INTRODUCTION

Ever since the first Americans in the party of Jedediah Smith entered overland into California in 1826-7, stories were told of a wonderful valley - 'a perfect paradise'. Over the years many of the fur trappers and mountain men moved into this valley and made it their home.

One California trapper, Antoine Robidoux, gave glowing accounts to settlers living in Platte County, Missouri on the conditions in California. Encouraged by Robidoux’s reports, the people of Platte County formed the 'Western Emigration Society' and signed a pledge in November 1840 to meet at Sapling Grove in eastern Kansas in May of 1841 for the first wagon train to California.

Reports on conditions in California were also making their way back to Washington, where pro-expansionist forces conspired to set in action a plan designed to gain control of California. The object of their desire was the Bay of San Francisco, the great natural harbor with enormous potential for trade and commerce.

In 1835 an offer was made to the Mexican government to buy California outright. Already suffering humiliation from the outbreak of war and the impending loss of its northern province of Texas, Mexico was in no mood to discuss parting with California.

The American government did everything it could, subtle or otherwise, to encourage emigration to California. If they couldn’t buy California, they could people it with American settlers, and, following the Texas example, let the settlers rise up in revolt against Mexico, declare an independent republic and eventually be annexed to the United States.

THE PATHFINDER

Born in Savannah, Georgia on January 21, 1813, John Fremont was destined to play a pivotal role in the settlement and conquest of California. At the age of 23, Fremont had accompanied the French geographer Nicolet on his exploration of the northwestern prairies. Young, dashing and fearless, Fremont was a born explorer and adventurer.

Returning to Washington after his expedition with Nicolet, Fremont met Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton, the most powerful pro-expansionist voice in the U.S. Senate. They became fast friends and had many discussions about pro-expansionist politics. Fremont met Benton's daughter, Jessie, and he immediately fell in love with her and she with him. They eloped on October 19, 1841 when she was only 17.

1ST EXPEDITION

Fremont’s first expedition left St. Louis in late May 1842. He engaged 21 Creele and Canadian fur trappers who had become familiar with life on the western prairies. Charles Preuss was his topographical assistant, mountain man Lucien Maxwell was engaged as a hunter and Kit Carson was chosen as their guide. The expedition lasted four months ending in early October 1842. Fremont was only 29 years old when he led the first expedition and he proved to be a competent, well-liked leader of men. Fremont's report on the first expedition was a well-written account of the land, the people and the hardships encountered on the journey and provided the American government with much needed information about the western regions.
2ND EXPEDITION

As a result of his success, Fremont was again chosen to lead a second expedition to the west in 1843. His mission this time was to connect his reconnaissance of 1842 with the survey of Commander Wilkes expedition of 1838 that explored the Willamette Valley region of Oregon. 39 men accompanied Fremont including the famous mountain men, Lucien Maxwell and Thomas Fitzpatrick. Also on this expedition was Sam Neal, a blacksmith from Bucks County, Pennsylvania. On his way from Washington to St. Louis, Fremont, his wife Jessie and her mother, Mrs. Benton, were traveling in a coach on a rainy, disagreeable day. Their driver attempted to pass a huge wagon as it was swinging out to make a sharp turn. Fremont’s coach was overturned and Mrs. Benton was slightly hurt. Sam Neal’s blacksmith shop was nearby and he quickly and skillfully repaired the coach. Fremont was so impressed with Neal’s work that he immediately hired him as a blacksmith for his second expedition.*

The second expedition left St. Louis on May 29, 1843. They traveled across the western regions gathering data on the terrain, plant life, geology and animal life they encountered. They arrived at The Dalles on the Columbia River in northern Oregon on November 4, 1843. Fremont and three of his men continued on to Fort Vancouver where Dr. McLoughlin, the head of the British fort, provided them with fresh provisions. Here he connected his survey with that of Commander Wilkes’ expedition of 1838.

Although his orders provided for him to return after connecting with the Wilkes survey, Fremont determined to travel south by way of Klamath lake and the Great Basin between the Rocky Mountains and the Sierra Nevada. It was his hope to locate the long sought after mythical Buenaventura River which was thought to flow from the Great Basin to the Pacific Ocean. If it could be found, it would provide an easier route for westward travel than the deep-cut gorges of the Columbia River.

They started out from The Dalles on November 25th just as winter was coming on. They traveled south along the Deschutes River and on to Klamath Lake where they found Indians who led them east through a pass in the mountains. They continued east, then south across mountains and deserts until they arrived at Pyramid Lake in present day Nevada.

After examining the condition of his animals, Fremont decided to abandon his eastern course towards home and cross westward across the Sierra Nevada into the Sacramento Valley where he knew he could get fresh supplies and provisions at Sutter’s Fort.

After much suffering and deprivation on Carson Pass, Fremont’s party finally reached Sutter’s Fort in early March 1844. ‘Out of the 67 horses and mules that had started across the Sierra, only 33 reached Sutter’s Fort, and then only in a condition to be led along. Fremont’s own horse, Proveau, was lost on the crossing.

Continued on Page 25

*See the story about Sam Neal on page 4 of this issue.
FREMONT  From Page 7

Sutter’s Fort went into high gear to aid the party. Horses, mules and cattle were collected; flour was ground, horses shoes were made in the blacksmith shop and pack-saddles, ropes and bridles were provided.

While at the fort, Fremont discharged five of his men who desired to remain in California. One of them was Neal, the blacksmith, who stayed and went to work for John Sutter. In his report, Fremont said: ‘I had discharged five of the party: Neal, the blacksmith, (an excellent workman, and an unmarried man, who had done his duty faithfully, and had been of very great service to me,) desired to remain, as strong inducements were offered here to mechanics.’

Fremont and his remaining men left Sutter’s Fort on March 22, 1844 and headed into southern California to catch the Santa Fe Trail. They returned to St. Louis on August 6, 1844.

Although the country was well-known to the mountain men, Fremont’s report of his travel through California was the first official account made known to the outside world, and Sutter’s generosity and hospitality was made known to people everywhere. In fact, Fremont’s report of his travels was the most popular literature of the period and little boys and grown men were fascinated by his adventures. His report would generate more interest in emigration to California than any other of the period.

WESTERN EMIGRATION SOCIETY

The first wagon train to start for California was organized under the auspices of the Western Emigration Society in 1841. The society spread the California fever during the fall of 1840 throughout the Mississippi River Valley and in one month over 500 signatures were obtained to meet at Sapling Grove for the trek west.

So many people decided to leave Platte County, Missouri that the local merchants and land owners became worried that they would lose all of their business if so many people moved away. As a result of their self-interest, they conspired to encourage a campaign of slander designed to discourage migration.

The scare tactics were so successful that only 69 people showed up at Sapling Grove in May of 1841. Only one man showed up who had signed the pledge the year before. His name was John Bidwell, the eventual founder of Chico.

1ST WAGON TRAIN FOR CALIFORNIA

The Bidwell-Bartelson wagon train was the first organized migration of American settlers to head for California. The inexperienced party was fortunate to fall in with the seasoned mountain man, Fitzpatrick, who was guiding Father De Smet to the Flathead Indians in Oregon. They followed the Missouri River to the Platte River, then on to Fort Laramie, Independence Rock, then the Sweetwater River to the Rockies, through South Pass and the Green River Valley to Soda Springs, near present day Pocatello, Idaho.

Here the party split up - Fitzpatrick, De Smet and 32 of the members of the original wagon train heading for Oregon, and the remaining 37, including Bidwell, headed south through the unknown desert to California.

After an arduous journey following the Humboldt River, they passed the Humboldt Sink and Carson Lake, arriving at the Walker River on October 16th. Leaving their wagons behind, the party eventually found their way through the mountains by way of the Stanislaus River, which they followed to the site of Sonora. When they arrived in the San Joaquin Valley, they could hardly believe they were in California. Some thought it was still five hundred miles away.

With help from an Indian guide, the party arrived at the ranch owned by Dr. John Marsh, near Mt. Diablo on November 4, 1841.
FREMONT  From Page 25

This was the first overland migration of American settlers into California. Soon, other parties followed. The Workman-Rowland Company came across the desert from Santa Fe; Lansford Hastings brought in a party from Oregon (and was planning for more); Joseph Chiles (from the Bidwell-Bartelson party) returned to Missouri to guide another party and many others were in the planning stage or just getting underway.

SUTTER’S FORT

The genial host at Sutter’s Fort, Captain John Sutter, was fortunate when he was able to hire John Bidwell in 1842. Bidwell supervised the removal of the equipment, cannon and other items that Sutter had acquired from the Russians when they abandoned Fort Ross on the coast.

Bidwell became Sutter’s most valuable employee as the years progressed. In fact, at the time when Fremont appeared at Sutter’s Fort on his 3rd Expedition in December of 1845, Bidwell was in charge of Sutter’s Fort since Sutter was away on other business.

The rest of this story, ‘Fremont in the Conquest of California’, is best told by the man who was there, John Bidwell:

JOHN FREMONT
in the Conquest of California
By John Bidwell

In the autumn of 1845 Fremont came on his second exploring expedition to California. This time he divided his party east of the Sierra Nevada and sent the greater portion to come in through a gap supposed to exist farther to the south, while he followed substantially what is now the emigrant road, or Truckee Route, and came direct to Sutter’s Fort with about eight or nine men. At that time I was in charge of Sutter’s Fort and of Sutter’s business, he being absent at the bay of San Francisco. Fremont camped on the American River about three miles above the fort. The first notice of his return to California was his sudden appearance, with Kit Carson, at the fort. He at once made known to me his wants, namely, sixteen mules, six pack saddles, some flour and other provisions, and the use of a blacksmith’s shop to shoe the mules, to enable him to go in haste to meet the others of his party. I told him precisely what could and could not be furnished - that we had no mules, but could let him have horses, and could make the pack-saddles; that he might have use of a blacksmith’s shop, but we were entirely out of coal. He became reticent, and, saying something in a low tone to Kit Carson, rose and left without saying good-by, and returned to his camp. As they mounted their horses to leave, Fremont was heard to say that I was unwilling to accommodate him, which greatly pained me; for, of course, we were always glad of the arrival of Americans, and especially of one in authority. Besides, I knew that Captain Sutter would do anything in his power for Fremont. So I took with me Dr. Gist, a recent arrival from St. Louis, across the plains, and hastened to Fremont’s camp and told him what had been reported to me. He stated, in a very formal manner, that he was the officer of one government and Sutter the officer of another; that difficulties existed between those governments; and hence his inference that I, representing Sutter, was not willing to accommodate him. He reminded me that on his first arrival here, in 1844, Sutter had sent out and in half an hour had brought him all the mules he wanted. I protested my willingness to do anything in my power, but was obliged to plead inability to do more than stated, telling him that in 1844 Sutter was in far better circumstances; that on that occasion a man (Peter Lassen) had just arrived with a hundred mules, of which Sutter had bought what Fremont needed. But he had not been able to pay for them, because Fremont’s drafts had to go East before Sutter could realize on them the money which had been promised to Lassen. In a few days Sutter returned, but could not furnish anything more than I had offered. Then Fremont concluded to go down to the bay and get supplies. He went with his little party of eight or nine men, including Kit Carson, but without success; so he sent the men back to Sutter’s Fort to go, as best they could, to find the main party. Meanwhile he himself had made his way to Monterey to see the American Consul, Thomas O. Larkin. After several weeks Fremont and his entire party became united in the San Joaquin Valley. While at Monterey he had obtained permission from Jose Castro, the commandant-general, to winter in the San Joaquin Valley, away from the settlements, where the men would not be likely to annoy the people. He had in all the exploring party about sixty well-armed men. He also had permission to extend his explorations in the spring as far south as the Colorado River.

‘Fremont in the Conquest of California’ by John Bidwell, will continue in the Fall Issue of the Dogtown Territorial Quarterly

DOG TOWN FAIRE

The Dogtown Faire, advertised to come off on the Fourth of July, promises to be a fun occasion for everyone. Art, and Crafts show, food and performances will be going on along with activities for kids from 6 to 60. Don’t miss it – in Old Magalia on the 4th of July!

SOLUTION OF DOG TOWN DOODLER
ON PAGE 26

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N
1. 43
2. Dog
3. Grovelston
4. Larkin
5. Lido
6. Set
7. Enewton
8. W
9. Midacle
10. Ide
11. LVallejo
12. Lost
13. Bidwell
14. Marshall

TRIVIA ANSWERS
1. 43
2. Sam Neal
3. Senator Benton
4. Adam
5. Smith H. Horlutz
6. Ruthe Creek
7. 1804
8. Bidwell
9. Archibald Gillespie
10. William B. Ide
11. Coloma
12. 1st woman hung in California
13. Bidwell
14. Sandwich Islands
JOHN FREMONT
in the Conquest of California

By John Bidwell

The first part of this story may be found in the 1991 Summer Issue of the Dogtown Territorial Quarterly.

PART 2

Accordingly early in the spring (1846) Fremont started south with his party. When Castro gave him permission to explore towards the Colorado River he no doubt supposed he would go south or southeast from where he was camped in the San Joaquin Valley, and on through the Tejon Pass and the Mojave Desert; but, instead, Fremont with his sixty armed men started to go west and southwest through the most thickly settled parts of California, namely, the Santa Clara, Pajaro, and Salinas valleys. As he was approaching the last valley Castro sent an official order by an officer warning Fremont that he must leave, as his action was illegal. The order was delivered March 5. Fremont took possession of an eminence called Gavilan Peak, and continued to fortify himself for several days, perhaps a week or more, Castro meantime remaining in sight and evidently increasing his force day by day. Fremont, enraged against Castro, finally abandoned his position in the night of March 9, and, gaining the San Joaquin Valley, made his way rapidly northward up the Sacramento Valley and into Oregon, leaving Sutter’s about March 24.

SECRET MESSAGE

A little over four weeks after Fremont left I happened to be fishing four or five miles down the river, having then left Sutter’s service with the view of trying to put up two or three hundred barrels of salmon, thinking the venture would be profitable. An officer of the United States, Lieutenant A.H. Gillespie, of the marines, bearing messages to the explorer, came up the river in a small boat and at once inquired about Fremont. I told him he had gone to Oregon. Said he: “I want to over haul him. How far is it to the fort?” And receiving my reply, he pushed rapidly on. He overtook Fremont near the Oregon line. Fremont still indignant against Castro, who had compelled him to abandon his explorations south, returned at once to California. It so happened that Castro had sent Lieutenant Arce to the north side of the bay of San Francisco to collect scattered Government horses. Arce had secured about one hundred and fifty and was taking them to the south side of the bay, via Sutter’s Fort and the San Joaquin Valley. This was the only way to transfer cattle or horses from one side of the bay to the other, except at the Straits of Carquinez by the slow process of swimming one at a time, or of taking one or two, tied by all four feet, in a small boat or launch. Arce, with the horses and seven or eight soldiers, arrived at Sutter’s Fort, staid overnight as the guest of Sutter, and went on his way to the Consumne River (about sixteen or eighteen miles) and camped for the night.

FREMONT PRECIPITATES WAR

Fremont’s hasty departure for Oregon and Gillespie’s pursuit of him had been the occasion of many surmises. Fremont’s sudden return excited increased curiosity. People flocked to his camp: some were settlers, some hunters; some were good men, and some about as rough specimens of humanity as it would be possible to find anywhere. Fremont, hearing that the horses were passing, sent a party of these promiscuous people and captured them. This of course was done before he had orders or any positive news that war had been declared. (with Mexico) When Gillespie left the United States, as the bearer of a despatch to Larkin and Fremont and of letters to the latter, war had not been declared. The letters included one from Senator Benton, who had the confidence and knew the purposes of the administration. As Gillespie had to make his way through Mexico, he committed the despatch and his orders to memory, destroyed them, and rewrote them on the vessel which took him, via the Sandwich Islands, to the coast of California. There had been no later arrival, and therefore no later despatches to Fremont were possible. Though Fremont was reticent, whatever he did was supposed to be done with the sanction of the United States. Thus, without giving the least notice even to Sutter, the great friend of Americans, or to Americans in general, scattered and exposed as they were all over California, he precipitated the war.

Sutter was always outspoken in his wish that some day California should belong to the United States; but when he heard that the horses had been taken from Arce (who made no resistance, but with his men and with insulting messages was permitted to go on his way to Castro at Santa Clara), he expressed surprise that Captain Fremont had committed such an act without his knowledge. What Sutter had said was reported to Fremont, perhaps with some exaggeration.
CAPTURE OF SONOMA

As soon as the horses arrived at Fremont’s camp, the same party - about twenty-five in number – were sent to Sonoma. By this party General Vallejo, the most prominent Californian north of the bay, his brother Salvador, his brother-in-law Jacob P. Leese, and Victor Prudon were surprised at night, taken prisoners, and conveyed to Fremont’s camp, over eighty miles distant by the traveled route on the Sacramento River. The prisoners were sent to Sutter’s Fort, Fremont arriving at the same time. Then Sutter and Fremont met, face to face, for the first time since Fremont, a month before, had passed on his way towards Oregon. I do not know what words passed between them; I was near, but did not hear. This, however, I know, that Sutter had become elated, as all Americans were, with the idea that what Fremont was doing meant California for the United States. But in a few minutes Sutter came to me greatly agitated, with tears in his eyes, and said that Fremont had told him he was a Mexican, and that if he did not like what he (Fremont) was doing he would set him across the San Joaquin River and he could go and join the Mexicans. But, in this flurry, Sutter was soon himself again, and resumed his normal attitude of friendship towards Fremont, because he thought him to be acting in accordance with instructions from Washington. For want of a suitable prison, the prisoners were placed in Sutter’s parlor, - a large room in the southwest corner of the second story of the two-story adobe house, - which had but one door, and this was now guarded by a sentinel. Fremont gave me special directions about the safety of the prisoners, and I understood him to put them under my special charge. Some of Fremont’s men remained at the fort.

WILLIAM B. IDE

Among the men who remained to hold Sonoma was William B. Ide, who assumed to be in command. In some way (perhaps through an unsatisfactory interview with Fremont which he had before the move on Sonoma) Ide got the notion that Fremont’s hand in these events was uncertain, and that Americans ought to strike for an independent republic. To this end nearly every day he wrote something in the form of a proclamation and posted it on the old Mexican flagstaff. Another man left at Sonoma was William L. Todd*, who painted, on a piece of brown cotton, a yard and a half or so in length, with old red or brown paint that he happened to find, what he intended to be a representation of a grizzly bear. This was raised to the top of the staff, some seventy feet from the ground. Native Californians looking up at it were heard to say ‘Coche’, the common name among them for pig or shoot.

Continued on Page 25

*More than thirty years afterwards I chanced to meet Todd on the train coming up the Sacramento Valley. He had not greatly changed, but appeared considerably broken in health. He informed me that Mrs. Lincoln was his own aunt, and that he had been brought up in the family of Abraham Lincoln.

Announcing a risk-free offer: Sample this fascinating text- and photo-filled magazine of California history.

If you’re fascinated by the dynamic history of our great state of California and its rich historical saga of the willful, the strong, the builders, schemers, gold-seekers, soldiers, scoundrels, scholars and fools, powerful and poor ... if you know that history is more than just a collection of facts and objects — that it is, in fact, a thoughtful, interesting appraisal of the past’s hows and whys and what they mean for us today ... above all, if you love a good story ... than you’re the kind of person who will enjoy and value The Californians.

Send now for this fascinating, unique magazine on California history to The Californians, 5720 Ross Branch Rd, Sebastopol CA 95472.

☐ Bill me $18.95 + $1.42 sales tax for a year’s subscription. If I’m not completely satisfied with the first issue, I may cancel and pay nothing.

☐ I enclose $18.95 + $1.42 sales tax for 6 bi-monthly issues of The Californians.

Name ____________________________

Address ____________________________

City \state\zip ____________________________
The party at Sonoma now received some accessions from Americans and other foreigners living on the north side of the bay. Rumors began to reach them of an uprising on the part of the native Californians, which indeed began under Joaquin de la Torre. Henry L. Ford and other Americans to the number of thirty met De La Torre – whose force was said to number from forty to eighty – near the Petaluma Ranch, and four or five of the Californians were said to have been killed or wounded. The repulse of the Californians seems to have been complete, though reports continued alarming, and a man sent from Sonoma to Russian River for powder was killed. A messenger was sent in haste to Sacramento for Fremont, who hurried to Sonoma with nearly all his exploring party and scoured the country far and near, but found no enemy.

BIDWELL LEAVES FOR SONOMA

I tried to make the prisoners at Sacramento as comfortable as possible, assisting to see that their meals were regularly and properly brought, and sometimes I would sit by while they were eating. One day E.M. Kern, artist to Fremont’s expiring expedition, called me out and said it was Fremont’s orders that no one was to go in or speak to the prisoners. I told him they were in my charge, and that he had nothing to say about them. He asserted that they were in his charge, and finally convinced me that he had been made an equal, if not the principal custodian. I then told him that, as both of us were not needed, I would go over and join Fremont at Sonoma. Just at this time Lieutenant Washington A. Bartlett of the United States Navy arrived from the bay, inquiring for Fremont. The taking of the horses from Arc, the capture of the prisoners, and the occupation of Sonoma, had been heard of, and he was sent to learn what it meant. So he went over to Sonoma with me.

FREMONT ORGANIZES SETTLERS

On our arrival Fremont was still absent trying to find the enemy, but that evening he returned. The Bear Flag was still flying, and had been for a week or more. The American flag was nowhere displayed. There was much doubt about the situation. Fremont gave us to understand that we must organize. Lieutenant Gillespie seemed to be his confidential advisor and spokesman, and said that a meeting would be held the next day at which Fremont would make an address. He also said that it would be necessary to have some plan of organization ready to report to the meeting; and that P.B. Reading, W.B. Ide, and myself were requested to act as a committee to report such a plan. We could learn nothing from Fremont or Gillespie to the effect that the United States had anything to do with Fremont’s present movements.

SEE ME FOR MOUNTAIN ACREAGE

JACK McWHERTER BROKER/OWNER
1-800-656-9325

BENNETT REALTY
7126 Skyway, #F
P.O. Box 1407, Paradise, CA 95967
Bus: (916) 877-4335

HAL’S AUTO SERVICE
6226 SKYWAY
PARADISE, CA 95969
PHONE: (916) 877-0660

HEADLIGHT AIMING PROPANE A/C SERVICE

HAROLD HILL, JR.
A.S.E. Certified Mechanic Owner

NICHOLAS L. BECKER
GENERAL BUILDING CONTRACTOR
CUSTOM HOMES REMODELING

(916) 877-8397 LIC. #311758
FREMONT From Page 25

In past years rumors of threats against Americans in California had been rather frequent, several times causing them and other foreigners to hasten in the night from all places within one or two hundred miles to Sutter’s Fort, sometimes remaining a week or two, drilling and preparing to resist attack. The first scare of this kind occurred in 1841, when Sutter became somewhat alarmed; the last, in 1845. But in every case such rumors had proved to be groundless, so that Americans had ceased to have apprehensions, especially in the presence of such an accessible refuge as Sutter’s Fort. And now, in 1846, after so many accessions by immigration, we felt entirely secure, even without the presence of a United States officer and his exploring force of sixty men, until we found ourselves suddenly plunged into a war. But hostilities having begun, bringing danger where none before existed, it now came imperative to organize. It was in everyone’s mouth (and I think must have come from Fremont) that the war was begun in defense of American settlers! This was simply a pretense to justify the premature beginning of the war, which henceforth was to be carried on in the name of the United States.

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

Under these circumstances on the Fourth of July our committee met. We soon found that we could not agree. Ide wished to paste together his long proclamations on the flagstaff, and make them our report. Reading wrote something much shorter, which I thought still too long. I proposed for our report simply this:

‘The undersigned hereby agree to organize for the purpose of gaining and maintaining the independence of California’

Unable to agree upon a report, we decided to submit what we had written to Lieutenant Gillespie, without our names, and asked him to choose. He chose mine. The meeting took place, but Fremont’s remarks gave us no light upon any phase of the situation. He neither averred nor denied that he was acting under orders from the United States Government. Some men had been guilty of misconduct in an Indian village, and he reprimanded them — saId he wanted nothing to do with the movement unless the men would conduct themselves properly. Gillespie made some remarks, presented the report, and all present signed it.

The organization took place forthwith, by the formation of three companies. The captains elected were Henry L. Ford, Granville P. Swift, and Samuel J. Hensley. Thus organized, we marched into the Sacramento Valley. The men who had not been at Sonoma signed the report at the camp above Sutter’s Fort, except a few who soon after signed it at the Mokelumne River on our march to Monterey. This was, so far as I know, the last seen or heard of that document, for Commodore Sloat had raised the American flag at Monterey before our arrival, and soon it waved in all places in California where American influence prevailed.

As yet Fremont had received advices from Washington no later than those brought by Gillespie. His object in going to Monterey must have been to confer with Commodore Sloat and get positive information about the war with Mexico, which proved to be a reality, as we learned even before our arrival there.

There was no longer uncertainty; all were glad. It was a glorious sight to see the Stars and Stripes as we marched into Monterey. Here we found Commodore Sloat. The same evening, or the next, Commodore Stockton, a chivalrous and dashing officer, arrived around Cape Horn to supersede him. Plans were immediately laid to conquer California. A California Battalion was to be organized, and Fremont was to be lieutenant-colonel in command. Stockton asked Fremont to nominate his own officers. P.B. Reading was chosen paymaster, Ezekiel Merritt quartermaster, and, I think, King commissary. The captains and lieutenants chosen at Sonoma were also commissioned. Though I did not aspire to office, I received a commission as second lieutenant.

MERRITT DECIDES TO PARTY

Merritt, the quartermaster, could neither read nor write. He was an old mountaineer and trapper, lived with an Indian squaw, and went clad in buckskin fringed after the style of the Rocky Mountain Indians. He chewed tobacco to a disgusting extent, and stammered badly. He had a reputation for bravery because of his continual boasting of his prowess in killing Indians. The handle of the tomahawk he carried had nearly a hundred notches to record the number of his Indian scalps. He drank deeply whenever he could get liquor. Stockton said to him: ‘Major Merritt’ (for he was now major), ‘make out a requisition for some money, say two thousand dollars. You will need about that amount at the start. Bring your requisition on board, and I will approve, and direct the purser to honor it.’ Major Reading wrote the requisition and Merritt got the money, two thousand Mexican silver dollars. That afternoon I met him in Monterey, nearly as drunk as he could be. He said, ‘Bidwell, I am rich; I have lots of money;’ and putting both hands into the deep pockets of his buckskin breeches he brought out two handfuls of Mexican dollars, saying, ‘Here, take this, and if you can find anything to buy, buy it, and when you want more money come to me, for I have got lots of it.’

Continued Page 38

SOLUTION OF DOGTTOWN DOODLER ON PAGE 26

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N
L O D C O T O R
O L D C O A R D N
N M O N R O E V I L L E
G A T V W A
S O U R E I M H
P Y R O L O L O H
B A S S V L N O N E
A V I D E D L
R I I L O V E
L I Y L
K E L S E Y C L O T T
T E A L A I
I C L A M P E R A
C A S T R O P
Doc Smith joined the rainbow chasers who followed their glittering dreams to Butte County with the gold rush, each with his own notion of what would constitute his fortune. Doc's lifelong assault on the problem was regularly and swiftly enfeebled through a progressive series of small successes and ever larger failures.

He was destined to be eclipsed by others who left more famous imprints as The California Builders. But the foundations of the State were laid brick by brick by Doc Smith and the multitude of others like him.

Although gifted with diligence and motivation - human frailties being what they are - he found himself mired in blasted hopes burned to ashes, seemingly outdone by his larger-than-life experiences. Doc Smith evokes for us a sense of the times:

How formidable it really was.

How elusive those glittering dreams really were.

Surely, an enduring legacy for us after all.

Author's Note:


FREMONT From Page 29

Merritt was never removed from his office or rank, but simply fell into disuse, and was detailed, like subordinate officers or men, to perform other duties, generally at the head of small scouting parties. Merritt's friends - for he must have had friends to recommend him for quartermaster - in some way managed to fix up the accounts relating to the early administration of his office. In fact, I tried to help them myself, but I believe that all of us together were never able to find, within a thousand dollars, what Merritt had done with the money. How he ever came to be recommended to quartermaster was to everyone a mystery. Perhaps some of the current theories that subsequently prevailed might have had in them just a shade of truth, namely, that somebody entertained the idea that quartermaster meant the ability and duty to quarter the beef!

The first conquest of California, in 1846, by the Americans, with the exception of the skirmish at Petaluma and another towards Monterey, was achieved without a battle. We simply marched all over California from Sonoma and San Diego and raised the American flag without opposition or protest. We tried to find an enemy, but could not. So Kit Carson and Ned Beale were sent East, bearing despatches from Commodore Stockton announcing the entire conquest of California by the United States. Fremont was made governor by Stockton at Los Angeles,
but could not enter upon the full discharge of his duties of his office till he had visited the upper part of California and returned. He sent me to take charge of the Mission of San Luis Rey, with a commission as magistrate over the larger portion of the country between Los Angeles and San Diego. Stockton and all his forces retired on board of their vessels. Fremont went north, leaving part of his men at Los Angeles under Gillespie, part at Santa Barbara under Lieutenant Talbot and some at other points. Pío Pico and José Castro, respectively the last Mexican governor and commander-in-chief, remained concealed a while and then withdrew into Mexico.

Suddenly, in about a month, Fremont being in the north and his troops scattered, the whole country south of Monterey was in a state of revolt. Then for the first time there was something like a war. As there were rumors of Mexican troops coming from Sonora, Merritt was sent by Gillespie to reconnoiter towards the Colorado River. Gillespie was surrounded at Los Angeles, and made to capitulate. I fled from San Luis Rey to San Diego. Merritt and his party, hearing of the outbreak, also escaped to San Diego. Meanwhile Fremont enlisted a considerable force (about four hundred), principally from the large Hastings immigration at Sacramento, and marched south. Commodore Stockton had landed and marched to retake Los Angeles, and failed. All the men-of-war, and all the scattered forces, except Fremont’s new force, were then concentrated at San Diego, where Commodore Stockton collected and reorganized the forces, composed of sailors, marines, men of Fremont’s battalion under Gillespie and Merritt, volunteers at San Diego, including some native Californians and that portion of the regular troops under General S.W. Kearny that had escaped from the field of San Pascual—in all between 700 and 800 men. Of these forces I was commissioned and served as quartermaster. This work of preparation took several months. Finally, on the 29th of December, 1846, the army set out to retake Los Angeles. It fought the battles of San Gabriel and the Mesa, which ended the insurrection. The enemy fled, met Fremont at San Fernando, and surrendered to him the next day. The terms of surrender were so lenient that the native Californians from that time forth became the fast friends of Fremont.

Unfortunately differences regarding rank had arisen between Stockton and Kearny. Fremont was afterwards arrested in California by Kearny for refusing to obey his orders, and was taken to Washington and court-martialed. Stockton, however, was largely to blame. He would not submit to General Kearny, his superior in command on land, and that led Fremont to refuse to obey Kearny, his superior officer. Fremont’s disobedience was no doubt owing to the advice of Stockton, who had appointed him governor of California.

The war being over, nearly all the volunteers were discharged from the service in February and March, 1847, at Los Angeles and San Diego. Most of us made our way up the coast by land to our homes. I had eleven horses, which I swam, one at a time, across the Straits of Carquinez at Benicia, which J.M. Hudspeth, the surveyor, was at the time laying out for Dr. Robert Semple, and which was then called "Francisca", after Mrs. Vallejo, whose maiden name was Francisca Benicia Carrillo.

John Bidwell