

NOTICIAS del PUERTO de MONTEREY

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

VOLUME 2, NUMBER 1

MARCH, 1958

THE NOTICIAS ENTERS ITS SECOND YEAR

Our quarterly is now one year old. A lusty infant among the older historical bulletins, its voice, according to our mail, is heard throughout the State, and its numbers are on file in those libraries and institutions whose paramount interests are historical research and public information.

We expect to continue to bring wide attention to the fascinating story of Monterey and her people, to present a panoramic view of her culture and environment, and to foster an appreciation of Monterey's key resources and treasures, her visible heritage, the old adobes and her way of life.

In this first issue of the new year, the members of the association will find not only the accustomed historical article, but the treasurer's report and the president's summary of the association's activities for 1957.

The directors and editors would appreciate your comments and suggestions.

WILLIAM CURTIS, PIONEER MERCHANT

by James F. Cosgrave

William Curtis of Monterey, civic minded merchant of the early American period, was born in Kentucky, November 18, 1824. At least part of his youth was spent in Missouri, to which state his kinfolk migrated, and he turned up in California early enough to enlist in Fremont's California Battalion October 6, 1846, in Sonoma, California. While details of his experiences as a frontiersman, pioneer, soldier, gold seeker, merchant and local politician, if available, might provide an increment of additional evidence in the reconstruction of the historical colorful West, the figure of William Curtis is interesting mainly because of records of the activities of him and his partners as general merchants in Monterey during the fifties and sixties, records which survive today and yield much information about times and people. These records speak for themselves. By contrast it is only by reference to vast numbers of related documents and family records that Curtis remains more than a shadow. No person now living is known to remember him, and no person save one is known to remember his household at about the time of his death in 1875, at which time his family left Monterey. Furthermore, uncontroverted rumors and writings — that he came west with Fremont as a trooper, that he made money selling supplies to miners during the first rush, for example — plague the issues in the life of this locally prominent, if otherwise unimportant businessman. Hence the somewhat impersonal, sketchy and perhaps incomplete nature of this chronicle.

Immediately following his mustering out, November 6, 1847, the whereabouts of Mr. Curtis remains uncertain. In March 1848 his name appears on the account books of Thomas O. Larkin in partnership with L. F. Loveland, a name separated from that of Curtis by two scant lines on the official Fremont Muster. Potatoes, beef, manteca, tea, beans, sugar, aguardiente, wine, flour, salt and coffee were purchased in quantities sufficient to feed many people. Credits included boards, "B oil," and offsets to others, but mainly boards in amounts of several thousand feet. Entries terminated three months later, and activities of the pair during this period can only be the subject of speculation. Perhaps highly significant of the character and ambition of these men was the purchase of a parcel of business property across the street and southwest from the Customs House for \$2500 in March 1849, a time when the gold fever must have been at a high pitch.

Again we must skip to the first Monterey County assessment records which start in 1850. By now Curtis was ostensibly engaged in several business enterprises, probably, as becomes more and more apparent, to take advantage of different business opportunities. Curtis and Loveland had an office, acted as business agents for out of town interests, and owned real property (including a saloon), some of which was rented out to others. They were probably engaged in other business dealings also, although Loveland begins at this point to fade from the picture, and drops out entirely in 1854. (An L. F. Loveland later in the century became a member of the San Francisco Stock Exchange.) Curtis had other partners as well. In 1850 he succeeded Robert Hamilton as a partner with Gilbert Murdock in an auction business. In 1851 they were commissioned by the French Consul at Monterey to auction the cargo from the French barque "Le Courier de Cherbourg" which put into Monterey in distress of some sort. A sampling of the list of goods includes: 2 cases containing machinery for making ice, 3 iron pots of mercury, 1 case tools for sounding, 1 case containing fold machines, 1 bbl stand for weighing, 1 case containing notice Power & fixtures, cooking utensils, glassware, nitric acid, 1 case Register book Bindery & etc, 1 case moulds & parring stones, 1 case iron piece for Press, 2 cases pertaining to a press, 4 cases containing upright binding press, hardware, 4 bbl printing ink, etc. — and of course the ever present brandy, wines, etc.

Curtis bought and sold property in his own name also by this time. Starting 1852 there are records of about 50 transactions in some 15 years. With Milton Little, Curtis entered into what was his first known dealing in the general merchandise business, in a partnership that ended during the year 1852.

Thus began, the general merchandise store became progressively larger. Pre-occupation with other ventures assumed a subordinate role, particularly after the mid-fifties. In 1857 Curtis and a new partner, Simpson Conover, built a red brick building, one of the first, perhaps the first such store building in town. Although unimposing by modern standards, Curtis & Conover served the needs of much of the English speaking element, along with some of the Spanish, until the mid-sixties. The building was constructed on the west side of Alvarado Street.

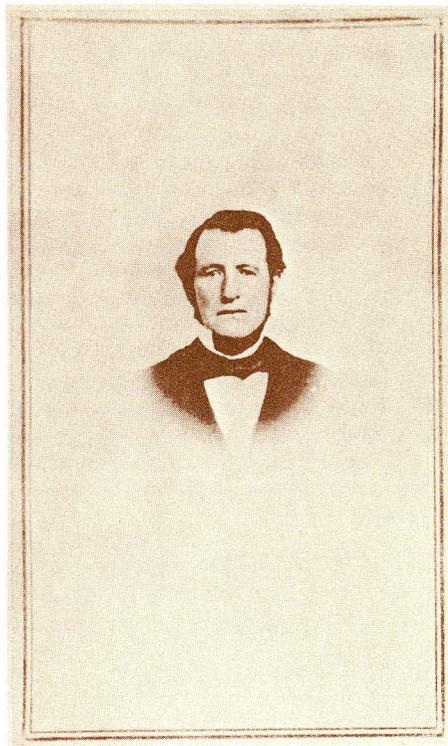
By this time we may typify Curtis, for we may know the man through his actions and accomplishments even though we have no contemporary biography. In Monterey Curtis saw future growth and prosperity which would lead to appreciated land values and increased commerce as well. This is apparent in yet extant family letters, and was an opinion no doubt shared by others, the superiority of Monterey as a port being listed as one causative factor. Generous, friendly and kind to all, public spirited, yet apparently possessing a keen business sense, he must have been one of the better known men of the town. His name appears among the records of a surprising number of ventures, commercial and civic, and he twice held public office as County Treasurer. Believed to have been short and stocky, like his progeny, we can best characterize him through his handwriting, which was firm, articulate, and at times sensitive, as though a man of education,

although this is unlikely. He was an especial friend of the Spanish Americans; he indulged his family and bound himself to provide for several Indian children, as did several other local men of his day. He voted a Democrat in politics.

Although confronted with ill health in later years, he waited out the years better than many, waiting for times which the trends of the day or the economics upon which they were based, as they seem now, with hindsight, might have forewarned against. Seemingly the focal point of all California, Monterey looked forward in anticipation when gold was discovered. The main artery of trade to the mines was through San Francisco, but miners' gold, the movement of cattle from the established ranches northward, the gradual settling of the country and other factors also swelled the volume of trade through Monterey. After 1850 when the excitement died down and ruffians no longer paraded the streets, times took a different turn. Records of Curtis & Conover and other sources indicate a gradual upturn in volume of trade at least through the middle sixties. But it was a competitive, mainly agrarian economy rather than the boom days of the gold rush era. Business letters in 1856-58 between partners of the firm of Boston & Day, a competitor, characteristically complained of "No business — long credits — no money — more competition — poor crops," and in one letter further claimed there were "22 stores, 6 of which employ a capital of at least \$40,000 & like Kilkenny cats are always striving to eat one another up." The number of stores and the capital are probably both exaggerated, but indicate the nature of competition. Each of these enterprises would strive to provide a variety of goods or services, regardless of the fundamental nature of its business, and would certainly endeavor to provide anything whatever, on order, for a price. Furthermore, few of the businesses were very stable, the very smallness of the average business making it easy for proprietors as well as customers, to move on to another more promising location. While the settlement of Monterey would attract many, almost as many would eventually drift away to a newer frontier.

A glimpse of life in Monterey during the early fifties may be obtained from an inventory of the store taken when Milton Little sold out in 1852. This inventory and other records of the Curtis and Conover store are now the property of the Monterey History and Art Association. They were given to the Association by Mrs. Millie Birks in whose family they were preserved for years, and saved from destruction.

The entire inventory only runs a little over 400 items. These items represent what was on hand at the moment, rather than what might be obtained in, say, a month's time, but even so the indication is that most patrons were mainly interested in the bare essentials necessary for frontier farming. For example, of the



Portrait of Wm. Curtis, Monterey merchant of the 1850's and 60's. From family records of Mr. James F. Cosgrave, his great grandson.

approximately 80 food items, about 40 deal with different grades and lots of only 11 basic foods, i.e., (prices are wholesale)

sugar, mats @ 6½c; sugar, loaf @ 10¾c; rice, sacks @ 5½c; flour, 100# sacks @ \$4.75; bbl mess pork; rice @ 3c; kegs lard; black tea @ 20c; coffee, sacks and bags @ 9c; corn meal @ \$14 bbl; ; bbl Navy beans @ 8½c; salt; pepper; green tea @ 40c.

A few other foods and representative prices are:

sacks onions @ 7½c; chocolate @ 18c; saleratus, kegs @ 6c; kegs mackeral; jars oysters; kegs vinegar @ 32½c; crackers, tins @ 14c lb; cheese, 20 tins, 253 lb @ 8c; mustard; prunes; raisins 55c; potatoes, bags @ 4½c; sardines; tins, @ 48½c; bbl dried apples 125 lb @ 6c; olive oil; oranges; candy, 50 lb \$15; soda bisquits, 83 lb bbl @ 14½c; bread, 265 lb bbl @8c; butter, firkin.

Lest the scanty selection be thought due to the early date of the inventory, it should be pointed out that the account books of ten years later indicate only a slightly larger variety, namely among the dried foods, spices and other items.

The Curtis store can best be described in an advertisement which appeared in the short-lived Monterey Sentinel, in 1855, just prior to Conover becoming a partner:

WILLIAM CURTIS, Dealer in
Groceries
Provisions
Liquors and Wines
Dry Goods
Hardware
Woodware
Paints and Oils
Boots and Shoes

*And all other goods usually kept in a country store,
which he will sell at the lowest market prices.*

In other words, the store sold everything they could buy somewhere else, and would also act as the agent of the buyer in the purchase of any unusual or expensive items not ordinarily handled by the store. Stores were not the neatly arranged and well managed businesses of today. For example, to quote from Isaac L. Mylar, in *Early Days at the Mission San Juan Bautista*, a not too distant settlement: "The stores of that period, 1855-60, carried general assortments — there were no ready-to-wear women's garments . . . Men's suits could be bought in the store. Men's work shirts were piled on the counter; if you wanted to buy one you picked it up and held it in front of you with a cuff in each hand and arms extended. If the tail was long enough and the sleeves about right, you bought it regardless of the size of the collar. Shirts were, generally, all the same color; either small check or hickory. Ties were seldom worn. White shirts for dress purposes had the collar attached which was worn as a standing collar. Boots were worn by all men. They were on display in boxes on the floor along the counter and were bought something like the shirts. You found the style you wanted and tried on pair after pair until you got a fit. You did not pay any attention to sizes and if the merchant had anything to attend to, he let you alone until you found a pair that would satisfy you."

To be continued in the next issue

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS The assistance of Bancroft Library, the Society of California Pioneers, and the Monterey History and Art Association in making available source material is hereby gratefully acknowledged. The author is especially indebted to Mrs. William E. Kneass of the latter association for information and encouragement. (Editor's Note: Mr. James F. Cosgrave, now a resident of San Francisco, is the greatgrandson of William Curtis, whose biography he has traced here from family papers and research.)

JOHN O. TOSTEVIN
Public Accountant
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 MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

Monterey History and Art Association
 Statement of Income and Expense, January 1 to December 1, 1957

INCOME:

Postcards	\$ 781.45	
Less Cost of Cards	240.00	\$ 541.45
Merienda	\$1,177.00	
Less Expenses	1,277.40	(100.40)
Doll Sale		10.50
Interest on Savings		25.69
Adobe Tour	\$1,118.00	
Expenses over reimbursement	32.21	1,085.79
Memberships		1,604.50
NET INCOME		\$3,167.53

EXPENSES:

Meetings	\$ 238.32	
Stamps, Notices, Etc.	751.78*	
Historical Markers	78.35	
Gifts of Appreciation	247.10	
Insurance	144.30	
Dues and Associations	25.00	
Furniture Purchases	24.48	
TOTAL EXPENSES		1,509.33
Remaining Income not spent		\$1,658.20
Less Transfer to Savings		1,052.50
BALANCE		\$ 605.70

December 1956 Bank Balance	\$1,549.30	
Deposits January to October	5,109.93	\$6,659.23
Less Checks		\$4,531.92
Bank Balance October 18, 1957		\$2,127.31
Savings Account	\$1,052.50	
Interest (June)	25.68	\$1,078.18
Total Bank and Savings		\$3,205.49

Submitted by Mrs. W. M. O'Donnell, Secretary-Treasurer

*Includes \$485 for printing of quarterly bulletin, *Noticias del Puerto de Monterey* (Editor)

THE PRESIDENT SURVEYS THE YEAR'S WORK

At the General Meeting of the Association held in the U. S. O. Building on January 20, some 200 members gathered to hear the yearly reports of Secretary-Treasurer Mayo Hayes O'Donnell and President James van Loben Sels, elect members to the Board of Directors, enjoy the fine voice of Mr. Ted Cross in a group of songs, and go back in spirit one hundred years as Mr. Francis Price of Santa Barbara described "Life on the California Ranchos."

Mrs. O'Donnell's statement of the Association's financial position may be found on page 5 of this issue. President van Loben Sels, describing the past year's activities, traced the development of the Association from that January 19, 1931, when it was determined to establish a society devoted to the history and art of Monterey. That Association, at the end of 1957, had grown to 647 members, and the membership limit had been raised to one thousand.

Mr. van Loben Sels praised the cooperation of his hardworking, loyal Board of Directors, and named the projects which the Association has undertaken during the year. High on the list he mentioned the inauguration of the *Noticias del Puerto de Monterey*, a quarterly bulletin of Historic Monterey, which, besides announcing meetings, decisions of the directors, programs and news of interest to the membership, has also published original articles dealing with the romantic past of the "Old Pacific Capital."

The sale of postcards in the Old Custom House, Old Theater, Stevenson House and Old Pacific Building has been well worth while. The Association's reprint of Robert Louis Stevenson's "Old Pacific Capital," a handsome little booklet on sale at the Stevenson House, has also been a success, the president noted. He went on to declare that the entire membership should be aware of, and appreciate, the volunteer service that the curators of the four buildings perform for our Association and for the traveling public in this matter.

Claude Faw's beautiful colored photograph slides of the interiors and exteriors of historic adobes of Monterey have aroused great interest. The president estimated that the pictures have been shown to over one thousand persons in the organizations that have asked for them. Mr. Faw, Mrs. Mary Greene and Mrs. O'Donnell have carried on this valuable educational program.

The annual Merienda in Memory Garden celebrated Monterey's 187th birthday on June 1 with an attendance of over 400 notables. The City of Monterey, the Monterey Fair Association, the Army and the Navy, as well as many members of the Association worked together to make the fiesta a memorable success. Miss Margaret Jacks, as is her custom, gave the enormous and beautiful birthday cake. Miss Camille Stahl was a charming Favorita, escorted by her watchful Duena, Mrs. Mary Greene, and two pretty attendants, Miss Mimi Doud and Miss Molly Costello. The Rev. Father Michael MacInnes gave the invocation and the Monterey Peninsula Civic Ballet presented original dances.

"We extend thanks to Mrs. Harry Toulmin, the donor of the Larkin House, Mrs. Wesley Heard of the Alvarado House, Dr. and Mrs. Mast Wolfson of the Boronda Adobe, Mrs. Mary Greene of the Casa Soto, Miss Margaret Jacks of the Castro Adobe, Mrs. Guy Catlin of the Sherman Rose Adobe, Mrs. William O'Donnell of the Casa Soberanes, the Old Capital Club for the Casa Amesti, and to the Casa Abrego Club for its adobe. The Adobe House Tour, a famous feature of the Association's work, was held in August with these nine of our most historic and attractive old residences open for the afternoon," President van Loben Sels acknowledged.

A month previous, on July 7, the Association and the Navy League sponsored the 111th anniversary of the landing of Commodore Sloat and the raising of the American flag over the Old Customs House. Allen Knight was in charge of the event, which has been growing in attendance and enthusiasm since its centennial

re-enactment in 1946. The president thanked the members of the United States Army and Navy and the committee members for their cooperation in this historic event.

"We will certainly miss the genial personality of Dr. Harry Brownell at the Merienda this year," said Mr. van Loben Sels, expressing the regret of the Association for the sudden death of Dr. Brownell. For years he had taken charge of the barbeque at the celebration, and was a willing worker for the ideals of the Association almost from its inception. Another cause for regret was the retirement of Mrs. Mary Greene as Curator of the Old Customs House, but the directors have insisted that she continue her outstanding work on the Board, and her acceptance is cause for rejoicing.

Regarding the rise in dues, the president explained that although the Association has concluded a very successful year financially, a number of its funds are earmarked for special projects, such as the Colonel Roger S. Fitch Memorial, a Building Fund, and the publication of the *Noticias*. The expenses of the Merienda outran the income, and acquisitions of historic value must be provided for. The articles entrusted to the Association and on exhibit in the various museums are now insured, and accident insurance has also been taken out to cover the Adobe House Tours and Merienda.

Among the projects yet to be completed are the installation in the Friendly Plaza of the Colonel Roger S. Fitch Memorial fountain and pool and the eventual acquisition of an Association clubhouse. Two other matters of prime importance are the restoration to the people of Monterey of the Old Cuartel park area now used by the Standard Oil Station, and the keenest attention and vigilance in the question of traffic patterns versus the old adobes.

At the conclusion of the president's remarks, he emphasized the importance to the Association of the fine support of the membership and his personal appreciation for the devoted help of the members on various committees.

COSAS DE INTERES PARA LOS SOCIOS

The excellent colored slides of historic Monterey taken by Claude Faw and the accompanying commentary by Mary Greene have been enjoyed by several groups in the past few months. Mrs. Greene and Mr. Faw gave an evening's showing to the *Voyageurs* of the Church of the Wayfarer in Carmel, and Mrs. W. M. O'Donnell presented the slides and a commentary to the California Pioneers of Santa Clara County in San Jose.

Sunset Magazine is interested in publishing an itinerary of the Association's Adobe House Tours. President James van Loben Sels appointed Mrs. M. R. Gragg, Mrs. Wesley Heard and Mrs. W. M. O'Donnell as a committee to decide on the date for this year.

Mrs. Marje Eliassen and her committee have prepared lavender sachet bags, made from the flowers grown at Colton Hall, for sale on behalf of the Association.

Mrs. Armin Hansen has given to the Association the press upon which her husband made his world-famous etchings. Myron Oliver informs us that the press was once used by the U. S. Mint in Philadelphia.

On February 20, the Monterey History and Art Association placed a bronze marker on a lichen-covered granite boulder near Munras Avenue. The marker records the 1942 gift to the City of Monterey by Misses L., M. and V. Jacks of a park area to be known as Don "Dahvee" Park in memory of their father, David Jacks. Many members of the Board of Directors and the City of Monterey were present, as well as Miss Margaret Jacks, Don "Dahvee's" daughter.

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COSAS DE INTERES PARA LOS SOCIOS

Life membership certificates have been issued to the following members in 1957. The certificates, printed a number of years ago at the Grabhorn Press for then-President Thomas W. Norris, denote a contribution of \$50 to the Building Fund of the Association.

Misses Ardella and Alice Work, Mr. and Mrs. W. R. Holman, Mr. R. H. Partridge, Mr. J. F. van Loben Sels, Miss Edna Browning, Mr. S. F. B. Morse, Mrs. John Cooper, Mrs. Carrol Votaw, Mrs. B. A. Hackney, Mr. and Mrs. W. E. van Loben Sels, and Professor and Mrs. Robert Giet.

We welcome the following new members to our Association; their interest and cooperation are appreciated.

Commander Kathryn Dougherty, U. S. N., Peter Eaton (junior member), Mr. and Mrs. Wm. J. Farlinger, Mrs. C. Parker Fox, Mrs. Sylvia Garrison, Mrs. Helen Haber, Mrs. Helen Hoxey, Mr. Arthur C. Hull, Mrs. Anne Issler, Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Mathys, Mr. and Mrs. Al Parker, Admiral and Mrs. E. E. Stone, Mr. and Mrs. Rudolph ver Mehr, Jr., and Mr. and Mrs. Elwood Wilson.

The Directors accepted with regret the resignation of Mrs. C. D. Hyde from the Board. Mr. Ted Durein was elected at the general membership meeting in January to fill the vacancy.

The next meeting of the membership of the Association will be held at the Monterey U. S. O. Building on March 31, according to a decision of the directors at their March 3rd meeting. Mrs. Mary Greene is in charge of the program, but the details are still to be worked out and will be given to the members soon.

Another item of importance to the membership at large is the setting of the date for the annual birthday party of Monterey. This year it will be held in Memory Garden, as customary, and on Saturday, June 7. President James van Loben Sels and Mrs. Mayo Hayes O'Donnell are working on the preliminary arrangements.

Allen Knight, chairman of the committee to commemorate the landing of Commodore John Drake Sloat and the raising of the American flag over the Custom House on July 7, 1846, gave a progress report at the March meeting of the Board of Directors. The date for the observance of the occasion is tentatively set for Saturday, July 5, and it is expected that a strong contingent of the U. S. Navy will be on hand, as well as other ships.

The directors would appreciate receiving the gift of a punchbowl, glasses and a ladle. Our membership has grown so that one bowl is inadequate at our meetings. Telephone Mrs. W. M. O'Donnell if you have these items to spare.