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If John Judson Ames hadn't lost part of his printing-press in the Chagres River, or some more of his gear in one of San Francisco's fires, or taken so long rounding up the needed financial support, San Diego might have had the first newspaper in Southern California.

As it was, when the first issue of the Herald rolled -- or rather, slithered -- off of the little hand press in Old Town on May 29, 1851, Los Angeles already had a newspaper which was 12 days old. It never seemed to bother Ames, however.

Six and a half feet tall and built in proportion, Ames was no man with whom to take liberties. The erstwhile Second Mate -- his father was a shipbuilder in his native Calais, Maine -- personally dove overboard and salvaged that missing part from his press; the incident, however, delayed him -- as did the fire, and the fact that, landing penniless in San Francisco, he was forced for a period to use those huge muscles in manhandling baggage from incoming steamers.

Just what a sleepy little burg like San Diego, only recently "liberated" from the sleepy Spanish-Mexican regime, was doing with a newspaper anyhow, is a good question. Certainly the village could not support a newspaper with its own advertising patronage, and there were those who wondered why Ames, who by that time was not doing at all badly in the Bay City, should make the move. The answer was that the Herald was heavily subsidized with San Francisco advertising, and was the official mouthpiece of U. S. Senator William M. Gwin. The senator had ideas, and one of them was to divide the state, annex Baja