been made. The Bear Flag Revolution still continues to baffle historians, even in the nineteen-sixties, and some of them are still unable—or unwilling—to uncloud the issues. This essay will attempt, on the basis of evidence available, to assess the various interpretations of the Bear Flag episode and to suggest which of these appear to be the most valid.

The Bear Flag Revolution would undoubtedly not have bulked so large in history, nor have been such a cause of confusion to historians and their readers, but for the attempts made to tamper

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with the record by John C. Frémont, who did not arrive in Sonoma until June 25, 1846, and by his gifted and resourceful wife, Jessie Benton Frémont (now acknowledged as the more important co-author of his *Memoirs*) who was all the time in Washington, D.C., and never visited California at all until 1849.

Unless they quite honestly remembered in their old age only what they wished to remember concerning the origins of the Bear Flag movement and Frémont's own part in helping to bring it about, and to make it contribute to the American conquest of California, the general and his lady quite possibly carried to the grave with them certain pieces of key information without which the story can never be complete. Nevertheless, even during their lifetime the version presented in the *Memoirs* in 1887 (and earlier, if more crudely, by some of the campaign biographers of Frémont in 1856)<sup>1</sup> had been largely discredited under the relentless—and at times cruel—cross-examination of the two Frémonts by the Harvard philosopher and historian Josiah Royce in 1884 and 1885, quite apart from having been denied on points of detail in the reminiscences of other leading characters in the story, such as General M. J. Vallejo and William B. Ide—neither of whom, it must be admitted, was a disinterested witness, but neither of whom had quite such a big axe to grind as had the Frémonts.

The Bear Flag revolution was not a piece of spontaneous combustion. It is indeed remarkable that something like it did not happen earlier than June, 1846. Ten years before, when the number of Americans in Alta California was far too few for them to sponsor such a movement themselves, some of them gave support to the native-born Californian, Juan Bautiste Alvarado, in his successful ousting of an unpopular governor. The Alvarado revolution of 1836 made Upper California almost completely independent.<sup>2</sup> It was called "the free and sovereign state of California" and a separate flag was devised for it. "The flag is to be six stripes and one star they say," wrote Thomas Larkin from Monterey on November 9, 1836, to his friend Abel Stearns (who had supported the revolution) in Los Angeles.<sup>3</sup> The declaration of independence, which never came, was eagerly awaited by many Californians and by most of the foreign residents, but Alvarado was quietly to hand over the governorship of California to the next official nominee of the Mexican government in 1842. Once again, in

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1845, this last Mexican governor, General Micheltorena, was expelled by a revolt led by native Californians and supported by foreign residents, though Thomas Larkin remained neutral and John Augustus Sutter supported Micheltorena. The triumvirate of Pio Pico (in the south), José Castro (in Monterey) and M. J. Vallejo (in the north) put the governorship of Alta California into informal commission (with Pico as nominal governor) and for the next twelve months hesitated between resuming a more active allegiance to Mexico, declaring California independent and seeking to make the country a protectorate of either Great Britain or the United States. Pico was more favourable to Britain and Vallejo to the United States, while, of the three, Castro was the most inclined to heed the far-off voice of Mexico City, though not to the extent of paying taxes over to the central government once again or accepting a new governor sent from the capital. The loyalty of these Spanish Californians had indeed worn almost as thin as that of the "Mexican citizens" of United States or British birth, like Abel Stearns and J. J. Warner, who were now among the most important men in California and who had married into the leading Spanish Californian families. The tenuous allegiance to the Mexican Republic could therefore have very easily been snapped at any time after 1835 in Alta California without any foreign intervention whatsoever, and another Lone Star Republic set up.

The foreigners in California nevertheless were most of them already less than content with the prospect of living under the flag of a California republic dominated by Spanish Californians like Pico, Castro and Vallejo. Although the charge against Isaac Graham<sup>4</sup> and the other immigrants from the United States and Britain arrested with him in 1840 by Alvarado was a trumped-up one, the resentment caused by their treatment turned rumour into reality, and from that year onwards, at least, the Americans in California began to hope and work more and more openly to make it part of the American Union. That this end had also been desired by the government in Washington ever since Andrew Jackson had sent Anthony Butler down to Mexico City to try to purchase the Pacific Coast province, gave them the encouragement that Britons in California, like James Alexander Forbes (H.B.M. Vice-Consul in Monterey), lacked, for the latter was told

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very firmly by Aberdeen and by Palmerston in turn that Great Britain had no desire at the moment for fresh colonies in distant parts of the world, least of all ones that would further complicate her already strained relations with the United States.<sup>5</sup>

Desiring independence of Mexico is one thing but the forcible seizure of the province by immigrants from the United States is another, and none of the more established or "solid" of the immigrants had anything to do with the Bear Flag revolution. It is true that men like Thomas Larkin and John Marsh had for years been hoping for a peaceful purchase or annexation of Alta California by the U.S.A., but the news of the Bear Flag movement, when it came, shocked and appalled them. The appeal of John Marsh and Charles M. Weber, dated March 27, 1845, to "persons of foreign birth, whether nationalised or not, to send delegates to attend a meeting in St. José on July 4 to consider the best interests of all the foreigners resident in California"<sup>6</sup> gave no evidence (other than circumstantial, in view of the date provocatively chosen for the meeting) that a declaration of independence, least of all an appeal to the United States, was envisaged. In any case the meeting does not seem to have taken place. Likewise, the famous circular letter sent out by Thomas Larkin to his friends Leese, Stearns and Warner on April 17, 1846,<sup>7</sup> after he had been appointed United States confidential agent by Buchanan in the despatch brought to him personally and verbally by Lieutenant Gillespie on April 17, was most cautiously worded, as had been the despatch itself, which had instructed him "peacefully to intrigue for the secession of the department from Mexico, by the will of its own inhabitants, as expressed by their own constituted authorities."<sup>8</sup> So cautiously indeed did Larkin intrigue that he did not even report to Washington the results of the meeting of the leading Californians at his house (only Pio Pico, despite Larkin's frantic efforts, refused to come, probably out of jealousy toward Castro) in mid-April, 1846, at which Mariano Vallejo is alleged to have made a speech in favour of Alta California putting herself under United States protection forthwith.<sup>9</sup> Larkin pinned his faith on the forthcoming meeting at Santa Barbara (called for June 15) of a *Consejo General de Pueblos Unidos de Alta California*,<sup>10</sup> which in fact was never to meet, and finally he was overtaken by events—the Bear Flag revolution, followed on July 2 by the arrival of Commodore Sloat's

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squadron at Monterey—before his plan could mature. His request for “three more weeks”<sup>11</sup> went unheeded by Sloat and his advice to Buchanan (in a despatch also bearing the momentous date of June 15, 1846) to “pension” the leading Californians,<sup>12</sup> was a somewhat belated action in view of the fact that Captain Arce’s horses had (though this was as yet unknown to Larkin) already been stolen.

The capture of Arce’s horses, en route from Sonoma to Monterey on June 10, 1846, by Ezekiel Merritt and his gang, was the first overt move by the Americans in the forcible seizure of California, whether it was their own idea or part of a plot by Frémont (as has been alleged) to provoke Castro—to whom the horses belonged—into attacking him or the settlements in the Sacramento valley. By this aggressive action on June 10, the fat was put into the fire and the same gang (somewhat augmented in numbers and now including the starry-eyed carpenter, Mr. Ide) was to advance on Sonoma on June 13, either self-propelled or under Frémont’s orders.

But there had already been a lot of smoke, and whether or not these two “acts of aggression” were promoted by Frémont (out of ambition or because he had persuaded himself that something of the sort was expected of him by his government or by his father-in-law, Thomas Hart Benton), some such direct action by the American settlers had long been advocated by the more irresponsible and feared by the more responsible of them. Ezekiel Merritt was well known as an unruly character and as a potential troublemaker. As early as August 2, 1842, Sutter had written (in a letter to Marsh): “Merritt and 3 others, while making a hunt on the San Joaquin were robbed of 8 horses. They speak of making an expedition against the horse thieves”;<sup>13</sup> while Larkin on April 2, 1846, without mentioning any specific names, had reported to his government the rumour that, “Some Americans (who left Capt. Frémont) are joining the Indians to attack the farms and others were about to take possession of a Town in the upper part of the Bay of San Francisco.”<sup>14</sup> Apart from the nonsense about “joining the Indians,” this is almost prophetic, for Kit Carson and others of its members were to beg Frémont to let them leave the expedition and join up with the more militant of the American settlers, while just over ten weeks later Sonoma was to be attacked. Larkin’s story

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could, of course, have been an amended echo of that entered in James Clyman's diary on March 17, 1846, to the effect that, "A report is rife that Captain Frémont has raised the American flag at Monterey and all good citizens are called on forthwith to appear at Sonoma armed and equipped for service under General Byaho to defend the rights and privileges of Mexican citizens."<sup>15</sup> Certainly "General Byaho" (M. J. Vallejo) seems to have expected an attack upon Sonoma at about that time, if the story of his "Midnight Proclamation" is to be credited.<sup>16</sup> On March 9, C. M. Weber had written to John Marsh from San José,

Great News! War! War! Captain Frémont . . . with sixty or more riflemen has fortified himself on the heights between San Juan and Don Joaquin Golmero's rancho, the Stars and Stripes flying over their camps. José Castro and two or three hundred Californians with artillery are besieging their position. Captain Graham and sixty or more boys are moving to their rescue. Spaniards and foreigners are enlisting under their respective banners.<sup>17</sup>

Rumours and exaggerations like these were flying in all directions between March and June, 1846. Many of them, as in Weber's case, were largely wishful thinking. Sutter, Larkin and Stearns, on the other hand, continued to hope for a peaceful outcome of California's difficulties, and even John Marsh, who had in the past associated himself to some extent with the "physical force" party, was now alarmed by these rumours of violence, and although he journeyed to San José, as Weber had suggested, to "see the repetition of Texas history in this country"<sup>18</sup> and may have conferred with Frémont during the latter's retreat northward from Eagle Peak during March, he seems to have kept carefully out of the troubles of June, 1846, and to have deplored Frémont's precipitate action of eventually throwing in his lot with the makers of the Bear Flag revolution. But everybody knew, as Sutter wrote on April 3, that "something is brewing,"<sup>19</sup> though nobody knew exactly what.

The Bear Flag revolution was not, indeed, a carefully planned or very well thought out operation, but it could hardly have happened when and in the way it did unless certain elements among the American settlers in the Sacramento valley, "especially the floating population of the territory, landless men of no fixed abode, trappers, deserters from ships, often precious rascals" who "would

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enjoy and spread . . . warlike talk,"<sup>20</sup> had not been more than willing to believe every rumour and to take up arms against the Californian authorities on any pretext. A word of encouragement from Frémont, in his camp at Marysville Buttes, was more than they needed. Frémont afterwards claimed that he had decided on his plan of action by June 6,<sup>21</sup> and Ide asserts that Frémont outlined his scheme for the "neutral conquest" of California to a group of settlers in his marquee there on May 10. The seizure of Arce's horses, that same day, now seemed fully justified in the eyes of Merritt and his companions, even though Ide and others objected at first to a policy of violence and broke off relations with Frémont. According to Ide,<sup>22</sup> the march on and capture of Sonoma (where no violence was to be countenanced unless the Vallejos resisted) was not Frémont's idea and was carried out without his knowledge or approval, only being known about in advance by the twenty-four men who took part and the ten others who refused to participate after being told of the plan. Although some of the people who had captured Arce's horses were also in the Bear Flag party, the one action was not apparently a direct consequence of the other. Having given events a resolute push, Frémont resumed a passive role for a time, and on his arrival at Sonoma on June 25, openly disapproved of much that the Bear Flag party had carried out there. He was afterwards to suggest that they should "annul and wipe out all that had been done up to July 5th,"<sup>23</sup> but his refusal to release Vallejo and his fellow prisoners when the Bear Flaggers sent them to him from Sonoma and his "occupation" of Fort Helvetia in the intervening period make his subsequent claim (in a letter dated September 14, 1847) that "circumstances there [in California] made us, in connection with the emigrants to that country, involuntary witnesses and unwilling actors at the birth of a great nation"<sup>24</sup> even less convincing than the much later claim (in his *Memoirs*, published forty years after) that he himself had won California for the United States. Frémont could easily have stopped the Bear Flag movement, which might never have occurred but for his apparently inflammatory advice to the more excited of the American settlers, and it was his failure either to lead it or to nip it in the bud that allowed matters to get out of hand. A more glaring example of recklessness, combined with timidity, would be hard to find, yet—



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His decision made him subsequently a popular hero, a Senator of the United States, a candidate for the Presidency, a millionaire *ad interim*, a major general; in fact it gave him greater prominence than has perhaps ever been attained by any other man of no greater ability. Lucky fellow!

is the not unfair judgment of Henry L. Ford, one of the participants in the Bear Flag movement.<sup>25</sup>

Certainly people at the time were quick to discern Frémont and Gillespie behind the Bear Flag revolution, long before Frémont was to make his belated and unconvincing claims. Larkin wrote to Buchanan as early as June 18, 1846 (the very day that he first heard about the capture of Sonoma), "Captain Frémont and Mr. Gillespie are supposed by the Californians to be at the springing of this business, fanning it on in a private manner,"<sup>26</sup> while on July 20, he sent to the Secretary of State his more considered opinion that,

The taking of Sonoma and imprisoning at a distance of sixty to eighty miles from their homes the four principal inhabitants of the town by an unknown party of men called now the Bear Party, supposed to be put in motion by Messrs. Frémont and Gillespie is yet so harsh on the feelings of the Californians that for the present they will not enter into any arrangement with the commander in chief of the American forces on the coast.<sup>27</sup>

This is a fair and reasonable comment on the most serious consequence of the Bear Flag revolution and a consideration that should have made Frémont ashamed rather than proud of any part he might have played in it. General William Tecumseh Sherman (no admirer of Frémont, it must be admitted) was to write to a friend many years afterwards that, "It was the general belief in California when I reached there in January 1847 that Gillespie had brought out a slip of paper from Benton concealed about his person which he delivered to Frémont who then turned back and took up the Bear Party at Sonoma."<sup>28</sup>

Frémont made the mistake of trying to have it both ways in the history books and this explains in part why he has had such rough treatment from historians. If he had stood by his statement in the *Memoirs* that, "There lay the pieces on the great chessboard before me with which the game for an empire had been played. I was but a pawn and like a pawn I had been pushed forward to the front

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at the opening of the game,"<sup>29</sup> the historians would no doubt have been less savage with him. Cardinal Goodwin, whose appraisal of Frémont stands midway between the savage and scornful pulverisation by Johiah Royce and the kindly, if over-indulgent, glosses of Allan Nevins, says of this last statement that it was ". . . literally true. He had been pushed forward against his will and now found himself embarrassed by being credited with leadership in the movement which he did not deserve,"<sup>30</sup> but even Goodwin feels that a harsh summing up is not inappropriate, saying, "During those restless days which preceded the settlers' uprising he did not display any of the qualities of the conqueror. Even second-rate leadership must be denied him."<sup>31</sup> "The West's Greatest Adventurer" (according to Nevins) was not quite "the West's Greatest Bungler," as George Tays<sup>32</sup> suggests he should be called, but the build-up of the campaign biographies of 1856, and the disingenuousness of the correspondence with Royce in 1884 and 1885, and of the *Memoirs of My Life* of 1887, undoubtedly made Frémont's reputation highly vulnerable, particularly with regard to the events of 1846.

It is difficult to discuss the Bear Flag revolution except in terms of Frémont's relationship to it and his degree of responsibility for its outbreak, but as has been made clear, Frémont deliberately refrained from taking over the leadership of the party that rode to Sonoma, and he did not intervene there in any way for ten days, though the arrival of Mariano Vallejo, his brother, Leese and Prudon at Frémont's camp as prisoners in charge of Merritt and Robert Semple had made him fully aware of the somewhat *opéra bouffe* circumstances of the capture of the town of Sonoma. The history of these first ten days of the Bear Flag movement in Sonoma was thus in no way dominated by Frémont even from a distance, for "there was no intercourse with Frémont between June 10 and June 25" on the part of any of the party who remained there, according to William B. Ide,<sup>33</sup> who made himself leader, after the successive abdications of Merritt, Semple and Grigsby under the benign influence of General Vallejo's *aguardiente* during the night of June 13-14. Much fun has been made (especially by Josiah Royce) of the California Republic and its "President," Mr. Ide, whom Royce likens to the Bellman in *The Hunting of the Snark*,<sup>34</sup> with his maxims "tremendous but trite," but nevertheless

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the original party of twenty-four did contain several serious-minded men (represented by Ide and Semple) who really thought they were making history and striking a blow for freedom, as well as ruffians and riff-raff of the type of Merritt and Kelsey, who were spoiling for a fight with the “yellow bellies”<sup>35</sup> and who wanted to pay off old scores. Harvey Porterfield, who inclined toward the latter persuasion, admitted quite frankly in his reminiscences “Concerning the organisation of the Bear Party,” set down in his old age at Napa City in the year 1896,<sup>36</sup> that, “I said I wanted to take Leese, as I had worked for him and I didn’t like him anyway . . . Merritt stuttered badly and said ‘When I was a prisoner you treated me like a d-d-dog but I t-t-treat you like a Jen-Jentleman.’ Kelsey and Merritt had been tied up to a tree by Salvador Vallejo and whipped with a Riato by him some time before.” This helps to explain why not only the commanding general in Northern California, Mariano Vallejo, was (despite his well-known and pro-American inclinations) taken prisoner by the Bear Flag party and refused the parole he offered, but why his brother Salvador and his inoffensive brother-in-law, Jacob Leese (who was an American citizen), and his *aide*, the Frenchman Prudon, were sent with him to Frémont’s camp. Mariano was too valuable a prize to let go, while the other three were simply disliked by some members of the Bear party. Whether or not Merritt and company had the previous approval of Frémont for taking these four men prisoner is not known, but he certainly did not release them when he could have done so. It speaks well for the magnanimity of Mariano Vallejo that he later entered into a close business partnership with Semple and was within a few months on cordial terms with Frémont again.

The story of the making and setting up the bear flag has often been told, and the actual flag itself survived until it was destroyed in the San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906, but Harvey Porterfield’s hitherto unpublished account runs as follows:

So “dirty” Matthews said he could get us something if we would not tell on him. So he brought his wife’s red flannel petticoat and Todd put a strip of red flannel on this Manta.<sup>37</sup>

The six-pointed star, the crude representation of a bear and the words “California Republic” were then painted on the white sheet

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W. Fort Sacramento, July 29 1846

Dear

By the favor of Com. Hoop, I am enabled to send you a few lines of the doing in this newly acquired Territory of the U.S. Little did I think when sitting at home in our office in St. H. that I would ever raise to be a still character a pale countenance of a Gov. With power to do as I pleased & shoot people if they did not obey me & all that sort of thing. But there is a tide in the affairs of men which comes at the turn of our way lead to fortune. How strange as you may think it there I am, glad with the oppressed aboriginals and surrounded by a Garrison of them away from the country with them? & in the most ungodly hold of the largest & hardest to catch highest jumping - & hard hitting putting up in furs on and not to find it as that have our worried man since the days of Adam. They are a staple production of the country before entering upon my blood & their narrative of the Ward I will give you a sketch of some of the people concerned therein.



Got in from the Director's camp where from the W. My last way from New C. from that place we had taken up our line of march for home & have got as far as the head of Cassette Lake when an epidemic arrived for our immediate return to the camp of medical stragglers. We lost 3 of our men they were murdered in bed - We recognized ourselves on the Indians by killing & burning in person an opportunity offered, but believe the course had been followed some days by the Macky Inds. When a party was sent from our camp to meet him. On the night they came

Courtesy Henry E. Huntington Library.

Edward Kern to Richard H. Kern, July 29 [?], 1846. Fort Sutter Papers.

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A imitar a todos los buenos y principales Ciudadanos de California  
 q. sean amigos de mantener el buen orden y los derechos iguales  
 y por los presentes les invito para que procedan a mi llamamiento  
 unido en un solo punto sin demora de tiempo para ayudarnos a  
 establecer y perpetuar un Gobierno Republicano que asegure a  
 todos la libertad civil y religiosa y discubra y castigue el cri-  
 men y anime a la virtud y la literatura el comercio y el buen  
 gobierno - Declaro ademas que confio sobre la rectitud  
 de nuestras intenciones sobre el favor del Cielo y sobre el  
 valor de aquellos q. se han obligado y jurado conmigo,  
 por el principio de propia conservación, por el amor a la  
 verdad, y el odio de la tirania para fundar mi espe-  
 ranza de un buen éxito. Declaro tambien q. creo q. el  
 Gobierno para su progreso y feliz (salud y bienestar) debe to-  
 mar su origen del pueblo amigo de la constitucion como  
 q. sus Ciudadanos son sus guardianes sus oficiales, sus servi-  
 dores y que en gloria es su premio - firmada Guillermo  
 B. Ide Comandante - Cuartel principal sonoma Junio 18  
 de 1846 - Es copia sacada del original traducida por  
 Guillermo Hastwell



Courtesy Henry E. Huntington Library.

Translation into Spanish of William B. Ide's Proclamation, June 18, 1846.  
 Stearns Papers.

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(or "manta") which formed the ground of the flag. It first flew over Sonoma on June 15, 1846, and two weeks later a rough drawing of it was added to the text of a translation into Spanish of Mr. Ide's proclamation of independence and goodwill toward all men, prepared in Santa Barbara by William E. P. Hartnell, an Englishman who was official translator to the government of California and who acted unofficially in that capacity also for Thomas Larkin, the American consul. This drawing (together with the document) was subsequently sent down to Los Angeles for the information of Mexican officials there and has been preserved in the papers of Abel Stearns. It is the first known attempt to reproduce the flag, a flag which (in an idealised form) now flies, as decreed by State law, over all official buildings in California, thus giving to the flag—and to the "California Republic"—a significance which they never really possessed between June 15 and July 9, 1846.<sup>38</sup>

The terms of Ide's proclamation<sup>39</sup> (which he sat up through the night of June 14-15 to draft unaided and read out to the captors of Sonoma and its inhabitants the next day) soon became widely known throughout the settlements of Alta California on account of the copies he had made and distributed. "The Proclamation, written and re-written, was sent as far as to Los Angeles," he claimed.<sup>40</sup> Although Josiah Royce has set a fashion of deriding it and poking fun at its naive clauses and at Ide's "peculiar political ideas" as "impotent nonsense," the proclamation does not seem to have made so ludicrous an impression among the Americans in California at the time. William Leidesdorff, when it reached Yerba Buena on June 18, reported that,

The proclamation seems to have pleased many who have read it . . . It is impossible to say how many men they have but I think the proclamation will call many to their Banner, which is a white "field" with a red "border," a large "Star" and a grisly Bear. Such is the flag of Young California.<sup>41</sup>

It is interesting that, in those days of "Young Germany," "Young Italy" and "Young England," Leidesdorff should have used the term "Young California" to describe the Bear Flag Republic, which he, at least, seems to have regarded as a blow for freedom. So also, but in more restrained terms, did Captain Montgomery<sup>42</sup>

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of the U.S.S. Portsmouth, then in San Francisco Bay, but Thomas Larkin in Monterey was from the first rather more critical. On July 1, he wrote to Leidesdorff, "The Northern affair is beyond my comprehension. Therefore I must not commit myself or you on the business. Mr. Hartnell has made up his mind that the Ide party is extinguished before this."<sup>43</sup> Six months later he was already referring to the Bear Flag revolution as "that bad-acted affair at Sonoma"<sup>44</sup> and a year later he told Buchanan roundly that in his opinion, "The Bear Party have broke all friendship and good feeling in California toward our government."<sup>45</sup> Ten years later he sighed retrospectively after "the times prior to July 1846 . . . Halcyon days they were. We shall not enjoy their like again."<sup>46</sup> The historians of "Pastoral California"<sup>47</sup> have tended to echo his words.

On June 25, Frémont pushed himself back into the limelight by arriving in Sonoma with a force of seventy-two men (his exploring party having been augmented by a number of the American settlers) and taking command of the insurgents. As a regular American army officer, he seems to have assumed that it was his right to do so, and the original party did not question this. Ide expressed much resentment afterwards at having been so unceremoniously supplanted but does not seem to have protested at the time, although Frémont was so unkind as to doubt his authorship of the by this time famous Proclamation. "Who wrote that Proclamation for you?" he asked Ide.<sup>48</sup> He also kept up the pretence of having come only to see fair play and "not to take any part in the matter, only to see the sport and explore about the bay"<sup>49</sup>—yet he sent Semple<sup>50</sup> and others to spike the guns at the lightly-manned Mexican fort, the *Presidio*, overlooking the Golden Gate, where for good measure they also arrested the captain of the port at nearby Yerba Buena. But the force he sent out to engage De la Torre's Mexican troops failed to prevent these escaping by a stratagem across the bay and retiring to San José. All the time Frémont left the Bear Flag flying above Sonoma. When he asked Ide, "Why did you not raise the United States flag?" the latter replied, quite reasonably, "We had no right to do so,"<sup>51</sup> and Frémont did not himself have the courage of his convictions to the extent of repairing the omission. By July 4, 1846, two hundred and seventy-two men had signed the "bear roll" in Sonoma, an elevenfold increase of the

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original party, and Frémont decided to make his leadership of this now quite respectable force of Americans a more open and active one. He proposed that all the actions of the Bear Flag party up to July 5 should be ignored, which in effect meant setting aside the proclamation he so much resented, and side-tracking the ultra-radical constitution that Ide had been preparing for all California. His "unwarranted interference"<sup>52</sup> after July 4 was brought to an end by a message from Captain Montgomery in Yerba Buena, received on July 9, that Commodore Sloat had officially occupied Monterey on July 7, and under cover of the news the Bear Flag was hauled down at Sonoma too. The regime of the short-lived republic was over; President Ide became an ordinary obscure citizen again and most of the men of the Bear Flag muster roll now enrolled in the California Volunteers (in it Ide was made a private) which, commanded by the now triumphant Frémont, was soon to march down to Monterey to place itself at the disposal, much to that worthy officer's embarrassment, of Commodore Sloat. The "Young Californians" were already old campaigners. They created quite an impression on the British naval officers who visited their camp in Monterey from Admiral Seymour's squadron, anchored in the bay. "He is as famous here as is the Duke in Europe,"<sup>53</sup> said one of them of Kit Carson, than which there could be no greater tribute, and the seven feet and one inch of Dr. Robert Semple also attracted much attention ". . . in buckskin dress. A foxskin cap . . . true with his rifle, steady with his pen and quick at the type-case"<sup>54</sup>—verily a man of parts. Gillespie, who had now rejoined Frémont, remarked that Admiral Seymour and the British navy were much more friendly toward Frémont and the California Volunteers than were Commodore Sloat and his officers.<sup>55</sup>

The Bear Flag revolution was over; its participants now came under the command of the United States and played their part in the military occupation. When peace came, most of them remained in California and some became prominent in the building up of the new state. Ide never came back into the limelight, but Semple was to be joint editor of California's first English-language newspaper later in 1846, and in 1849, he was made president of the constituent convention at Monterey.

As soon as the Bear Flag became history, it began also to become legend. It is quite possible that Frémont embraced the legend so



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heartily only because he found it to hand ready-made and so suitable to his purposes. Any early reluctance on his own part to claim inspiration and leadership of the movement was smothered by his friends in the east and particularly by his formidable father-in-law, Thomas Hart Benton, who dressed up his “reluctant participation” into “Captain Frémont determined to turn upon his pursuers and fight them instantly, without regard to numbers, and seek safety for his party and the American settlers by overturning the Mexican government in California.”<sup>56</sup> This gloss (written in the Autumn of 1846) and the slightly more polished-up version that Benton later put into his *Thirty Years View*, wherein he says that Frémont “determined to put himself at the head of the people and save the country,”<sup>57</sup> were even improved upon by the campaign biographers of 1856 until the glaze was too dazzling even for Frémont himself. Despite his published correspondence of 1846 and 1847, despite his evidence before the Congressional Claims Committee and at his court martial in 1848, in which he only half (perhaps “reluctantly”) adopted the legend, his *Memoirs* (1887) go the whole hog, and he had already told Josiah Royce (in 1884 and 1885) in answers to a questionnaire which the latter used (with Frémont’s knowledge) in his *History of California* (published before the *Memoirs*) that,

Merritt, who was a “good man,” had the instructions about taking Arce’s horses and about the subsequent seizure of Sonoma. All that was therefore done by Captain Frémont’s order.<sup>58</sup>

Nothing can be more explicit than this and Frémont had the opportunity, which he did not take, of objecting to this paraphrase of his answers when he read Royce’s chapter in manuscript or in proof form before publication.

Because Frémont (out of vanity or from a desire not to seem irresolute and lacking in enterprise, or from political ambition or a mixture of these, or simply because it was easiest to accept a story that was being put around by others to the advantage of his reputation in the United States) so completely came to accept “the legend of the Bear Flag Revolution,” to the extent of claiming that he instigated and controlled it, and that it won California for the United States, then he must also accept the responsibility for the consequences of that revolution, even though he may well, in fact,

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have exaggerated his part in it. The strictures of Royce and other historians hostile to Frémont have, as has been seen, not spared Frémont a shred of reputation in the matter. Royce said,

He brought war into a peaceful department, his operations began an estrangement, ensured a memory of bitterness of feeling toward the two peoples that were henceforth to dwell in California such as all his own subsequent personal generosity and kindness could never again make good. From the Bear Flag affair we can date the beginning of the degradation, the ruin and the oppression of the Californian people by our own.<sup>59</sup>

Royce, the son of California pioneers and himself born and brought up in California, has perhaps over-emphasized a bitterness and a memory of oppression that has now long since passed, but many of the Americans who lived in California in 1846 and who were not participants in the Bear Flag revolution were either from the beginning or were soon to become extremely critical of it. James Bidwell, an early overland pioneer and in 1846 in Sutter's employ at Fort Helvetia, wrote in the statement he prepared to assist the compilation of H. H. Bancroft's *History of California*:

There was no excitement, no danger, till Frémont began the war by sending the party which attacked Arce . . . I say that Frémont and he alone is to be credited with the first act of war. Truth compels me to say that the war was not begun in California in defense of American settlers. It may be there was a drawn sword hanging over their heads, but if so they did not know it, and Frémont must have the credit of seeing it for them. Frémont began the war, to him belongs all the credit, upon him rests all the responsibility.<sup>60</sup>

Nothing can be more forthright than this. Thomas Larkin, as befitted his official position, was much more circumspect even though he had suffered more annoyance and frustration from the Bear Flag affairs than perhaps any other American in California, Hittell claiming that, "Everything was going along smoothly with Larkin's plans [for a peaceful acquisition of California by the United States through the action of the Spanish Californians themselves] when they were disturbed by the folly and insolence of Frémont."<sup>61</sup> Larkin wrote to Leidesdorff on first hearing the news (at 10.30 p.m. on June 18),

There is a supposition that this affair is started by Frémont and that I was aware of it. I knew nothing and don't believe they do. I suppose it was a personal affair . . .<sup>62</sup>

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But a year later he had revised his opinion and was no longer giving Frémont the benefit of the doubt. On June 30, 1847, he wrote to Buchanan,

I thought Col. Frémont too young and also culpable for moving in the affair of the Bear Party and perhaps putting the Bear Party in motion [though] in my dispatch of the time he was not mentioned as one of the party.<sup>63</sup>

And on August 25, 1847, even more positively, he told the Secretary of State,

Nothing is more certain that the U.S. are not responsible for property taken by the Bear party. Yet it will be ascertained that Lt. Col. Frémont, then a Captain by Brevet of the U.S. Army, took command of the party openly after our flag was hoisted at New Helvetia.<sup>64</sup>

It is clear that Larkin only reluctantly and gradually came to the conclusion that his first impressions of June 18, 1846, had been wrong and that Frémont had after all identified himself with the Bear Flag revolution to a dangerous and imprudent extent. During the intervening twelve months or so, Larkin had met many of the participants in and witnesses of the different phases of the revolution and was perhaps in as good a position as anybody could (or will ever) be to express an opinion on this matter.

There was therefore plenty of evidence available for later historians who sought to link Frémont with the Bear Flag revolution, and as the revolution came to be regarded no longer as a glorious episode, but as an unfortunate incident in the history of California, late nineteenth century historians such as Hittell, Royce and Bancroft used this association to the detriment of the general's reputation. Later writers, like Goodwin<sup>65</sup> and Billington,<sup>66</sup> in attempting to strike a balance, have been only a shade less severe than the hatchet men of the seventies and eighties, and even Nevins, who of all the serious twentieth century historians dealing at length with Frémont in California, has been the most charitable, has receded from his favourable attitude in *The West's Greatest Adventurer* (1928) through the rather more critical judgment in *Pathmarker of the West* (1939) to the somewhat lukewarm admission in the introduction to his edition of Frémont's *Narratives of Exploration and Adventure* (1956) that,

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While we cannot call Frémont a great man, we can maintain that as an explorer—the first distinctively scientific explorer produced by the United States—he had qualities of greatness. Alas that his career was warped into inferior channels, while he was yet in his early prime, by the Mexican War. The sun that rose so auspiciously on the well-equipped young man marching purposefully and joyously into the West of 1838 sank into the dust and commotion of California in 1846.<sup>67</sup>

The dust and commotion of California in 1846 have still not entirely subsided. The rights and wrongs of the Bear Flag revolution and of Frémont's action before and during that crisis are still the subject of popular debate, even though the more authoritative historians and the standard reference books have come out with something approaching unanimity against both Frémont and the Bear Flag party. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (11th edition) says of Frémont:

Resentment incited him to personal revenge on the Californian government, and an ambition that clearly saw the gravity of the crisis prompted him to improve it unscrupulously for his own advancement. In violation therefore of international amities and practically in disobedience of orders, he broke the peace, caused a band of Mexican cavalry mounts to be seized and prompted some American settlers to occupy Sonoma.<sup>68</sup>

The *Britannica* is even more severe on the Bear Flag "episode," saying of it that, "It was a very small, very disingenuous, inevitably an anomalous and in the vanity of proclamations and other concomitant incidents rather a ridiculous affair."<sup>69</sup>

Nevertheless, five years after the *Britannica* published (in its first edition under American ownership) this devastating judgment, a monument was raised, in 1915, in the plaza of Sonoma to celebrate the deeds of the Bear Flag heroes, "a bronze figure (by John MacQuarrie) of a pioneer waving the Bear Flag from a forty-ton granite chunk."<sup>70</sup> As Robert Glass Cleland pointed out in his introduction to a new edition (published in 1948) of Royce's *California*,

The essential facts, as Royce presents them, are now pretty generally accepted by historians, but tradition dies hard, and by a comparatively recent action of the California Legislature the Bear Flag floats over every state, county and municipal building in the State.<sup>71</sup>

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup>Such as Samuel M. Schumucker, C. W. Upham and John Bigelow.

<sup>2</sup>See George Tays, "Revolutionary California . . . 1820-1848" (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1932; revised, 1934), pp. 766-780.

<sup>3</sup>*Stearns Manuscripts*, Box 40. Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

<sup>4</sup>For the Isaac Graham affair, see further Hubert H. Bancroft, *History of California* (7 vols.; San Francisco, 1884-1890), IV, 5-17, where a list of the arrested men is given.

<sup>5</sup>See Ephraim D. Adams, "English Interest in the Annexation of California," *American Historical Review*, XIV (July, 1909), 744-763.

<sup>6</sup>Reproduced in facsimile in Marsh's handwriting in George D. Lyman, *John Marsh, Pioneer* (New York, 1930), pp. 264-265, though it is there misdescribed as a "call to arms" and its importance is greatly exaggerated.

<sup>7</sup>In *Stearns MSS*, Box 40, Huntington Library. A slightly different version of this letter is to be found in the *Official Correspondence of Thomas O. Larkin*, MS 100, I, 78-79. Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

<sup>8</sup>Josiah Royce, *California*, edited by Robert G. Cleland (New York, 1948), p. 107.

<sup>9</sup>See Myrtle M. McKittrick, *Vallejo, Son of California* (Portland, Oregon, 1944), pp. 248-251, for a description of the *Junta* of April 2, 1846, and of Vallejo's alleged speech, which Bancroft and Royce had doubted was ever delivered. George P. Hammond, ed., *The Larkin Papers* (7 vols. to date; Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1951-1960), VI, p. xiv, appears to accept its authenticity without question.

<sup>10</sup>See Larkin to Stearns, May 21, 1846, in *Stearns MSS*, Box 40, Huntington Library, and Rayner W. Kelsey, *The United States Consulate in California*, in the *Publication* of the Academy of Pacific Coast History, I (June, 1910), 167 ff.

<sup>11</sup>Larkin to Buchanan, July 20, 1846. Hammond, *op. cit.*, V, 181.

<sup>12</sup>Larkin to Buchanan, June 15, 1846. *Ibid.*, pp. 26-29. Also, see Kelsey, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

<sup>13</sup>Sutter to Marsh, August 2, 1842. *Marsh Manuscripts*, California State Library, Sacramento.

<sup>14</sup>Larkin to Buchanan, April 2, 1846. Hammond, *op. cit.*, IV, 275-276.

<sup>15</sup>Entry for March 17, 1846, in James Clyman's manuscript diary, 1844-1848. *MS*, Huntington Library. See also Charles L. Camp, ed., *James Clyman* (San Francisco, 1928; reprinted with revision, 1960), p. 198.

<sup>16</sup>See "General Vallejo's Midnight Proclamation," *California Historical Society Quarterly*, IV (December, 1925), 387-388.

<sup>17</sup>Printed in Lyman, *op. cit.*, p. 272, from the *Marsh MSS*, California State Library.

<sup>18</sup>*Loc. cit.*

<sup>19</sup>Sutter to Marsh, April 3, 1846. *Marsh MSS*, California State Library.

<sup>20</sup>Royce, *op. cit.*, p. 79, paraphrasing John Bidwell.

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<sup>21</sup>Frémont to Benton, July 25, 1846. Printed in *Niles Register*, LXXI (November 21, 1846), 191.

<sup>22</sup>Simeon Ide, *A Biographical Sketch of the Life of William B. Ide . . .* (Claremont, N.H., 1880), pp. 31, 53, quoting, "Scraps of California history 'rewritten' by one of its early pioneers [William B. Ide]" (This has been recently reprinted in an edited text by Joseph A. Sullivan [Oakland, Calif., 1954].)

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>24</sup>Frémont in the *Columbus Ohio Press*, September 14, 1847. Quoted by John A. Hussey, "The Bear Flag Revolt" (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1941), p. 305.

<sup>25</sup>Henry L. Ford, "The Bear Flag Revolution," MS, Bancroft Library. Quoted in Bancroft, *op. cit.*, V, 90.

<sup>26</sup>Larkin to Buchanan, June 18, 1846. Hammond, *op. cit.*, V, 45.

<sup>27</sup>Larkin to Buchanan, July 20, 1846. *Ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>28</sup>W. T. Sherman to J. T. Doyle, March 18, 1887. Printed by Robert J. Parker, "Building the Larkin House," *California Historical Society Quarterly*, XVI (December, 1937), 334, from the original manuscript in the *Crocker Collection*, California Historical Society, San Francisco.

<sup>29</sup>John C. Frémont, *Memoirs of My Life* (New York, 1887), as quoted and discussed by Cardinal Goodwin, *John Charles Frémont* (Stanford, Calif., 1930), pp. 114-132 (quotation on p. 121).

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>32</sup>George Tays, "Separatism in California" (Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1922), p. 233.

<sup>33</sup>Ide, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>34</sup>Royce, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

<sup>35</sup>Term used to describe the Spanish Californians by Edward M. Kern in a letter dated Fort Sacramento [Helvetia], July 29, 1846. Printed by Oscar Lewis, *California in 1846* (San Francisco, 1934), pp. 44-51, from original manuscript in the *Fort Sutter Papers*, Huntington Library.

<sup>36</sup>Harvey Porterfield, "[Reminiscences] concerning the organization of the 'Bear Flag' . . ." (Napa City, Calif., 1896), 6 pp. *Facsimile No. 123* (photostat copy of original manuscript formerly in the possession of A. M. Boggs), Huntington Library.

<sup>37</sup>*Loc. cit.*

<sup>38</sup>See Susanna B. Dakin, *The Lives of William Hartnell* (Stanford, Calif., 1950). The manuscript translation made by Hartnell and the drawing of the Bear Flag are in the *Stearns MSS*, Box 35, Huntington Library. The drawing is reproduced here with the permission of the Huntington Library. The proclamation is misdated, June 18, 1846, in this copy. See further Bancroft, *op. cit.*, V, 151, note 4.

<sup>39</sup>The text of the Proclamation (and of other Bear Flag revolution documents) is printed in William C. Jones, "The First Phase of the Conquest of California," *Papers of the California Historical Society*, I, Pt. I (1887), 72-79, with related documents on pp. 80-94; also in Hammond, *op. cit.*, VI, 30-31, and Bancroft, *op. cit.*, V, 152.

<sup>40</sup>Ide, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

<sup>41</sup>Leidesdorff to Larkin, June 19, 1846. Printed in full by Robert Underhill, *From Cowhides to Golden Fleece* (2nd edition; Stanford, Calif., 1948), *Appendix*, pp.

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257-277, from the original manuscript in the *Larkin Papers*, Bancroft Library. A previous letter giving a brief first report on the taking of Sonoma had been sent to Larkin by Leidesdorff on June 17, 1846. Hammond, *op. cit.*, V, 35-36.

<sup>42</sup>Captain Montgomery's letter of June 16, 1846, to Larkin, giving news of the taking of Sonoma, is also printed by Underhill, *op. cit.*, pp. 277-278, and by Hammond, *op. cit.*, V, 35-36. For an excellent report on the revolt, see James H. Gleason's letter to William Paty, Monterey, June 18, 1846. Duncan Gleason, ed., "James Henry Gleason: Pioneer Journal and Letters, 1841-1856," in this *Quarterly*, XXXI (March-June, 1949), 23-24.

<sup>43</sup>Larkin to Leidesdorff, July 1, 1846. *Leidesdorff Manuscripts*, Huntington Library.

<sup>44</sup>Larkin to Mrs. Larkin, December 14, 1846. Hammond, *op. cit.*, V, 313.

<sup>45</sup>Larkin to Buchanan, June 30, 1847. *Ibid.*, VI, 225.

<sup>46</sup>Larkin to Stearns, April 24, 1851. *Stearns MSS*, Box 40, Huntington Library.

<sup>47</sup>Bancroft used the title, "Pastoral California," for a volume describing life in Spanish and Mexican Alta California before the Mexican War.

<sup>48</sup>Ide, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>50</sup>Robert Semple, article in the *San Francisco Californian*, May 20, 1847, of which he was then editor.

<sup>51</sup>Ide, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>53</sup>Frederick Walpole, *Four Years in the Pacific* (London, 1849), as quoted by Frémont in his *Memoirs*, p. 533.

<sup>54</sup>Walter Colton, *Three Years in California* (New York, 1852), p. 32.

<sup>55</sup>Frémont, *op. cit.*, p. 533.

<sup>56</sup>Thomas H. Benton, quoted by James M. Cutts, *Conquest of California and New Mexico* (Philadelphia, 1847), p. 152.

<sup>57</sup>Thomas H. Benton, *Thirty Years View* (2 vols.; New York and London, 1854-1856), Chapter 164, summarized by Royce, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-73.

<sup>58</sup>See Royce's sarcastic footnote on p. 95 of his *California*.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 79-81, as quoted.

<sup>61</sup>John S. Hittell, *History of San Francisco* (San Francisco, 1878), p. 100.

<sup>62</sup>Larkin to Leidesdorff, June 18, 1846. *Leidesdorff MSS*, Huntington Library.

<sup>63</sup>Larkin to Buchanan, June 30, 1847. Hammond, *op. cit.*, VI, 225.

<sup>64</sup>Larkin to Buchanan, August 25, 1847. *Ibid.*, p. 291.

<sup>65</sup>See footnote 29, *ante*.

<sup>66</sup>Ray A. Billington, *The Far Western Frontier, 1830-1860* (New York, 1956), especially Chapter VII.

<sup>67</sup>Allan Nevins, introduction to his edition of Frémont's *Narratives of Exploration and Adventure* (New York, 1956), p. 23.

<sup>68</sup>*Encyclopaedia Britannica* (11th edition; New York, 1910), article on "California," V, 18.

<sup>69</sup>*Loc. cit.*

<sup>70</sup>Federal Writer's Project, Works Progress Administration, *California: A Guide to the Golden State* (New York, 1939), p. 363.

<sup>71</sup>Robert G. Cleland, introduction to Royce's *California* (New York, 1848), p. xvii.

## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

The literature of the Bear Flag revolution is so voluminous that its extent and richness have only become very partially evident in the footnotes to the foregoing article. An attempt will now be made to deal more systematically (but of necessity not exhaustively) with this material. The material is discussed under the three headings of (1) manuscript material, (2) primary printed material, including the reminiscences of participants and contemporaries, even if set down or published many years afterwards, (3) secondary material.

### I. MANUSCRIPT MATERIAL

*Documents for the History of California* (9 MS vols.) and the *Official Correspondence of Thomas Oliver Larkin, 1844-1849* (2 MS vols. in one) contains the most important Larkin material in the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, for the purposes of this bibliography. This material is in the course of publication as *The Larkin Papers* (7 vols. to date; Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1951-1960), edited by George P. Hammond. But this publication must be supplemented by study of the extensive correspondence between Stearns and Larkin in the *Stearns Papers* and between Leidesdorff and Larkin in the *Leidesdorff Papers* in the Huntington Library. The Huntington Library also contains the *Fort Sutter (Kern) Papers* (33 bound MS vols.) with much of value concerning Frémont's and Kern's relations with Sutter, Larkin, Vallejo, and other notabilities in California, while both the Huntington and the Bancroft Libraries have extensive collections of *Mariano Vallejo's Papers*, those in the Bancroft having been the subject of an index by Doris M. Wright, which has been printed. The Bancroft Library also contains Salvador Vallejo's manuscript, *History of California* (in Spanish) and also that of Juan B. Alvarado (5 MS vols.), both of which were used extensively, though critically, by H. H. Bancroft and his collaborators, as were the manuscript accounts of the Bear Flag revolution by Baldrige, Bidwell, Fowler, Leese, Hargrave, Martin, and Sutter. The original of the *New Helvetia Diary, 1845-1848* (San Francisco, 1939) kept by William F. Swasey and others, is in the possession of the Society of California Pioneers, San Francisco. The



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Huntington Library, among its individual manuscripts or photostat copies of manuscripts, has Harvey Porterfield's "[Reminiscences] concerning the organization of the 'Bear Party' . . ." (*Facsimile No. 123*) and James Clyman's "Diary, 1844-1848" (*MS, No. 3900*)—the latter has been printed in copious extracts in Charles Camp's book on *James Clyman* (San Francisco, 1928; reprinted, with revisions, 1960)—and also the very enlightening correspondence between Josiah Royce and H. L. Oak (*MS, Nos. 2013-2047*) carried on while Royce was writing his *History of California* and Oak was acting as H. H. Bancroft's principal collaborator and editor on the California volumes of his *History of the Pacific Coast States*. This correspondence should be supplemented by several items of correspondence between Royce and Jessie Frémont, and by Mrs. Frémont's trenchantly annotated copy of Royce's draft Chapter II ("The Secret Mission and the Bear Flag"), both of which are in the Bancroft Library. Mrs. Frémont's manuscript, *Secret Affair of the Mexican War*, referred to in the Royce-Oak correspondence, is in the Huntington Library, but was printed in full by Robert J. Parker in the *Historical Society of Southern California Quarterly*, XX (March, 1938), 22-38. The California Historical Society has the *W. M. D. Howard Papers*, the *Sloat Correspondence* (with Frémont's pencilled comments), and photostats of a few Larkin, Leidesdorff and Sutter letters of the year 1846, indexed separately, which refer to the Bear Flag incident. In the California State Library are to be found the *John Marsh Papers* and those of *Pierson B. Reading*, both of primary importance. The *Marsh Papers* have been used, somewhat inadequately, in Lyman's biography of *John Marsh* (New York, 1930). The *Leidesdorff* and *Gillespie Papers*, Department of Special Collections, University Library, University of California, Los Angeles, are important, especially the latter, with its five hundred documents, including a nine-page manuscript account by Gillespie of the Bear Flag Revolution, dated August, 1846. Werner H. Marti's *Messenger of Destiny* (San Francisco, 1960), a biography of Gillespie, has used these.

The National Archives, Washington, D.C., contains State Department correspondence with the U.S. Consulate in Monterey (largely duplicated in Bancroft Library's collection) and the U.S. Legation in Mexico; the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.,

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the *James K. Polk Papers*; the Pennsylvania Historical Society, Philadelphia, the *James Buchanan Papers*, and the Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, the *George Bancroft Papers*, but none of these have been used in their original manuscript form in the preparation of this article.

## II. PRIMARY PRINTED MATERIAL

The reminiscences of contemporaries include not only Frémont's *Memoirs* (New York, 1887), of which only one volume was ever published, but Edwin Bryant, *What I Saw in California* (Philadelphia, 1848); Joseph W. Revere, *A Tour of Duty in California* (New York, 1849); Alfred Robinson, *Life in California* (New York, 1846); William H. Davis, *Seventy-Five Years in California* (San Francisco, 1929); John Bidwell, *Echoes of the Past* (c. 1914), and William F. Swasey, *Early Days and Men of California* (Oakland, Calif., 1891), while the memories of many pioneers and native Californians were collected and written down by H. H. Bancroft and his editors. Copious extracts from these are printed in his *History of California* and the originals are in the Bancroft Library. Bancroft's invaluable *Pioneer Register* (printed in alphabetical instalments at the end of the various volumes in his *History* [vols. II-V] provide some biographical material on virtually every man who visited or who was living in California in 1846.

Primary material is also incorporated in James M. Cutts, *History of the Conquest of California and New Mexico* (Philadelphia, 1847), and Simeon Ide, *A Biographical Sketch of William B. Ide . . .* (Claremont, N.H., 1880), incorporating "Scraps of California History," "The Conquest of California," and "Who Conquered California?" (by William B. Ide himself, according to his pious family biographer). *Niles Register*, LXXIII (October 27, 1847), 110, prints statements by Nash, Grigsby and Ide concerning the Bear Flag revolution. Benjamin Kelsey's dictation to Mary E. Foy, "The Bear Flag Revolution," *Quarterly of the Historical Society of Southern California*, XXVIII (June, 1946), 61-73, so inaccurate, is useless. "Pio Pico's Correspondence with the Mexican Government, 1846-1848," edited by George Tays, is printed in an English translation in the *California Historical Society Quarterly*, XIII (June, 1934), 99-149. Much of Gillespie's correspond-

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ence appears in "Gillespie and the Conquest of California," edited by George W. Ames, Jr., in the same journal: XVII (June, 1938), 123-140; (September, 1938), 271-283; (December, 1938), 325-350. Oscar Lewis, *California in 1846* (San Francisco, 1934), prints letters written in that year by Larkin, by Edward Kern, by "Farthest West" (probably Lieut. Bartlett, U.S.N.), and others. Samuel J. Bayard, *A Sketch of the Life of Stockton* (New York, 1856), prints contemporary material, while most of the important documents put out by the Bear Flag party in Sonoma have been printed or reprinted *seriatim* in the *California Historical Society Quarterly*, I (July, 1922), 72-94; (October, 1922), 178-191; (January, 1923), 286-295. Robert A. Thompson, *The Conquest of California: The Capture of Sonoma* (Santa Rosa, Calif., 1896), also prints much contemporary material, though he failed in his efforts to secure General Vallejo's first-hand accounts of these events. *The Diaries of James K. Polk, 1845-1849*, edited by Milo M. Quaife (4 vols.; Chicago, 1910), is almost too well-known to mention.

### III. SECONDARY MATERIAL

In addition to the older *Histories* of the Hittells, Royce and Bancroft, the standard modern works of Justin H. Smith, *The War with Mexico* (2 vols.; New York, 1919), of John W. Caughey, *California* (2nd edition; Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1953), of Ray A. Billington, *The Far Western Frontier, 1830-1860* (New York, 1956), and of Robert G. Cleland, *From Wilderness to Empire* (New York, 1944), all throw light on the Bear Flag affair, though none of them regards the evidence of Frémont's complicity as quite so incontrovertible as do the three nineteenth century writers. Of them, Cleland goes furthest in this direction, and his general history just mentioned has been supplemented by valuable monograph studies such as *Early Sentiment for the Annexation of California . . . 1835-1846* (Austin, Texas, 1915), which originally appeared in three instalments in the *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XVIII (July, 1914), 1-40; (October, 1914), 121-161; (January, 1915), 231-260, and *Cattle on a Thousand Hills* (San Marino, Calif., 1951), as well as his enlightening introduction to the 1948 edition of Royce's *California*. The various attitudes of Frémont's principal biographers have already been referred to

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in the foregoing article. Most books on Frémont—and they are legion—add nothing new, as for example, George W. James, *Frémont in California* (Los Angeles, 1903), and Frederick S. Dellenbaugh, *Frémont and '49* (New York and London, 1914), while those with new theories (such as Ernest A. Wiltsee, *The Truth about Frémont* [San Francisco, 1936]) often fail to present them convincingly. The three most interesting recent contributions to the Frémont-Bear Flag literature remain, unpublished (except very partially in magazine articles). These are George Tays, "Revolutionary California" (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1932; revised 1934); John A. Hussey, "The United States and the Bear Flag Revolution" (*ibid.*, 1941), and Harold W. Gross, "The Influence of Thomas O. Larkin Toward the Acquisition of California" (Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of California, 1938). The *California Historical Society Quarterly* (Vols. III-IX [1924-1930]) printed a series of documents concerning Frémont in California under the general title, "The Frémont Episode." Other specially useful items in that invaluable magazine are to be found in: George W. Ames, Jr., ed., "Gillespie and the Conquest of California," XVII (June, 1938), 123-140, an article which was continued in the September and December issues; John A. Hussey, "New Light on Talbot H. Green . . .," XVIII (March, 1939), 36-63; George W. Ames, Jr., "Horse Marines: California, 1846," in the same issue, pp. 72-84; and Hussey's article, "The Origin of the Gillespie Mission," XIX (March, 1940), 43-58. The *Pacific Historical Review*, among other articles, has published Richard R. Stenberg, "Polk and Frémont, 1843-1846," VII (September, 1938), 211-227; George Tays, "Frémont Had No Secret Instructions," IX (June, 1940), 157-172; Norman A. Graebner, "American Interest in California, 1845," XXII (February, 1953), 13-27, and John A. Hawgood, "Patterns of Yankee Infiltration in Mexican Alta California," XXVII (February, 1958), 27-37. The important articles by Ephraim D. Adams, "English Interest in the Annexation of California," *American Historical Review*, XIV (July, 1909), 744-763, and by A. P. Nasatir, "French Activities in California before Statehood," *Proceedings of the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association*, III (1928), 76-88, should be compared with *Lord Aberdeen, Texas y California* (Vol. XV of the publica-

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tions of the Mexican government's *Archivo histórico diplomática de México*) and with Carlos Bosch Garcia's *Material para la Historia Diplomática de México (México y los Estados Unidos, 1820-1848* [Mexico City, D.F., 1957]), in which all documents are printed in Spanish.

Biographies of the leading protagonists in the events of 1846 in California include Robert Underhill, *From Cowhides to Golden Fleece* (Stanford, Calif., 1946), a thoroughly inadequate life of Thomas O. Larkin, which must be supplemented and corrected by Rayner W. Kelsey, *The United States Consulate in California* (*Publications of the Academy of Pacific Coast History*, I [June, 1910], 167 ff.), and by Robert J. Parker, "Larkin, Anglo-American Businessman in Mexican California" (in *Greater America, Essays in Honor of Herbert E. Bolton* [Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1945], pp. 415-430), and in various other articles listed in his bibliography (*ibid.*, p. 643). Parker's full-length biography of Larkin has, unfortunately, not been published. William B. Ide has found a serious biographer in Fred B. Rogers, a study which has been published by Warren Howell (San Francisco, 1962), since George Kirov's *William B. Ide: President of California* (Sacramento, 1935), is slight and unreliable. John A. Sutter has yet to find an equally serious biographer, though the bad books about him are legion. James P. Zollinger, *Sutter: The Man and His Empire* (New York and London, 1939), is by far the best but is by no means definitive. Other useful lives are Rockwell D. Hunt, *John Bidwell, A Prince in California* (Caldwell, Idaho, 1942); Susanna B. Dakin, *A Scotch Paisano: the Life of Hugo Reid in California, 1832-1852* (Berkeley, 1939); Myrtle M. McKittrick, *Vallejo, Son of California* (Portland, Ore., 1944), and Andrew F. Rolle, *An American in California* [William Heath Davis] (San Marino, Calif., 1956). George D. Lyman, *John Marsh, Pioneer* (New York, 1930), is slapdash and impressionistic, despite its extensive though confused use of primary materials. Charles L. Camp, *James Clyman, American Frontiersman, 1792-1881* (San Francisco, 1928; reprinted, with revision, 1960), is more satisfactory. A minor figure at Sonoma, Henry L. Ford, is the subject of Fred B. Rogers, "Bear Flag Lieutenant," *California Historical Society Quarterly*, XXIX (June, 1950), 129-138; (September, 1950), 261-278, and (December, 1960), 333-344. Mr. Rogers has also

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published three more recent books which have pertinent reference to the Bear Flag revolution: *Filings from an Old Saw* (San Francisco, 1956); *A Navy Surgeon in California, 1846-1847* (San Francisco, 1957), and *Montgomery and the Portsmouth* (San Francisco, 1959).

In his preface to the second edition of *Frémont: Pathmarker of the West* (New York, 1955), Allan Nevins states, "If I were to write the biography completely anew it would be with a marked difference of approach," but he has not yet done so and his attitude toward Frémont still remains distinctly ambivalent. A new chapter entitled, "Some New Light on Frémont," adds nothing really fresh concerning the Bear Flag movement nor does his Introduction to his recent edition of Frémont's *Narratives of Exploration and Adventure* (New York, 1956).