

# NOTICIAS del PUERTO de MONTEREY

A Quarterly Bulletin of Historic Monterey Issued by  
The Monterey History and Art Association

VOLUME 1, NUMBER 4

DECEMBER, 1957

## CUSTOM HOUSE LETTERS

With this issue we end the printing of letters from the old volume of letters written from the Custom House at Monterey. For this number we have selected several that are of particular interest. The old volume contains many hundred letters, and ends in the 1860's with the end of the term of James Watson, who succeeded Wall as Collector.

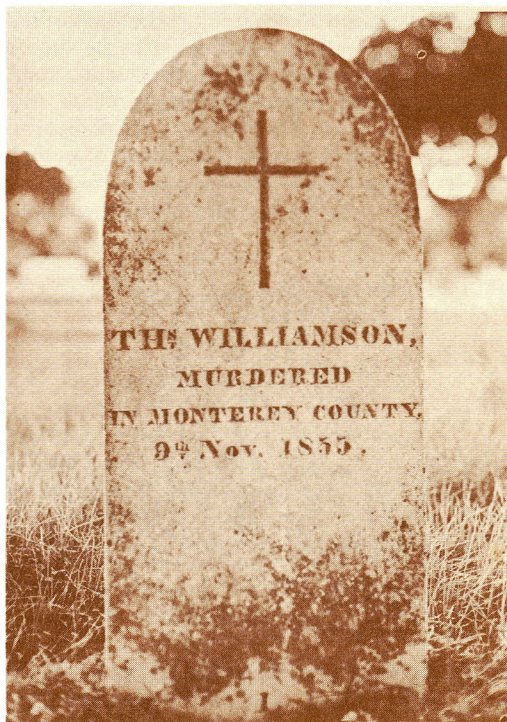
Custom House  
Monterey Aug 1st 54

Sir:

Your communication of June 3d together with enclosed letter from the Hon. Secy of the Treasury and accompanying documents have been received.

In a communication of June 10th to your office I nominated Charles Layton, as a suitable person to take charge of the Monterey Light House — I now in obedience to instructions again submit his name for principal Keeper of the Light, and propose that his salary be fixed at \$700 - per annum. So soon as I can find a suitable person for assistant Keeper who will perform the services for the salary proposed say \$500 — (being the balance of the sum stipulated in yr letter) I will submit the nomination.

/s/Isaac B. Wall  
Collector and Supnt of  
Lights in Dist



This grave in the old section of the Monterey cemetery marks one of the two victims of the unsolved crime of 1855. Beside this stone is the more elaborate iron fence enclosing the grave of Isaac Wall, his companion, and Collector of the Customs at Monterey. Photo by Roger Diefendorf

(Ed. Note: Layton was duly appointed, thus becoming the first Keeper at Point Pinos. Isaac Hitchcock was appointed assistant a few months later.)

Custom House  
Monterey

Sir:

I have officially to advise you that the Br. Barque "Amelia Thompson," Thompson, Master, from London and bound to San Franco. was stranded on the Bay of San Simeon within this Dist. on the 26th day of August 1854. Mr. Chas. H. Johnson Dept Collector and Inspector proceeded at once to the wreck to protect the interests of the Revenue Dept.

The consignees on board the vessel having chartered the Steam Tug "Carolina" & dispatched her with an agent fully authorized to secure their property & convey the same to San Franco. and that Steam Tug is now in this Port laden with such articles, among which are 8 casks of Porter contg. but 3 doz each. - Had entry of said vessel been made within this Dist., or the vessel arrived within its jurisdiction, by any other cause than distress or unavoidable accident, I should have seized the said 8 casks as well as the vessel for forfeiture under the provisions of Sec 103 Act of 1797, prohibiting the importation of Beer Ale or Porter in packages containing less than 6 dz. Doubts having arisen in my mind whether the vessel has subjected herself to any penalty thus far, she not having voluntarily arrived within this District, And the law defining the Act of Importation to be, the arrival of a vessel within a District with intent to unlode, I now officially furnish you with the information that among the cargo of the Amelia Thompson now laden on board the "Carolina" -intended to be imported into the District of San Francisco, there are 8 cases of Bottled ale, containing less than 6 doz, in violation of the act alluded to, and desire you to take such steps as in your opinion are necessary for the protection of the Revenue & all the interests of the Government.

The Carolina has also on board the anchors, chains, sail rigging, boat davits &c of the "Amelia Thompson"

I discharge the Carolina under charge of an officer of the Revenue who will duly report to you.

/s/Isaac B. Wall, Collector

R. P. Hammond Esq  
Collector, San Francisco

Custom House  
Monterey Mar 8 1855

Sir:

In compliance with direction contained in letter of the Commissioner of Customs dated Jany 25th 1855, I herewith forward to you contract with Geo. W. Hayden for Repairs on Custom House together with a separate account for the amount paid to him. The last three items amounting to \$57.60 are for work done, which you will perceive was not included in the contract.

/s/Isaac B. Wall, Collector

First Auditor  
Washington City

*(Ed. Note: From the original bill we learn that George Hayden re-built the west end of the center part of the building, re-laid tiles and shingled center building; weatherboarded the south end of the south wing; repaired the east adobe wall by bracing same and re-set the windows; plastered and whitewashed the Custom House, etc. for a total of \$495.60.)*

Custom House  
Monterey March 9/55

Sir:

In compliance with your letter dated Jany 10th 1855 requesting me to transmit to the Department a description of the Custom House building giving size, materi-



als &c, location and how the title to the Custom House site became vested in the United States, I have the honor to submit the accompanying plan and sketch of the building with the following statement.

The Custom House is an old dilapidated adobe building situated at the foot of main street, and fronting immediately on the bay — the sketch will give you a correct idea of its position. The dimensions of the site I cannot get from any record. The lines marked on the sketch embrace what is generally understood to be the Custom House lot, — but I do not know that they are correct.

There is nothing in the Archives at Monterey to show how title to the Custom House site became vested in the United States. In 1844 Gov. Pico ordered all the archives of the civil Dept. to be sent to Los Angeles. Gen'l Riley subsequently ordered them returned to Monterey, and after the organization of the state Government, to be turned over to the County Recorder of Monterey. Many of the documents were said to have been lost or destroyed— On the 1st of May 1851 the Legislature of the State of Cal. passed an Act requiring the transfer of all the Spanish Archives, then in possession of the County Recorder & County Clerk of Monterey County bearing date *previous* to the adoption of the Constitution of the state, to the office of the Secy of State Sec 2d of said Act provides that “all the archives relating to the Custom House & Military shall be delivered by the Secy of State to such person as may hereafter be authorized by the gov't of the United States to receive the same”

I am not informed as to what papers there are in the office of the Secy. of State relating to the Custom House at Monterey, but will take measures to ascertain as soon as practicable and inform the Department.

I am informed by David Spence Esqur. who was for many years prefect at Monterey that the Custom House site was a reservation made by the King of Spain and that the Custom House was commenced by the old Spanish authorities and finished by the Mexican government.

/s/Isaac B. Wall  
Collector Dist Monterey

Hon. James Guthrie  
Sec of Treasy

Custom House  
Monterey 17th Nov. 1855

Sir:

It is my painful duty to inform you that Isaac B. Wall Collector of Customs for the Dist of Monterey was assassinated on the morning of the 9th inst. upon the road to San Luis Obispo, to which place he was going on business.

Information of the fact reached this place on the evening of the 10th when I in company with other personal friends of the deceased went to the spot where the murder was committed & recovered the body which we brought to Monterey and buried with appropriate services.

I am Inspector of Customs for the Port of San Luis Obispo & with the consent of Mr. Wall was on a visit to this place, where I was detained in consequence of severe family affliction. Mr. Wall left me in charge of this office during his supposed temporary absence, and I shall continue to perform such duties as may be legal and necessary until steps are taken by the proper authorities to appoint his successor.

/s/Chs. H. Johnson  
Inspector of Customs  
Dist of Monterey

To Hon James Guthrie  
Secretary of the Treasury

(Ed. Note: E. L. Williams, business man of Monterey, and contemporary of Isaac Wall wrote an article about the murder some years later. Williams stated that Isaac B. Wall, Collector at Monterey in 1855, was a widely known and respected citizen. Wall had just been presented with a Minie rifle, and asked Williams to go to San Luis Obispo with him on a hunting trip to try the rifle. Due to urgent mail received the day before they were to leave, Williams could not go. Wall, not wishing to wait, left the following morning from the Washington Hotel in Monterey, accompanied by Thomas Williamson. Williamson was a shoemaker who had come from Texas three years before, had been elected constable in Monterey, and was a good companion for the trip.

The two travelers stopped the first night at Rancho Guadalupe in Salinas Valley, leaving there at eight the following morning. At nine a.m. the same day servants at Rancho Gonzales, about six miles further south, heard shots and soon after saw a riderless frightened horse approaching. They recognized the horse as belonging to Captain Briscoe Baldwin of Monterey. Wall had borrowed the horse from Baldwin for the trip. Wall and Williamson were found shot.

According to Williams, Anastacio Garcia was suspected of the crime, arrested and placed in the Monterey jail to await trial. A mob of men took Garcia from the jail and hung him.

Williams believed that Garcia was the victim of current prejudices against Mexicans, and he was a suspect of rustling.

Williams further stated that he believed the deed to have been committed by two men who lived in Carmel Valley. The men were of bad reputation, had passed through Soledad the same day of the double murder, and it was rumoured that they went to Sonora, Mexico.

The bodies of Wall and Williamson were brought back to the Fort at Monterey and prepared for burial under the supervision of Captain Baldwin. Then they were carried in solemn procession to the cemetery.

The body of Williamson was turned over to the Padre for services, and E. L. Williams was called on to say the prayers for Wall as there was no Protestant minister in Monterey at the time.)

—A. K.

## MONTEREY ADRIFT IN THE DOLDRUMS, 1849-1870

Monterey was left high and dry by the Gold Rush. Ships that had previously made their first call and shown their merchandise in the old capital now hastened past, all bound for the Port of Gold. So devastating was the blow to Monterey that enterprising men like Thomas Larkin quickly left for the lush fields of real estate and business speculation in San Francisco, and while San Francisco labored in a frenzy of activity, Monterey stagnated. The waterfront of San Francisco bristled with the spars of bare-masted ships whose crews and captains had struck out for the diggings; Monterey's heart leaped at the sight of an occasional coastal steamer. Seven months after the find at Coloma, Walter Colton wrote, "General Mason, Lieutenant Lanman and myself form a mess . . . This morning for the fortieth time we had to take to the kitchen and cook our own breakfast. A general of the U. S. Army, the commander of a man-of-war and the alcalde of Monterey sit in a smoking kitchen grinding coffee, toasting a herring and peeling onions." Every soldier and sailor who was able had stampeded to the mines with the civilians.

The only cheerful, albeit completely false note was sounded by Bayard Taylor who came to Monterey in 1849 to attend the Constitutional Convention. In the brief month and a half that the convention sat, the Monterenos made a valiant

\* Colton, Rev. Walter, *Three Years in California*, New York, 1850, page 247.



effort to secure an income equal to that of the gold fields and Taylor was properly dazzled. "The trade of Monterey is rapidly on the increase. During my stay of five weeks several houses were built, half a dozen stores opened and four hotels were established, one of which was kept by a Chinaman. There were at least ten arrivals and departures of vessels, exclusive of steamers within that time and I was creditably informed that the Collector of the Port had during the previous five months, received about \$150,000 in duties. Provisions of all kinds are cheaper than in San Francisco, but merchandise brings a higher price. At the Washington House, kept by a former private in Col. Stevenson's regiment, I obtained excellent board at \$12 a week. The building which belongs to an Italian named Albert Tusconi, rented for \$1,200 monthly. Rents of all kinds were high, \$200 a month having been paid for rooms during the session of the Convention.

"There was a good deal of speculation in lots and many of the sales, although far short of the extravagant standard of San Francisco, were still sufficiently high. A lot 75 x 25 feet, with a small frame store upon it, was sold for \$5,000. A one-story house, with a lot about 50 x 75 feet, in the outskirts of town, was held at \$6,000. This is about the average rate of property, and told well for a town that was deserted a year previously and which only six months before contained no accommodations of any kind for the traveller."<sup>2</sup>

By 1851, however, the first gorgeous flush of the gold and speculation fever was over. Business slackened even in San Francisco. The gambling houses were hard put to pay their musicians and cautious bets of twenty-five cents were no longer scorned at tables where yellow gold dust had freely poured. In the winter of '52-'53 San Francisco was crowded with destitute miners. Monterey, long before left in the backwash, had already sunk into apathy, her five hundred inhabitants once again snugly settled into the routine of an isolated, tightly-knit Mexican village.

While the Mariposa mines and the southern diggings were in full swing, the merchants of these mining areas kept Monterey's head above oblivion. Traders from the Sierra foothills occasionally drove pack trains consisting of from fifty to one hundred and fifty mules to the seaport, purchased merchandise to the value of \$6,000 to \$8,000 each and paid for it in gold dust fresh from the creeks at \$16 an ounce. The canny middlemen in Monterey then sent the gold dust to New York where the price was \$18 an ounce and pocketed an additional profit. However, this lonely commerce died out after the brief Kern River gold strike of 1854-55.

In 1862 Hubert H. Bancroft sent out a questionnaire to the prominent citizens of California towns in preparation for the publication of a *Handbook of Travel for the Pacific States*. His informant at Monterey, George W. Bird, in response to the query, "What are the peculiarities of your town that most impress the stranger?" wrote in a bold hand "Dullness" and circled the word heavily.<sup>3</sup>

This was not the only unkind remark made about the "old Pacific capital." Far-roving correspondents for the newspapers of San Francisco and San Jose occasionally stepped aside from the main-travelled roads, observed back-sliding Monterey and sadly shook their heads. "Monterey is now last in the fierce race of competition which is ever raging among the towns of California. The streets are in many places bisected by large cuts, through which a stream of water trickles and a flock of ducks enjoys the coolness and the mud. One naturally asks on first entering Monterey, 'Where are the people?' Certainly not in the streets, for there cows and geese hold uninterrupted procession, with the exception of a very occasional loungee at the door of a store. The homes seem as if the shadow of a

<sup>2</sup> Taylor, Bayard, *Eldorado*, New York, 1850, Vol. I, Pages 139-141.

<sup>3</sup> *Bancroft Scrapbooks*, Vol. VII, Nov. 2, 1860. (Courtesy Bancroft Library, University of California.



centennial sleep had fallen over them and Monterey is inhabited by some hundred Rip Van Winkles.”<sup>4</sup>

The passage of time did not improve Monterey but only mellowed it. In July, 1868, the travelling correspondent for the *Alta California* of San Francisco commented, “I see but little alteration since I was here 15 years ago, except in the more dilapidated appearance of the place. The population remains about the same,- some 1,500,- there being a considerable proportion of women over men among the old native portion. Several of the families once in affluent circumstances are now reduced to the extremest poverty.

“I found my old friend and fellow-traveller across the continent in 1843,- Milton Little - still a fixture here where he has resided since coming to the country. He owns considerable property in and around he town and once thought himself rich in its possession, but the going down and staying down of the prosperity of Monterey has caused him, like others here similarly situated, to struggle hard to support his large family.”<sup>5</sup>

A year later another journalist drifted through. “Everything here is intensely Mexican. The buildings are nearly all adobes. The streets diverge and converge at all sorts of angles without any regard to taste or convention. Sidewalks there are none, and from being used as a cow common, the streets are not overly cleanly. We doubt if a new building has been erected in the town within the last ten years. One-third of the buildings there already appear vacant. The lazy vultures roost upon the roofs and cock their eyes at all newcomers with a sort of regretful expression as if to say, ‘Please don’t disturb us’.”<sup>6</sup>

While Monterey dozed away the sunny hours, the Salinas and San Benito areas came to life, and in 1860, according to the *Bancroft Scrapbook* of 1867, the county of Monterey contained more sheep than any other county in the United States,- and 100,000 cattle pastured on its grassy hills and bottom lands. The one industry of which Monterey could boast was its whaling, but even this had seen better days. The whales were killed from shorebased boats, manned almost exclusively by Portuguese, who set out every day on the hunt and ranged over the bay and open sea at a distance of from eight to ten miles from land. The harpooners preferred the docile humpbacked whale as a target, for the grey whale, or “devilfish,” fiercely resented the chase and would round on the boats with furious tail-lashings. Slaughtered whales were towed to land, their blubber removed and tried out in pots on shore. From 1855 to 1858 about 800 barrels of oil were produced annually, but the price fluctuated wildly and the whales grew timid. By the ’70’s whaling had come to be only a part-time occupation. From April to September the harpooners and oarsmen tilled their vegetable gardens or cared for their livestock; from October to March they set their lookouts and held their longboats ready for the cry that “they were spouting in the bay.” From the Custom House east along the shore, the sand was littered with the ribs and vertebra of whales, but the end of this lone industry was apparent. Most authorities gave it no hope of continuing.

What would the old port do then? It had little to export, and could afford few imports. At the opening of the 1870’s Monterey, to all appearances, had died, and the reckless optimism of Bayard Taylor’s vision of 1849 would have aroused nothing but a pitying smile. Declaring that the miners were bound to come to the coast to winter and recover themselves from their labors, he had concluded that since Monterey had a better climate than San Francisco and living was comparatively cheap, “it will be a wonderful place for retired gold miners.”

<sup>4</sup> *San Francisco Bulletin*, April 19, 1863.

<sup>5</sup> *Alta California*, San Francisco, July 22, 1868.

<sup>6</sup> *San Jose Mercury*, July 1, 1869.

Unwittingly, Taylor came closer than anyone in indicating the key to Monterey's future success, but almost forty years were to elapse before the building of the Hotel Del Monte inaugurated the tourist rush and home-building of today.

—D. M. C.

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The Local History collection of the Monterey Public Library has been enriched recently with the addition of a number of pictures of Monterey, Carmel, and Pacific Grove points of interest in the early 1900's, as well as pictures and pamphlets of the old Del Monte Hotel of the same period. Of the books added, one relates solely to the Carmel Mission while the others refer at least in part to Monterey and its environs. All this material is available at the Library to interested persons.

Amoros, Father Juan. *Documents*; Edited by Maynard Geiger. Reprint from "The Americas," April, 1949.

Sub-titled "Reply of Mission San Carlos Borromeo to the questionnaire of the Spanish Government in 1812 concerning the native culture of the California mission Indians," the answers to the 35 questions concerning the mode of life of the California Indians were based solely on the missionaries' experience of nearly ten years among the Indians of San Carlos Borromeo Mission.

Heustis, Daniel D. *Remarkable Adventures, California, 1845*; edited by Carey S. Bliss from the 1847 Boston edition. Los Angeles, Glenn Dawson, 1957.

No. 40 in the Early California Travels Series, this 22-page excerpt from the original account of Captain Heustis' travels and adventures describes his five-month visit in California from June to November, 1845, beginning with his arrival in Monterey and his meeting with Consul Thomas O. Larkin. Most of the excerpt is devoted to an economic description of Upper California.

Duvall, Marius. *A Navy Surgeon in California, 1846-1847; the journal of Marius Duvall*; edited by Fred Blackburn Rogers. San Francisco, John Howell, c1957.

"In Dr. Duvall's journal pass in review Californians, adopted Californians, and visitors, both civilian and of the services, such as Fremont, Stockton, Sutter, General Vallejo and his family, and Dr. John Marsh. Outstanding in the book are the narrations of the trip of the 'Portsmouth's' launch to Fremont with supplies, of Sutter's establishment, of the Berryesa and Haro killings, and of the 'battle' of Santa Clara." Preface.

Farnham, J. T., Esq. *The Early days of California: embracing what I saw and heard there, with scenes in the Pacific*. [Excerpts.] Philadelphia, John E. Potter, 1860.

These excerpts from a contemporary diary include an account of landing at Monterey Bay during the period of the imprisonment of 150 American and British citizens in 1840, with a highly partisan description of Isaac Graham's uprising, and a critical evaluation of Governor Juan Baptiste Alvarado.

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The beautiful slides of Monterey taken by Mr. Claude Faw have been used by Mrs. Mary Greene and Mrs. Wm. O'Donnell in giving talks before several groups in the past months. We are grateful to these three Board members for the time they give, and the interest they have shown in furthering the purposes of the association.



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## COSAS DE INTERES PARA LOS SOCIOS

We welcome the following new members:

Mr. and Mrs. Paul D. Bartlett	Miss Patricia Curran	Mr. Don DeB. Perham
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At the directors' meeting held on December 2, after careful consideration, motions were passed to increase the membership rolls to 1,000, and to increase the single dues from \$2.50 to \$4.00, the joint family dues to \$7.00 from \$5.00, while the junior dues remained at \$1.00. The directors are faced with the fact that, with a Peninsula population of about 70,000, the present membership quota of 500 has actually grown to 650, and many persons interested in the preservation and enhancement of Historic Monterey are excluded from participation under present restrictions. Furthermore, besides sponsoring this Quarterly, the directors have begun to set aside funds for the purchase of a permanent center for the Association. In this way they wish to preserve another of Monterey's old adobes, but they have not yet accumulated enough money to start negotiations for any building. You are cordially invited to attend the annual meeting on January 20, 1958, at 8 p.m. in the U. S. O. building in Monterey. There will be the annual reports, the elections to the Board of Directors, a program of entertainment, and refreshments.

Gifts to the Association have been received from Mrs. W. R. Holman of 28 items of interest including pictures and personal belongings of the Hartnell family. Mr. George Dawson of Carmel has presented six valuable books of Californiana, including the rare first edition of C. F. McGlashan's "History of the Donner Party." Mr. and Mrs. Clyde Dorsey have given the fine Spanish costume that Mr. Dorsey wore in the Centennial celebrations.

Mrs. Tod Singleton arranged the entry for the Association in the U. S. O. table-setting contest at the Soldiers' Club and won one of the awards in the "Tea" section.