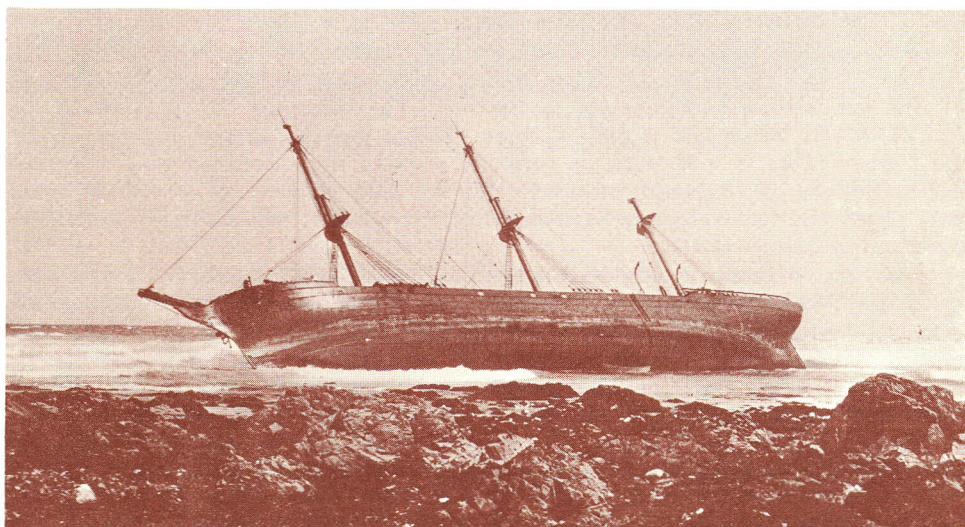


NOTICIAS del PUERTO de MONTEREY

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

Vol. V, Number 4

DECEMBER, 1961



The Wreck of the RODERICK DHU, 1909

Courtesy Ship Collection of Allen Knight

A Tragic Christmas In Monterey Bay

The Christmas seasons brought gaiety, song, feasting and ceremony to old Monterey. The bells of the presidio church of San Carlos were echoed by the peals from the mission of Carmel, just over the pine-clad ridge of hills, as Indians and "gente de razon" brightened the short days of December with festival.

On one occasion, however, the Christmas tide brought sorrow and loss, and initiated a long list of tragedies along the rugged seashore near the old Pacific capital. On the afternoon of December 21, 1834, the barkentine *Natalia* was driven ashore and totally wrecked within sight of the Old Custom House. Down under the smothering sands went not only the hulk of the valiant little ship, but most of the worldly goods and supplies of a party of settlers who had come up from Mexico to people the Santa Rosa Valley and furnish a bulwark against the Russians on the northern frontier. Among those thwarted pioneers was Florencio Serrano, whose adobe house is now the home of the Monterey History and Art Association.

Apparently Don Florencio was not in Monterey at the moment of the shipwreck, but his fellow-colonist Agustin Janssens was, and the following account is the record of an eye-witness. Don Joaquin Gomez, a local official, asked young Janssens to carry a dinner invitation that afternoon to the captains of the *Natalia* and the American packet *Lagoda* (remembered as *Aurora* by Janssens), which were the only ships in the harbor. Janssens met the Yankee skipper on the beach just as he was to be rowed out to his ship. The captain accepted the invitation with alacrity, but as they stood talking, he kept eying the sky and bay and finally begged to be excused from the dinner, for he feared a storm from the north or northwest. He advised Janssens not to go out to the *Natalia*, but offered to give the dinner invitation to Captain Gomez of that vessel as he passed her.

The dinner party on shore was about half way through the meal when the wind began to blow like fury. A servant came in and told the guests that the ships were in difficulty. Everyone jumped up and ran outside. Some went down to the beach. "The wind was so strong that it blew down several pine trees and tore off some roof tiles.

"On the brigantine *Natalia* the anchor chain broke. The crew threw out another anchor, and that was also lost. Sail was hoisted on the sprit, which was even more futile. The American ship was fortunate in having no cables broken and so did not lose an anchor, although nothing remained standing but the main masts.

"The *Natalia* hoisted a signal flag seeking help, but it was not possible to render it, for the customs boat capsized in the surf. The brigantine drifted toward the Salinas River, but before it arrived there, the sea drove it ashore in front of the sand dunes. Efforts were made to turn the prow to the shore, but they were not successful and she beached broadside. We all rushed there to see if we could save those who had fallen or been flung into the water, and some of the sailors were dragged from the surf.

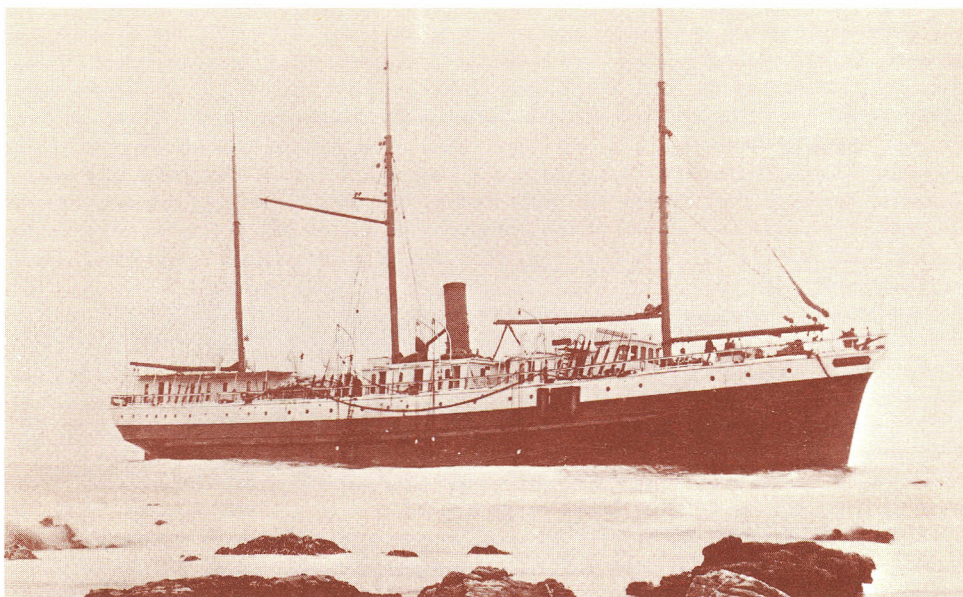
"Aid arrived, sent by Captain Munoz, commander of the artillery. Munoz himself came, and many people from Monterey, all setting to work with determination. But the most outstanding among them was a young negro cook of Don Joaquin Gomez. No sooner did he arrive at the beach than he threw himself into the water and brought in some of the shipwrecked men. The little old man, Sailing Master Cuevas, . . . was on one of the mess tables, and from there the little negro took him and brought him to land. Captain Gomez was on deck, but was stunned by the spars and other things which had fallen upon him. From there the little negro rescued him also.

"A Swiss came in with the surf, and with great labor and under great danger of being carried away by the waves, we succeeded in saving him. Three more men were carried in, but before they could be succored, the sea took them and they perished: these were the cook and two sailors"*1 A guard was left to recover whatever might be cast up, but at midnight the ship broke in two. Later, there was great looting of the cargo.

It is interesting to note how this unrelieved tragedy has become distorted. Although accurately reported in that Bible of Californiana, Bancroft's *History of California*, the American Guide Series otherwise valuable book "*Monterey Peninsula*", issued by Stanford University in 1941, declares that the *Natalia* was a smuggling vessel and that the crew was carousing ashore when the anchor chain broke and the ship went on the rocks.

Apparently the currents shifted the remains of the wreck westward along the beach until it came to rest near the pier. During the intervening ninety years, it

*1- Ellison, William H. and Price, Francis, editors, *The Life and Adventures in California of Don Agustin Janssens*, Huntington Library, San Marino, California, 1953, pg 28-30.



Wreck of the Steamer **ST. PAUL** ashore Point Joe, August 18, 1896
 Courtesy Ship Collection of Allen Knight

was exposed at least twice before September, 1924, when Henry Leppert took advantage of a very low tide and succeeded in bringing ashore eleven knees, four timbers and some teak ribs which still retained their handmade copper bolts. In Allen Knight's ship museum in Carmel is one of the knees, made of lignam vitae wood that is more durable than iron. Leppert gave the other mementos of Monterey's most tragic wreck to the Chamber of Commerce when it was on Alvarado Street, but when it moved to its new building in 1929, the remains of the *Natalia* were dispersed. Some of them eventually found their way to the Old Custom House. Other planks and beams may be seen at the Casa Abrego, in whose construction they were used.

Throughout the years that followed, more than one vessel came to grief on the rocky shore of the Monterey coast. A little more than ten years after the loss of the *Natalia*, in July, 1845, the English schooner *Star of the West* was wrecked at Point Lobos. She had a very valuable cargo aboard, and for a few days Monterey was deserted while all the able-bodied men galloped over to Carmel Bay and loaded their carts and horses high with casks of liquor, bolts of cloth and foreign fineries that were seldom seen on this frontier. The wrecking was dangerous. Three men were drowned in their eagerness to reap the bounty of the sea, but the rewards were great for the lucky ones. Homeward across the meadows of Point Lobos and the Carmel Valley near the mission trundled the clumsy carts, piled so high with plunder that something fell off at each awkward wheel-lurch.*2

In 1900, while a field on Point Lobos was being plowed, the plowshare turned up a copper-bronze ship's bell. The point of the plowshare had driven a hole in the bell which was solidly packed with earth. Louis Slevin of Carmel obtained the bell, and after his death, this solitary relic of the ill-fated vessel came to rest in Allen Knight's collection.

From the wreck of the *Natalia* until the sinking of the coastal steamer *Los Angeles* at Point Sur on April 22, 1894, at least seven other ships went down on

*2- Bancroft, H. H., **History of California**, Vol. IV, 568.

the grim south coast or exposed anchorages of the bay. In 1837, the *Commodore Rogers*, a brig, foundered off the rocks of Monterey. Her companionway doors may still be seen at the Old Whaling Station. In 1854, the *W. T. Wheaton* went under near Point Sur and the British bark *Emily Thompson* went ashore at San Simeon and was destroyed. The schooner *Julius Pringle* stranded off Pajaro beach in 1863. The bark *Harlech Castle*, loaded with grain, went on the rocks at Piedras Blancas, north of San Simeon in 1869, and in the same year, the steamer *Sierra Nevada*, in a heavy fog, struck at the same spot and sank. In 1873, the unfortunate *Ventura* ripped her heart out on the rock that still bears her name just south of Point Sur.

The wreck of the *Los Angeles*, in which six men drowned, was wholly avoidable. The night was dark with a slight haze, the sea a gentle swell, the wind light. The *Los Angeles* was just over thirty years old. She had been built as the revenue cutter *Wayanda* (*Wyandotte*?) in 1863 and was condemned for government service before Goodall Perkins Company bought her for the coastwise passenger traffic. Her length was 170 feet, her beam 27 feet, and her tonnage 423. In her engine room was a hundred horsepower engine; although she had masts and booms, they were mostly used for hoisting heavy cargo aboard.

On the fatal night, there were 49 men, women and children as passengers and a crew of 36. Captain Herman Leland gave a graphic description of the accident before the coroner's inquest held at Bagby's Opera House in Monterey on April 23rd.

"We left San Simeon at 2:50 P.M. (80 tons of wool brought aboard), and when off Point Piedras Blancas I set a compass course of Northwest by $1/4$ North which would clear all danger until we reached Point Sur. I was on deck from 7:30 A.M. to 7:30 P.M. At that time I decided to lie down and I went to the Third Officer, Mr. Roger Ryfkogel, who had the deck watch and told him to call me when abeam of Cooper's Point, five miles southeast of Point Sur. He said, "All right, Sir, I will do so." I went to my room next to the pilot house. The Third Officer came again and said, "Did you say to call you?" I repeated my instructions to call me at Cooper's Point. The Point Sur light was plainly visible 18 miles away to the northwest.

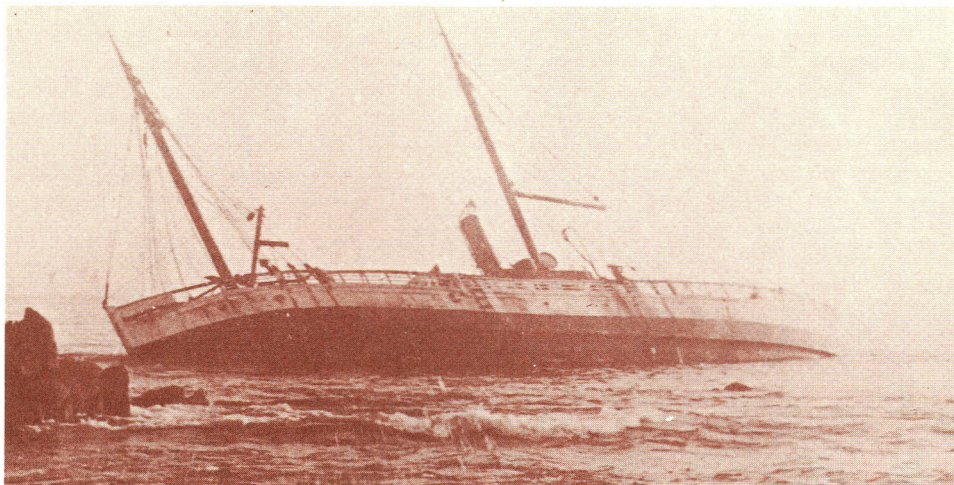
"At 9:15 P.M. I heard the ship strike. I immediately rushed out of my berth and into the wheelhouse and yelled to the helmsman, "Hard to starboard!" The man replied that the wheel was already over as far as it would go. I said, "How did this happen? Why did you not call me at Point Cooper as I told you?" The officer in charge, Ryfkogel, said, "Captain, we are not yet off Point Sur." I told him, "Cooper's Point is three miles astern!" I told him she was fast on the rocks and that this meant death for us. We fired rockets and sent up signal lights until we sank.

"I went to the engine room. She was making water with lightening-like rapidity. She was filling fast. A passenger, Captain McGinnis of the *Whitelaw*, volunteered to assist in getting the passengers aboard the lifeboats, women and children first. He deserves great credit for his brave conduct.

"The steam pipe exploded. We loaded a lifeboat and pushed it off safely. At that moment the ship started slipping off the reef. There was lots of water under us, enough to cover the vessel. We hastened the passengers into the boats and cut away the liferaft, but it was difficult to get people to leave the ship. Only one man got aboard the liferaft. Finally the four boats and the raft cleared the ship."³

Suddenly the steamer took a plunge and went down stern first, "and a quick plunge it was." Those left aboard sprang into the rigging and climbed up. When the ship touched bottom, the upper twenty feet of the masts were the only things left above water. In the cold and dark, the waves rocked the masts to and fro,

*3- San Francisco Chronicle, April 24, 1894.



The GIPSY, Wrecked 1905

Courtesy Ship Collection of Allen Knight

and as the ship rolled, the men clinging to the lines were alternately doused in and out of the icy water.

The boats rowed away, heavily laden. One boat came wandering back to pick up the stranded men, but lost its way in the dark and gave up the search. Clinging to the rigging with death-grips, the captain and the survivors cried for help. "It was pitiful to hear, heart-rending." An exhausted crewman fell into the sea and drowned. An elderly passenger drifted by and they could not reach him.

After an hour, the heroic Captain McGinnis and his lifeboat appeared out of the black, swirling waters. He had landed his boatload on the beach two miles below Point Sur.

"Jump and swim to the lifeboat, Captain!"

"I cannot; I am too far gone. Save the others."

Taking a chance of having his lifeboat stove in by floating wreckage or crushed by the gyrating masts, McGinnis rescued Captain Leland and a passenger from the main mast and the Second Mate and two passengers from the after mast. All the way in through the surf, they strove to bring the half-drowned men to, and continued the work on the beach with such good effect that only one died.

On the beach, the dawn broke over the wet, cold, miserable survivors. The lifeboats had all swamped coming in to the beach. Five persons had perished from salt water, exposure and shock. One Chinese was still missing and presumed drowned.

Those who could stand the trip over the rough coast road were brought to Monterey by wagon, and all were loud in praise of driver Artellan whose dexterity saved them from a second disaster when the wagon tongue broke on a steep grade. The other victims of the shipwreck were taken off the beach by the boats of the coastal vessel *Eureka*, southbound from San Francisco, and carried to Monterey. The rest of the sad journey to San Francisco was made by train.

At the inquest, Third Officer Ryfkogel showed in his haggard countenance the terrible strain he suffered. "I changed course on my own account. I thought we were abreast of the light and it was customary to change course there. I did my best according to my judgement."

Captain Leland declared that the loss of the vessel was not exactly due to negligence but to miscalculation. Ryfkogel had not recognized Cooper's Point.

"I had great confidence in him. He is a able seaman. He has been in the employ of the company for several years and has been on the *Los Angeles* for six months. Several times he has been in charge of the steamer while passing Point Sur in safety. A current must have carried us inshore, or the steering was faulty. *Another thirty feet more to the west and we would have cleared the rocks.*"

Ryfkogel was found guilty of disobeying the positive orders of Captain Leland, arrested and charged with manslaughter by the coroner's jury. What happened to him thereafter we have been unable to trace.

Up through the years, the toll taken by the sea mounts. August 8, 1896, saw the *St. Paul*, a coastal steamer, wrecked at Point Joe. In the museum of Allen Knight is the ship's bridge log, picked up soaking from the waves. It is illegible in the early pages, but the last page reads clearly, "Went on the rocks off Point Joe, 17 Mile Drive, near Pacific Grove."

Built in 1875 in Philadelphia, she was an iron barkentine, screw driven, with yards on her foremast, 889 gross tons, 197 feet long and 31 feet in beam. Captain Erskine was her skipper from her launching until 1893. In 1896 Captain Von Helm was in command, but strangely enough, that is not the partially illegible name written as master in the bridge log. When the *St. Paul* was wrecked, she was loaded with calves and sheep from San Simeon. For three months the ship lay grinding on the rocks, then one night she broke up and disappeared. Her crew had been rescued by the steamer *Gypsy*, herself destined to sail only nine more years before crashing on the ledges off present day Cannery Row.

In 1905 there were two sinkings in Monterey Bay. The *Northland* left little record, but the *Gipsy*, another of those pack-mules of the coastal trade before the railroad got to Los Angeles in 1901, and for twenty years thereafter the means of communication for the isolated sea-coast settlements and ranches, had a notable eyewitness. Charles Warren Stoddard, the well-known author, was then living in Monterey in a waterfront house now to be torn down for urban renewal. His diary is now owned by our association, and from it we get an on-the-spot impression of the loss of the *Gipsy*.

"Thursday 28th Sept-'05

Out of a dead sleep I was awakened: I did not know if it was night or day - today or tomorrow! The house was full of voices. Men, apparently in great excitement, were all over it. Every body was talking and no voice sounded quite natural. I looked at my watch; eleven o'clock. Evidently something had happened, but I was so sleepy with natural sleep that I could not keep my eyes open. Two men were in the room next to me. They were restless. Were silent a long time and then would exchange a word. It seemed mysterious but I could not waken to speculate.

"Behold! The mystery is solved. The Captain and his officers-seven men all told, slept in this house last night. No wonder I was wakened! I knew nothing of this until I heard the child across the street ask if anyone was killed!

"At breakfast I heard of the wreck and went out by trolley immediately after. Quite in front of McAbee's bath houses, before the little cove, that like an amphitheatre enclosed the scene, lay the wreck.

"Thousands went to see it. I never before saw so fresh a wreck in process of dissolution. It was almost tragic in its helplessness. The little ship struck a rock last night about nine-thirty. The rocks penetrated its vitals. While I was there, the poor thing, slowly dying, swung to and fro upon this picot, and rose and fell at long intervals, as if it were drawing a deep breath, or gasping. Wreckers went out to it, many of them fishermen, landmen, soldiers, sailors, and kids, or climbed over it as if they were flys on a fresh carcass. Once a boat with three sailors, no anything but that, -three soldiers, in it went broadside into a breaker and were

swamped. There was much excitement on the beach, women fainted or had hysterics. Those who were the least concerned were the soldiers themselves. They clung to their water-logged craft until another came to their rescue and then they climbed into this one and went after their hats which had floated away on the tide. I stayed at the beach seven hours - without luncheon or shelter from the wind, sand or dust.

"Cases by the score and whole barrels of beer and whiskey were taken away by the wreckers. Meanwhile the poor "Gipsy" was writhing in her last agonies and I could not look upon it without emotion. She was more like a dying monster - a whale - than anything else.

"Friday-29th Sept -'05

"Rode over to the wreck this morning after breakfast. It is all piled up on the shore and nothing is visible where she, the poor little "Gipsy" lay yesterday in her last agony."

The *Gipsy* was built in San Francisco in 1868, weighed 293 tons, and at the time she sank, was carrying a cargo worth \$15,000, including 200 tons of wheat from Moss Landing. She had just taken on a new master, Captain Boyd, and in the dark and fog, he mistook some lights on shore at McAbee's Bathing Beach at China Point for the lights of Monterey harbor. Turning in there, he struck and wrecked his ship. Mr. McAbee heard the distress signal and rowed out to the rescue. There were sixteen persons aboard and all were safely landed.

(What were the lights that misled the *Gipsy*? Well, the old-timers say that they were red lanterns put up to keep people from falling into the sewer line that had just been dug that day along the bluff.)

— Donald M. Craig

(To be continued in the next issue)

COSAS DE INTERES PARA LOS SOCIOS

At the December meeting our secretary Mrs. Wm. M. O'Donnell reported that the membership was at an all-time high of 838. Treasurer Howard Reed reported that the Fremont Adobe purchase, repair and restoration had to date cost us \$13,370.75 and that our first check from its occupants had just come in. The income from the property will be used for its maintenance and taxes. There are still some minor bills to be paid, but we are in good shape and all those who contributed time, money and interest to the rescue of the irreplaceable old landmark may take a well-deserved bow.

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The Monterey Peninsula Board of Realtors has been accepted as a suitable tenant for the preserved building, and Col. Griffin was authorized to enter into an agreement with the Board on lease arrangements. The monthly rental is to be sufficient to maintain the adobe building as a historical structure and to insure its preservation.

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The directors of the Association greatly appreciate the work done by Coast Counties Land Title Company on securing Title to the Fremont Adobe without cost to the Association. It is a very heartening thing to have such support by the business people of the area. We are also much indebted to Mr. Stanley Segale for his generous help on the lighting problem at the Casa Serrano.

The recent showing of the beautiful collection of Hogarth prints by the Arts and Humanities Council at the Casa Serrano was a great success. Since the Casa Serrano is ideally suited for such intimate exhibits, the directors are happy that it is being used more and more for such purposes. In order to outline clearly what are considered suitable uses for the Association's clubrooms. President Allen Griffin directed Mrs. John Short, Mr. McKeever, Admiral Chappell and John Martin to draw up a statement of policy to guide a screening committee of the Association dealing with use requests. At the same time, he named the same people to the screening committee.

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At the December meeting the use policy was adopted after reading and discussion. The principle points emphasize the idea that the Casa Serrano is primarily the headquarters of the Monterey History and Art Association and should be available at all times for the use of the Association. Any other use of the building must be consonant with the by-laws of the Association, that is, historical, artistic or cultural. Any non-Association use of the building must be for a definite period, not to exceed

(Continued on Page Eight)

THE EDITORS
MONTEREY HISTORY
AND ART ASSOCIATION

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Monterey, California

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COSAS DE INTERES PARA LOS SOCIOS

(Continued from Page Seven)

ten days, except under extraordinary circumstances. The building will not be used as an office by anyone other than the officers of the Association, and political use is strictly forbidden. Naturally enough, cleaning, damage and utilities costs must be assumed by the user. Furniture and objects belonging to the Association can only be moved under permission of the Association, and finally, the user must be adequately insured and hold the Association blameless.

At the December meeting too, new partitions were seen at the rear of the clubroom. These effectively shut off the old kitchen area and provide the desperately needed space for the storage of Merienda equipment, chairs, costumes and a thousand odds and ends. Henry Jones, the chairman of the maintenance committee, has done a fine job for very little money.

NEW MEMBERS SINCE SEPTEMBER, 1961

Mrs. Henri Wiethause, Clarence Church, Mrs. Nancy Schlager, Mr. and Mrs. DeLano Brown, Mrs. L. L. Dewar, Mr. and Mrs. W. P. Anthony, Dr. and Mrs. Bowersox.

Junior Member: Helen Lynn Tomlinson.

GIFTS: An Oriental rug from Mr. and Mrs. L. L. Dewar and a large damask table cloth from Mrs. Marje Eliasson which had belonged to her pioneer grandfather, James Faris.

In Memoriam: Mrs. Kate C. Woods, Mrs. Anne Norwood, Mrs. Royal Hawley, Mrs. Catherine Dennis and Mrs. Maria Antonia Bach Thompson.

Our Association is very desirous of opening Casa Serrano to visitors at least one afternoon each week with a member or two acting as hostesses. So far the secretary has received acceptances from Mrs. William Oberholtzer, Miss Marian Eley, Mrs. Dan R. Hull, Mrs. Charles Bentley and Mrs. John Francis Doud. Soon after the first of the year it is expected that the restoration inside the building will be completed and then a definite plan and the choice of a permanent day of the week will be chosen. More hostesses, of course, are needed, after which there will be one afternoon devoted to a course of information on the history of Casa Serrano and its contents, so the hostesses will be qualified to make the tour of the rooms much more interesting and informative to a tourist or visitor.

The present Board of Directors will meet for the last time on Monday, January 8th, to complete all outstanding business. On Monday, January 15th, the annual meeting of the membership of the History and Art Association will be held in Casa Serrano at 8 o'clock in the evening to hear reports, receive the report of the nominating committee, elect ten directors, and view the improvements to the interior of the building. At the February 5th meeting of the directors, new officers will be elected.

Dues for 1962 are due on January 1st. Dues for husband and wife are \$7.00 per year, \$4.00 for a single membership and \$1.00 for junior membership. Sustaining \$10.00, and life membership \$100.00. Checks should be made payable to Monterey History and Art Association and mailed to 336 Pacific Street, Monterey.