

NOTICIAS del PUERTO de MONTEREY

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December In Monterey, 1602: Viscaino's Diary

In our June issue, the principal article dealt with the mariners of all nations who have visited Monterey and influenced not only its history but also that of the state of California and the United States. It is an impressive record, but today it is difficult even to imagine the actual experiences of those early seafarers. We are removed from them by more than time. We have grown used to marvels; they found wonders in every island and around every cape. We cover unaware, in careless comfort, immense distances over which they toiled cold and weary, sick and hungry.

We can still hear them, however, and while we listen we bridge the void that lies almost 400 years wide between us. As sailors and explorers, on those incredible voyages they kept diaries, and in them we can again hark to the icy wind in the rigging, feel the ship roll and dip, taste the scummy water low in the butts and strain our eyes forward through the rain and mist to where the sea boils over sunken rocks.

One of the most circumstantial of these diaries, and the one most intimately connected with Monterey, is the Relation of Sebastian Viscaino, made on his expedition in 1602-1603. He was not the first to see our bay or the California coast, but his description was the most accurate and influential.

The names he gave persist to this day: San Diego, the Channel Islands of Santa Barbara, San Nicolas and Santa Catalina, Point Concepcion, the Santa Lucia Mountains, Monterey, Carmel, Point Año Nuevo, Point Reyes and others. His diary was translated in 1891 by George Butler Griffen and incorporated into the collection of original narratives of early American history published in 1916 by Professor Herbert E. Bolton of the University of California as *Spanish Explorations in the Southwest*.

This work is now almost a rare book, and not having it at hand, we have made a new translation from the original material issued in 1944 by the Spanish

Instituto Historico de Marina. This was given to me this year in Madrid by Admiral Julio Guillen, director of the Museo Naval, through whose kindness in 1960 the Monterey History and Art Association was permitted to exhibit the famous and unique drawings of California made by the Malespina expedition of 1790. But before reading Viscaino's dairy of 1602-1603, let us set the scene:

For thirty-five years before Viscaino's trip, the Manila galleon, so laden with Chinese silk, porcelain and precious spices that the water casks were slung in the rigging to give more cargo space on deck, had toiled wearily eastward on its journey to Acapulco. Sailing from the Philippines in June to avoid the typhoon season, the wallowing little vessels went north along the great circle route, using the Japan current in order to arrive off the California coast after a miserable voyage of about three months.

Their first landfall was often in the area of Monterey, but it varied from Cape Mendocino to San Diego. Often they must have rested a while in Monterey Bay and freshened their water barrels, for later, Father Antonio de la Ascencion, a sea-dog turned Carmelite chaplain with Sebastian Viscaino, mentions it in his report as a thing of common knowledge.

It was a terrible crossing from the Orient. Invariably there was scurvy, the provisions were always skimped so that more treasure might be carried and wrecks were frequent. But it was not really to relieve such conditions that made the King of Spain order Viscaino to seek out a safe harbor in California for the once-a-year trade ship. It was the increase of piracy on the western ocean that spurred the royal will to act.

Sir Francis Drake's incursion of 1579 profoundly shocked the Spaniards. The Pacific was their lake and they had not even fortified its harbors. Drake sacked ships and ports with scarcely a gun fired against him. Eight years later Cavendish took the Manila galleon itself off Lower California, and thereafter for almost 150 years, a veritable plague of Dutch and English privateers infested the Pacific, filling their holds with the spoils of Peru and Mexico and the silks and brocades of the Far East.

After Hawkin's raid of 1594, the crown of Spain took decisive action. Logically enough, the 1595 Manila galleon was asked to survey the California coast on its way back to Mexico and a safe refuge. Rodriguez Cermeno, the master of the ship, observed the shore from Eureka to Drake's Bay where, after fighting storms all the way, the galleon was wrecked.

His return to Mexico in a small open boat crammed with seventy men will always be one of the great sea adventures of all time. Understandably, Cermeno had other things on his mind than exploring, but he noted passing Monterey Bay on December 10 (he called it San Pedro Bay); he traded some Chinese brocade and blankets for food with the Indians of the Santa Barbara Channel

Islands, and sailed past the well-known San Diego Bay, then called Fishermen's Bay.

His report to the new viceroy of New Spain, the Conde de Monterey, and the evidence of his disastrous voyage convinced the court that half measures would not serve, and a true exploring expedition was planned. However, frugality in such matters being one of the royal virtues, an effort was made to find someone who would do it for nothing.

The choice fell upon Sebastian Viscaino, who was no seaman but a canny merchant. By a strange chance both he and Cermeno had been aboard the Manila galleon which was captured by Cavendish. He had lost heavily on that voyage, but he had not only recouped on later ones but had organized a pearl-fishing trip to the Gulf of California in 1596. One of his motives in volunteering for the costly privilege of charting the California sea-coast was to be first on the ground if new pearl beds were found there.

The Conde de Monterey was no fool. He gave Viscaino strict orders to do the king's business first and his own second; he had permission to search for pearls in the Gulf on his return trip, but his head would pay for it if he dared fritter away time on them on the outward voyage.

Viscaino was to start in 1599, but three rapacious Dutch freebooters made a sally into the South Pacific then and he had to delay until the danger had passed. On March 18, 1602, he received his sailing orders: explore the coast from Cape San Lucas in Lower California to Cape Mendocino. If weather permitted he was to go up to Cape Blanco in Oregon, but he was not to make detailed examination of any bay except as necessary to determine its suitability as a harbor.

His three ships, the *San Diego*, the *Santo Tomas* and a small shallow-draft boat, the *Tres Reyes*, (to be used for close work along the shore and in the bays) carried almost 200 men, Map-maker Geronimo Martinez de Palacios and three Carmelite friars. Viscaino went in the *San Diego* as "general", Gomez de Corban had his flag in the *Santo Tomas* and Sebastian Melendez captained the *Tres Reyes* frigate. On the 3rd of May, the expedition cleared from Acapulco but seven long months passed before it drew near San Diego Bay. It had struggled against headwinds all the way and only five months provisions were left. Now let them tell the story in their own words:

Donald M. Craig

On the 9th of the said month (*November*,) we discovered two other islands and three great rocks at 33 degrees North Latitude, a little more than two leagues from land, and a very large bay. The general ordered Ensign Melendez to go ahead in the frigate and the *Capitana* and the *Almiranta* (*1) followed after, although the frigate was skirting the shore. The *Capitana* came up to the

(*1) Nicknames for the ships carrying Viscaino, the captain-general, and Gomez, the "admiral."

islands, and around them so great was the quantity of seaweed growing up from the sea bottom (which was fourteen fathoms deep) that it lay stretched out on the surface for thirty-six feet. The *Capitana* sailed over it as if it were a green meadow. This seagrass has very gaily colored wide leaves like a squash plant and it has a kind of fruit like very large capers and a trumpet-like tube which resembles a pump. These islands were given the name of San Martin. (*2)

The fires that the Indians were lighting on the mainland were so many that by night they looked like a procession, and by day the smoke clouded the sky. We did not go ashore at this place because the coast is very rough. The next day, Sunday, the 10th of the said month, we came to a port, probably the best there is in the whole South Sea, (*3) because, besides being protected against all winds and having a good anchoring ground, it is at 33 1/2 degrees North Latitude, has very good drinking water, plenty of firewood and much fish in great variety, of which we caught quantities with both net and hook. On land there is abundance of game: rabbits, hares, deer, very large quail, geese, thrushes and many other birds.

And on the 12th of the said month, the day of the Glorious San Diego, (*4) the general, admiral, priests, captains and ensigns and almost all the people sprang ashore. A shelter was built, mass was said, the Feast of San Diego celebrated, and once all this was over, the general called a staff meeting on what had to be done at this port in order to dispatch all business in the shortest time. It was agreed that the admiral, with the chief pilot and the pilots and masters and caulkers and sailors, would careen the ships and give them a good cleaning (which they certainly needed), while Captain Peguero, Ensign Alarcon and Ensign Martin de Aguilar would each one hasten to get in water for his ship. Ensign Juan Francisco and Sergeant Miguel de Legar would superintend the carpenters on the firewood detail.

No sooner was this settled than about a hundred Indians, their heads decked with many plumes and armed with bows and arrows, appeared on a hill and with a great shouting called out to us. The general ordered Ensign Juan Francisco to take four blunderbuss men (*arquebusmen*) and go forward with them, followed by Padre Fray Antonio who was to greet them warmly and bring them in peacefully. The Ensign had orders to let the Indians go if they fled from him, and if they stayed he was to give them presents.

The Indians stood their ground, although with some misgiving. The Ensign and the soldiers returned and the general and his son and the admiral went out to the Indians. Upon seeing this, two Indian men and two women descended the hill and came to the general, the women weeping all the while.

(*2) Today known as the Coronados, south of San Diego.

(*3) The old Spanish name for the Pacific Ocean.

(*4) Saint James, the patron saint of Spain.

He made much of them and embraced them, giving them some trinkets and encouraging the rest of the Indians by signs. These came down peacefully and were rewarded with gifts. The fish net was thrown out and the catch distributed among the Indians, which encouraged them all the more. They went back to their villages and we to our ships to finish our jobs.

On Friday the 15th, the general boarded the frigate, taking Padre Antonio, his son, the chief pilot and fifteen blunderbussmen to take soundings in a great bay that went far inland. He did not take the mapmaker with him because he was ill and busy on the papers dealing with the voyage. This night, with a rising tide, he went forward and dawn found him six leagues (*5) inside the bay, which he discovered to be the best and most suitable for all kinds of ships and safer than either El Ferrol or Acapulco, and even better for careening, for ships can be beached on the mud on the high tide and taken off at the ebb, even if they are of a thousand tons. In this report I do not put ship's courses, nor landmarks, nor depths of water because the mapmaker and pilots are themselves making sailing directions according to the art of navigation.

The general and his companions went ashore in this bay, and after having walked more than three leagues along it, a great number of Indians appeared with bows and arrows, and although signs were made to them that we came in peace, they did not dare approach. Only one Indian woman, so old she looked to be more than 150 years of age, came up weeping. The captain treated her kindly, giving her some beads and food. She was so old she had wrinkles on her belly like a blacksmith's bellows and her navel stuck out bigger than a gourd.

The Indians, having seen this good treatment, came peacefully and led us to their villages where they were harvesting the seed crop and heaping up little piles of a seed that resembled flax. (*6) They cooked their food in pots and the Indian women wore animal skins. The general would not permit any soldier to enter the villages and since it was late, he went back to the frigate, many Indians accompanying him to the beach.

On Saturday night he returned to the *Capitana*, which was already beautifully prepared. Wood, water and fish were taken aboard, and on Wednesday the 20th we hoisted sail. I do not want to bore you by telling of the many times the Indians came to our encampment with skins of martens and other things until the day we sailed and then they stayed on the beach calling to us. This port was named San Diego.

Of The Departure From The Port of San Diego and The Arrival at Santa Catalina Island

As has been said, we left the harbor of San Diego on Wednesday, the 20th of November, and this day the general ordered Ensign Sebastian Melendez to go

(*5) The Spanish league was almost 4 miles.

(*6) Possibly "chia" (genus *salvia*), the most important seed food of the California Indians, particularly along the southern coast. It was parched and ground and is extremely nutritious.

ahead in the frigate and explore a bay that lay to windward about four leagues. The pilot was to take soundings and sketch it and see what was in it. He did so, and the next day he returned to the *Capitana* and reported to the general that he had entered the said bay and that it was a good port, although a sand-bar about two fathoms deep lay at its mouth. Inside, a heavily wooded lagoon ran back into the land and many Indians were there; he had not gone ashore. (*7)

With this we continued our voyage, hugging the coast until the 24th of the said month when, on the eve of Glorious Santa Catalina, we discovered three large islands, (*8) With great difficulty, for the wind was dead ahead, we chose the middle one (which is more than 25 leagues in circumference), and before we could drop anchor in a fine cove we found there, a host of Indians came out in eight-oared canoes made of cedar and pine planks so well joined and caulked that they seemed galleys. Each carried fourteen or fifteen Indians. They rowed right up without any fear whatsoever and tying up to our ships, they came aboard showing great joy at having seen us and urging us by signs to go ashore. Like pilots, they guided us into the haven.

The general received them very well and gave presents, particularly to the children. We anchored and the admiral, Ensign Alarcon, Padre Fray Antonio, Captain Peguero and some soldiers landed. A great number of Indians were on the beach and the women met us with broiled sardines and a kind of roasted fruit that tasted like sweet potatoe. There was fresh water there, but it was quite a distance from the beach.

The next day the general and the Padre Commissary went ashore. A brush shelter was built and mass was said, more than 150 Indian men and women being present and marvelling much to see the altar and the image of Our Lord Jesus Christ. They paid close attention to the mass and through signs, asked us what it meant. We let them know that it was from Heaven, at which they marvelled even more.

(To be continued next issue)

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COSAS DE INTERES PARA LOS SOCIOS

Annual Meeting

The 33rd annual meeting of the membership of the Monterey History and Art Association will be held Monday evening, January 18th, at 8:00 o'clock in Casa Serrano.

(*7) Probably False Bay, just north of San Diego Bay.

(*8) San Nicolas, Santa Catalina and Santa Barbara.

Outgoing President Edwin Bliss was given a surprise buffet supper at the Casa Serrano by his fellow directors at the last meeting of the year on December 7, 1964. Rice, gravy, cranberry and pineapple molded salad, New Orleans fruitcake and hot buttered rolls were contributed by the ladies, champagne by a friend and special turkeys were prepared by Gallatin Powers. It was a true expression of appreciation for the devoted work of President Bliss and his rare ability to organize and carry through the full program that was initiated this year.

At the meeting, the committee report on the revision of the constitution was made by John Martin. Changes in the constitution have been recommended so that the membership may have a stronger part in the selection of the president and directors. The suggested revisions will be brought before the association when it meets as a body on Monday at 8 P.M. in the Casa Serrano. Mark it on your calendar now!

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Gifts to Casa Serrano

A set of pictures of old Monterey from Mrs. Walter C. Palamountain, 112 Central Avenue, Burlingame, taken by her father, George Farrell, about 1900. He was, at that time, teaching dancing to officers stationed at the Presidio. The pictures are of Carmel Mission, San Carlos Church, First Theatre in California, Del Monte Hotel, U.S. Custom House, Chinese Fishing Village, one showing the wooden Cross, site of Father Serra's Landing Place, First Wooden House with the constable and wife posing in front of it.

Mrs. Bryan H. Smith of Carmel has placed on loan a dark blue silk and violet dress of the 1850 period which belonged to her great aunt of Port Hope, Ontario, Canada.

A collection of photographs collected by Mrs. Elizabeth Syle-Madison of Carmel, given to the Association with the compliments of her cousin, Irene Marguerite Syle and at the suggestion of John S. Coates of Carmel.

Mrs. J. L. Underhill of Carmel Valley has given a little boy's dress of silk plaid and a girl's bodice, worn by her uncle and mother over 100 years ago.

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With sincere gratitude we thank Mr. Claude Faw for his interest and work of supervision during the clean up and installation of the new floor in great hall of Casa Serrano. It can now be walked upon with the assurance of safety.

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Mrs. Margaret Hanna Lang has been installed as hostess and curator in Casa Serrano and will be happy to receive members and visitors on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays each week from 1 P.M. to 4 P.M. We have had two special exhibits-Spanish shawls first and more recently fans. Cases have been changed and all articles are well identified. A Christmas exhibit will be next in line.

Mrs. Lang formerly lived in Monterey but has spent the last several years in Columbia, California. She is a Smith College graduate, a member of the Junior League in Kansas City, Mo. and an artist and author of several books, including one on "Early Justice in Sonora."

THE EDITORS
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The Association maintains a Book of Remembrance on view in Casa Serrano. A memorial list also is published in each issue of the **Noticias**. In this manner are inscribed names of members who have passed on since the last issue.

Rear Admiral Charles K. Bergin, Erlanda Geil Norris. Audrey Walton, Sarah Rico and Allen Knight, a past president of our association.

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Mrs. Mary L. Greene was made an Honorary Life Member at the last meeting of the board of directors. She is a former curator of the Old Custom House, a believer in preservation and restoration of the historic sites and buildings in Old Monterey and was the restorer of Casa Joaquin Soto just off Pacific street on El Dorado street. Mrs. Greene is now visiting Monterey from San Miguel in Mexico.

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The Board of Directors has voted to raise the annual dues in the Association to: \$5 per year per person or \$9 for husband and wife. Sustaining members shall pay \$15 per year per person or \$25 per year for husband and wife. Life membership shall be \$250, but shall pay no dues.

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New Members

Mrs. Shirley R. Turner, Mr. and Mrs. Wright Fisher, Mrs. Janette Gallegos, Miss Jane Burritt, Mrs. Marshall Bond, Major Allis F. Hussey, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Moran, Mrs. Philip H. Smith, Mr. James M. R. Glaser, Mr. and Mrs. Gene Chavoya, Mr. Frederick C. McNulty (Sustaining), Mrs. H. L. Ireland, Mrs. George A. Marston (Sustaining), Mrs. Edna S. Kasch, Mr. Noel C. Stevenson.

New Juniors

Clyn Smith III, Sharon Smith, Brian Smith.