

# FORT MOORE AND THE BATTLE OF SAN PASQUAL

BY ORRA EUGENE MONNETTE

Occasion: California Historical Society, San Francisco,  
Thursday, May 17, 1923.

Historical Society of Southern California, Los Angeles,  
Tuesday, November 6, 1923.

## AN INTRODUCTION

The reach of history is wide and periodic. The story of mankind is an old, old story. A true interpretation of the past is the index of the present; and, likewise, a presage of the future. The paths trodden by the human race leading to civilization, progress and advancement are clearly marked and cut deep. They lead still farther to the unknown, but discoverable human experiences where heights of achievement give greater vistas of the valleys of contentment.

No portion of American annals possesses quite as much of stirring episode and romantic coloring as the early days of California. Those times induced the expression of courage, hardihood and pioneering, attended by a chivalry and faith, intermingled with native savagery, freebootery and baser influences, forming the melting pot of a special civilization. California was in turn Indian, Spanish, Mexican and finally American. In the course of time California was the objective point of discoverer, explorer, adventurer, woodsman and colonist who became settlers and citizens and founded a glorious commonwealth.

The special point to be elucidated from historical study is that obtained in the reflection of the men and women of the times, of their particular period. Modes, manners, morals and customs are the symbols of thought, action and life. The currents of existence flow in the direction of the struggle for the comforts and economies of physical environment. The trend of peoples in their outward efforts is the reflex of their inward emotions and desires. In other words the main characteristics of any people, of any civilization and of any period are the reflected personalities of the inhabitants themselves. Their activities, their achievements and their distinctions go no further and rise no higher than the individual attainments of single personages whose

superiority in thought and action stand forth as representative, but above the common level of their neighbors and intimates, that is, above those whom they specially represent. It is said that events make great leaders, as opportunities make great men. But, that leader is great who surpasses his events, and that man is great who seizes first the unusual opportunity coming to him. The men and women, whose names find permanent honor in the halls of fame are the makers and preservers of the American nation. The beacon lights of California history are the Commanders, leaders and patron saints of her discovery, exploration, inhabitation, those belongings to the Spanish, Mexican, Californian and American regimés, and those whose names, whose achievements and whose personalities well reflect the glory and greatness of this wonderful state.

#### THE BEGINNINGS

California history begins, as far as the more modern chronology is concerned, far back, perhaps, in those indefinite days of maritime exploration, when little was known of territorial extent and geographical positions. It was the famed novel, *Las Sergas de Esplandián*, of the year 1508, which gave the name to this portion of the hemisphere as "California," applied between the years 1533-1543; which seems to be the accepted explanation. Balboa, Magellan, Cortés, Ulloa, Coronado, Castillo and Jiménez are names never to be forgotten. And we who possess and enjoy English ancestry must ever remember the voyage of Sir Francis Drake in 1579 and that he certainly took possession of Californian shores. We know and remember, with reverence and acclaim, Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo, the Portuguese navigator, who really discovered our California.

And, then in rapid succession, but with considerable affection and pride over the names which should be favorite and household words in every public school, educational institution and private home of this southwestern land, we note the names of Cermeño, Oñate, Vizcaino, Ortega, Vitus Behring, Venégas, Don José de Gálvez, Gaspar de Portolá, Father Junípero Serra, Father Francisco Palou, Father Lasuén, the ten famous to a certain degree, governors under the Spanish regimé, 1769-1821; those of the Mexican era, with twenty-five years of governorship, resplendent with the names Pico, Figueroa and Alvarado, and the many, many names of Americans, familiar to the genealogies of New England, Virginia and eastern United States, such as Sloat, Stockton, Fremont, Kearny, Moore, Sutter, Marshall, Chap-

man, and others, all a galaxy of notable men who reflect in their personalities the character and attainments entered into their acts which founded most gloriously the cities and towns of the Golden State.

It is interesting to comment upon one phase of this early history. Proud are the Pilgrim and Puritan in their descendancy. While Virginia is a close ancestor of California, for, King James I of England makes his second grant of land on the North American Continent, in Virginia, known as the Jamestown Charter, being dated May 23, 1609, the seventh year of King James' reign; the inland limit of this grant or charter was from sea to sea, that is from the Atlantic to the Pacific, the southern boundary being thirty-four degrees, North latitude, and the northern boundary thirty-eight degrees, North latitude; and it is interesting to note that this northerly limit as finally settled passes into the Pacific Ocean, just north of San Francisco and that this southerly limit as finally settled passes about three miles south of the city of Redlands, through the City of Riverside, and into the Pacific Ocean at about Santa Monica, California, so that all of the Pacific Coast line from Santa Monica to the Golden Gate was the westerly limit of this *Jamestown Grant*, though never legally established nor right of control exercised. (O. E. M.)

#### HISTORICAL SETTING

With the introductory theme and these beginnings as presented by me, impressing upon your mind the dominant idea of reflected personality as displayed in pioneer, soldier, leader and statesman, it is now necessary to draw the inspirational ideas from the theme as further developed.

All of us are, or should be, familiar with the main facts of the Mexican War. The unrest and independent spirit of the Texans which separated them from their mother country and gave them a leaning toward the United States which formed the basis of the ultimate conflict, are well known. The subsequent war with the invasion of Mexico and the conquest of her cities, including that of the ancient and famed City of Mexico, are the common facts well known to students of American history.

However, the part which California occupied in this international conflict is not so well known and yet the results were of greater importance as affecting the history of our own commonwealth. From this must be drawn the illustration which forms the final thought which it is desired to present.

Permit me to remind you of a few of the historical facts.

California was strictly Mexican territory for approximately twenty-five years, that is, from April 11th, 1822 to July 7th, 1847, when the American flag was raised over the old fortress of Monterey. This was interspersed by an intermittent conflict between the "Californians" and the forces representing the United States which continued for some period of time.

However, Los Angeles was captured from the "Californians" January 9th, 1847. The conquering forces represented Commodore Stockton's sailors and marines, General Kearny's dragoons and General Fremont's band of soldiers and frontiersmen.

January 13, 1847 articles of capitulation were ratified between the "Californians" and General Fremont at the old Cahuenga ranch house, only a few miles out of Los Angeles, opposite Universal City; and, just recently, an effort is being made to preserve this location as one of the historic military land marks of California.

The city of Los Angeles was under military rule from January 13, 1847, when the Americans took possession of the City the second time, to August 1848, a period of nineteen months.

During the happening of the earlier of these stirring events, the bloody battle of San Pasqual had taken place and had found its fulfillment, in a sense, in the establishment of old Fort Moore and the raising of the American flag on the little hill above Los Angeles.

#### BATTLE OF SAN PASQUAL

While the conflict with the Mexicans was waging at its height and California becoming the objective point of invasion, a detachment of the American army was sent across the continent under the command of General Stephen W. Kearny who, starting from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, took a force of 1,600 men with full equipment of baggage, animals and supplies. This was in June, 1846. It is noteworthy that coming as he did through Arizona and New Mexico he raised the American Flag at the important points on his way and established a number of garrisons. With him from Socorro came Kit Carson, the famous scout who was a valuable aid in determining the route of travel and in bringing his woodcraft ability and service to bear effectively on the way.

In December of that year General Kearny was met by a detachment sent out by Commodore Stockton under the command of Captain Gillespie, who was to act as an escort to Kearny into San Diego.

At this particular period the "Californians" who were in a certain sense merely roving bands of men who trusted to horse and lance in their military operations more than to any strict military plan and method of attack, were under the command of General Andréas Pico. At this time the Americans had learned of the rebellion of the garrison at Los Angeles and the driving out of the soldiers; also of the defeat at Dominguez, and stimulated by a desire to overcome these temporary victories of the "Californians" the entire military party approached the battle of San Pasqual with much confidence and eagerness. There was one unfortunate psychology which the Americans entirely underestimated—the character of the men whom they were to fight—and they doubted their courage and valor and committed almost the same error as Braddock had done in 1755 when he was ambushed and defeated by the Indians. That is the main reflection to be obtained from the disastrous results which followed.

The following is a re-statement of historical accounts:

The old village of San Pasqual was about 38 miles northeast of San Diego, near to the bed of the river of San Bernardino and not very far distant from the old San Luis Rey Mission. The attack and fight which ensued were not planned and may be said to have been more or less accidental, but here is the place where they came together and where the bloody fight took place. Andréas Pico had under his command about eighty "Californians," each of whom rode his horse and carried his lance, which was their favored weapon in those days, being about 8 feet in length, very light and very strong and with a very sharp blade at the end of the rod. The "Californians" could use this weapon with unusual skill and severity and on that account it was a very powerful and effective weapon.

On the other hand the Americans, a part of whom were incapacitated by their long trip over the continent and some of whom were not within sight of the battle place, were not in good condition for a battle. Relying entirely upon military order and method of action and upon guns and pistols with the acoutréments, they really were not properly armed for the combat before them. Their horses were long traveled and worn out and the men themselves exhausted and both horses and men neither fully nor prop-

erly fed. All authorities agree that it was a tactical mistake and unwise military move for this battle to have ever been engaged in. However, the vanguard of the Americans was led by a Capt. Johnson and when in the early morning of December 6, 1846, the Americans suddenly and unexpectedly came upon Pico's band of eighty "Californians." Captain Johnson with a dash to the front and with only a dozen men immediately following him charged at the "Californians." Here came into play the unusual fighting abilities of the "Californians" in which they were especially distinguished because they employed the tactics of both the retreat and advance, the pause and the dash and rattle of spur, which served only to confuse the approaching Americans. There was a sharp, decisive preliminary conflict and Captain Johnson was killed, shot through the head, and several of his men were wounded. This forced the remainder of the small detachment to retreat until their support, under the command of Captain Moore, could come up and when they had done so the "Californians" wheeled, as was their custom, and rode swiftly away. It would not have been so bad if the Americans had stopped with the dishonors of the combat at that point, but they immediately took up the pursuit and raced after the fleeing "Californians" quite a distance when the latter turned, and being more familiar with the ground over which they were going, engaged the Americans in further combat with the result that in a short space of time eighteen Americans lay dead, stabbed by lances and as many more were severely wounded. The "Californians" then galloped away and it was called and recorded an American victory because they left the field, but the extraordinary percentage, as Mr. Willard states in his history, of Americans killed and wounded, approximately thirty-seven, out of the number engaged, makes the battle unique in the country's history.

One ridiculous feature appeared in connection with this battle and that was that an effort was made during the fight to get an old-fashioned gun into action but the mules who were dragging in through the brush got frightened, ran away, and the piece fell into the hands of the enemy.

Captain Benjamin Moore, whose reflected personality gives the key-thought to this paper, and who led the second charge was killed. General Kearny and Captain Gillespie were both wounded and altogether it was a very discouraging, regrettable reverse to Americans arms. The "Californians" escaped without the loss of a single life and apparently with only some inconsequential wounds and damage.

This relating of this event does not mean to indicate that the Americans lacked courage, military ability or determined effort to support their cause. The charge that the battle of San Pasqual was a stupid blunder is easy to make by a historian who reviews the events after they have happened in the light of defeat. Better to say that the tactics employed by the Americans were not suited to the occasion and to the topographical situation where the battle was fought. It may not have been a victory as military analysts would record, but it did have a psychology which was of inestimable value to support the trend of American occupation and the final triumph of the American flag.

The notables of American history are those who have sacrificed not always by their lives, but in many other positive ways. The shedding of blood however, has consecrated more than one battle field for the Republic and has established by this consecration more than one of the vital principles of the nation. Victory or defeat as it may be viewed on the part of one historian as against the judgment of another, the battle of San Pasqual was a baptism by blood of the thought and principle of the advance, growth and development of the American nation and when Captain Moore lost his life as a hero in the service of his country it was his supreme sacrifice which in a sense dedicated the battle field and laid the foundation for what followed in the establishment of old Fort Moore.

The early history of California is inseparably linked with the names of General John C. Fremont, General Stephen W. Kearny, Commodore Stockton and the other lesser lights of the military occupation and yet too frequently the leaders and commanders are eulogized to the depreciation in a comparative sense of the exploits and achievements of their subordinates. It would be a very interesting story if more intimately might be recorded the immediate phases of thought perhaps, and action referable to Captain Moore on this memorable occasion. We know very little of his antecedents but we know of his courage as a soldier, his patriotism as an American and his character as a man and a gentleman and these are the elements around which this story and idea of reflected personality are brought together.

#### FORT MOORE

The hill which now crowns the northerly entrance to the business section of Los Angeles along the streets of South Broadway and Hill, but north of Temple Street, and

which is pierced by a tunnel on the first two named, was first known as Fort Hill. It was a natural promontory overlooking the distant valley and plains and prior to the later expansive building of the city must have been quite high by comparison with the surrounding country and very likely a suitable place for the establishment of a fort. One can imagine that it was an outlook for the Indians in an early date; that its commanding position drew attention to the military leaders as a point of vantage. When the city of Los Angeles finally capitulated and the American occupation was complete under the treaty signed between the contending forces with General Fremont through the pass of Cahuenga, it was planned that Fort Hill should be converted into a permanent Fort and military post. In reality two such forts were planned and partially built. The first was projected by Lieut. William H. Emory, a topographical engineer of General Kearny's staff and work was actually commenced upon it by the marines under Commodore Stockton. For some reason the first contemplated fort was never actually completed and never was given a name. But a little later on the same site a second fort was constructed and designed to hold a company of one hundred men, being much larger than the outline of the first. It is with the naming of the second fort which was called Fort Moore, and its final dedication that this presentation has to do.

A little antecedent history:

On the 23rd of April, 1847, three months after the work had ceased on Emory's fort, the construction of the second fort was begun and its construction pressed forward very actively.

On May 13th the previous military commander, Col. Cook was superseded by Col. J. B. Stevenson, who was then in command of the southern military district of California. The work was continued on the fort to practical completion and the time was approaching to its dedication. With this in mind Col. Stevenson deemed that a suitable flag pole was necessary upon which the Stars and Stripes could be raised and the ceremonies of the dedication carried out with appropriate military form and exemplification.

It was Col. Stevenson who insisted that this flag staff should be unusual, high and particularly significant, and he desired a pole at least 150 feet long for the purpose, but there was not any tall timber of that character in the vicinity of Los Angeles and as the story is given by one of our historians, its recital here will prove most interesting.

"A contract was let to a native of California, Juan Ramiréz, to bring from the San Bernardino mountains a tree of a suitable length to make a flag pole. Juan Ramiréz, with a number of carretas, a small army of Indian laborers and an escort of ten Mormon soldiers to protect him against the mountain Indians, repaired to the headwaters of Mill Creek in the mountains, where he found suitable timber. He brought down two tree trunks, one about ninety feet and the other seventy-five to eighty feet long, fastened on the axle of a dozen old carretas, each trunk drawn by twenty yoke of oxen and an Indian driver to each ox. The carpenters among the volunteers spliced the timbers and fashioned a beautiful pole 150 feet long, which was raised in the rear of the field work, near what is now the southeast corner of North Broadway and Rock Street, or Fort Moore Place."

The next important feature of this undertaking lies in the fact that by July 1st, 1847, the work of building the fort had proceeded to such a stage that Col. Stevenson determined to have its dedication carried out as an act of patriotism in connection with the 4th of July celebration and he issued an official order for the celebration of this anniversary date as related to American independence. The following taken from the Orders of the Day should be quoted as exemplifying the spirit, thought and purpose of the event:

"At sunrise a Federal salute will be fired from the field work on the hill which commands this town, and for the first time from this point the American standard is displayed.

"At 10 o'clock every soldier at this post will be under arms. The detachment of the Seventh Regiment N. Y. Volunteers, and First Regiment, U. S. Dragons (dismounted), will be marched to the field work on the hill, when, together with the Mormon Battalion, the whole will be formed at 11 o'clock a. m. into a hollow square, when the Declaration of Independence will be read. At the close of the ceremony the field works will be dedicated and appropriately named, and at 12 o'clock a national salute will be fired \* \* \* \*

"The field work at this post having been planned and the work conducted entirely by Lieut. Davidson of the First Dragons, he is requested to hoist upon it for the first time, on the morning of the 4th, the American standard.

"It is the custom of our country to confer on its fortifications the name of some distinguished individual who has rendered important services to his country, either in the councils of the nation or on the battlefield. The commandant has therefore determined, unless the Department of War shall otherwise direct, to confer upon the field work erected at the post of Los Angeles, the name of one who was regarded by all who had the pleasure of his acquaintance as a perfect specimen of an American officer, and whose character for every virtue and accomplishment that adorns a gentleman was only equaled by the reputation he had ac-

quired in the field for his gallantry as an officer and soldier, and his life was sacrificed in the conquest of this territory at the battle of San Pasqual. The commander directs that from and after the 4th inst. it shall bear the name of Moore." (It was named after Capt. Benjamin D. Moore of the First United States Dragons.)

For some inexplicable reason the Fort was not completed and on July 15th, after such a splendid start upon a great design, the battalion serving at this point was mustered out of service and work on the Fort ceased.

Old Fort Moore disappeared as a landmark. Finally the tall flag staff was cut down and no trace of the fortification exists at this date except that, within the memory of the older inhabitants of Los Angeles, the position of old Fort Moore is known and has been marked; and for years the Daughters of the War of 1812 have held an annual celebration at this point and raised to the breezes blowing from the ocean and to the mountain sides beyond, the flag of the American Republic; and appropriate services have always been held in connection with this celebration. By their direction, the National emblem is unfurled each day from a lofty standard.

The battle of San Pasqual was the seat of war and bloody conflict. The site of old Fort Moore was the residuary of peace and the American flag raised then and since over its forgotten battlements was and is the emblem of American security and of individual and personal liberty.

What we are interested in is the first death and the sacrifice and the bloodshed at the battle of San Pasqual, then, finally the reflected personality of Captain Moore, whose memorial was old Fort Moore, which, though obliterated by the length and ravages of time, yet in its dedication the patriotic principles as reflected in his own character stands forth as a beacon light of history.

To be a man is something; to be a gentleman is even more and when Col. Stevenson recorded of him that he had a reputation acquired in the field for his gallantry as an officer and soldier, he was pleased to add that he was a perfect specimen of an American officer and possessed of a character which for every virtue and accomplishment betokened a gentleman.

The lessons to be drawn are to be found in the exemplification of those characteristics which after all make a nation great when its people are true gentlemen and sincere gentlewomen. As Californians, proud of her wonderful history, keen to relate episodes of her romantic course and enlivened always to consider the best expression of life,

service and patriotism, we find in the courage of the soldiery at the battle of San Pasqual and in the patriotic celebration of old Fort Moore, a new character, that of the man for whom the honor was given in recognition of his bravery and fine attributes, the reflected personality of the men and women of the Californian commonwealth who have made her history magnificent and insured her high destiny in the coming days.

The phases of American life are varied and complex. There are extremes of social activities which might seem to be the ground of alarm. There exists in some quarters a radical tendency. There is likewise an undercurrent of political reconstruction. But this is an age of advancement upon new and unusual lines. It is not comparable to any age heretofore existant. The strongest safeguard for all is found in patriotism, Americanism, and in the perpetuation of American institutions. Historically they were founded by high-minded men. They are the exponents of American principles, such as reflected in Fort Moore and the Battle of San Pasqual. By the guidance of such, America will endure.