

NOTICIAS del PUERTO de MONTEREY

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

Vol. X, Number 4

December, 1966

Medical Topography and Diseases of Monterey

by Assistant Surgeon William S. King: 1852

(The annals of medicine in Monterey date from the foundation of the town. Don Pedro Prat was official doctor to the Portola-Serra expedition of 1769-1770 and did heroic duty among the scurvy-stricken colonists. Thereafter, the Spanish and Mexican governments regularly appointed physicians to the Monterey presidio. Bancroft lists them all from 1769 to 1844 in his *California Pastoral*, Chapter 20.

The missionaries acted as doctors, too, for the presidial health officers seldom left the capital to attend cases. In many instances, the gap was filled with varying degrees of efficiency by visiting ships' surgeons, quacks and men like David Spence, James Stokes and Robert Semple, who had some smattering of medicine.

There was recognition of the contagiousness of certain diseases in Spanish Monterey. Inoculation against smallpox by means of cowpox had been practiced as early as 1806 and vaccination since 1817. Ordinarily there were no hospitals; one was born, suffered illness and eventually died at home. The only record of a community hospital relates to the smallpox epidemic of 1844 when the ayuntamiento appointed a Board of Health to establish a hospital for the poor. Larkin, Spence, Watson and Osio met under the chairmanship of Florencio Serrano and rented a house on the outskirts at \$8 a month. No physician was available, but two nurses were selected and a corporal's guard from the presidio acted as a burial party. Food and medicine for the needy sick were also furnished free.

The government agreed to donate \$125 monthly during the epidemic. Thirty-one prominent local families made up the rest of the \$249 required by the emergency. In 1845, the government decreed that two percent of the fines for smuggling should be used to support charity hospitals.

Official reports by local medical men on the general health of Monterey are rather scanty during the early period. After the seizure of the old capital by the Americans in 1846, numerous reports on everything having to do with the new territory were relayed to Washington.

I have not found the reports alluded to in King's article as having been made by Dr. Robert Murray, the first United States Army surgeon to be stationed at Monterey. Dr. Murray was attached to the First New York Volunteers and took up his duties in Monterey on April 5, 1847, on garrison service with Companies D, E, G and I. He was relieved in the spring of 1849 by Dr. King, the author of the following description.

I am indebted to Mr. Michael Harrison of Sacramento, an authority on the trans-Mississippi frontier, for information leading to the publication of this document from Senate Executive Document No. 96, 34th Congress, 1st Session, Washington: 1856, *Statistical Report on the Sickness and Mortality in the Army of the United States, 1839-1855*.

— Donald M. Craig)

* * *

Forty leagues from San Francisco, and upon the shores of Monterey Bay, is situated Monterey, probably the most beautiful town on all the coast of California. In all that constitutes beauty of scenery, derived from a proper proportion of woodland, water, hills, and distant mountains, Monterey will bear a comparison with other places of more celebrity; and its claims in this respect are acknowledged by all travellers. The houses (mostly adobe) are built on a broad, gentle slope of land, about two miles from Point Pinos, the southern extremity of the bay. They are scattered over an extent of three-quarters of a mile, and mirrored in the placid waters of the bay, stand in bold relief against a background of extensive forest. The hills in the rear increase in height as they run to the southeast, till, at a distance of forty miles, they are merged in the high mountains of the coast range.

The northern shore of the bay is twenty miles distant, bending so far to the west that the Pacific is not visible from any part of the town. The peninsula intervening between the bay and the Pacific shore is covered by a fine growth of tall and stately pines, with a few scattering oaks. About a hundred yards from the southern shore of the bay, on a level with it, and skirting the eastern edge of the town, is a low, flat, sandy plain, in the center of which is a lagoon, nearly half a mile in length, by one-eighth in width. Further to the east, in the same plain, and nearly parallel with the shore of the bay, are two other lagoons, of a large size, and at a distance of one and two miles from the town. (*1) Beyond the last lagoon the land rises gradually by a circuitous elevation for about six miles, and from thence by a regular descent to the Salinas river - a large

(*1) Roberts Lake and Laguna Grande.

stream emptying into the bay about eight miles east from Monterey. Beyond this river are what is called the Salinas plains, a broad, level prairie, nine miles wide, extending to the low hills of the San Juan mountains.

During the prevalence of the high tides in the spring, the water of the bay flows into the lagoon at the edge of the town, and keeps it full; but at other seasons, particularly at the latter part of the dry season, the waters of the lagoon recede toward the center, leaving a good deal of vegetable matter exposed to the action of the sun, the odor from which is far from agreeable when sufficiently near to inhale it. The water of this lagoon is so brackish at all seasons of the year that cattle will not drink it. (*2)

Three miles south of Monterey is Carmel valley, watered by a river of the same name, which empties into the Carmel Bay. The soil is rich and alluvial, and adapted to agriculture. Carmel and Salinas valleys are the only points now under cultivation in the vicinity of Monterey. Just beyond Carmel valley is Point Lobos, a promontory on the coast, celebrated for the number of seals and sea-lions always to be found there. In Carmel valley is situated the mission of San Carlos, founded in 1770 (1771) by Padre Junipero Serra, a Franciscan friar. The old church is still in good repair, while the other buildings have in a great measure fallen to ruin. (*3) At this mission is an orchard of pear-trees in fine bearing, being the only fruit that appears to thrive well in this vicinity.

Monterey redoubt, a few hundred yards to the north of the town, is placed upon an elevation of 140 feet above the bay. It is bounded by a picket-work, and encloses a sufficient area for a parade-ground, and a garden for the use of the troops. On the side of the redoubt next to the the bay is a battery, mounting twenty heavy guns. The quarters for the officers and men are built of logs neatly plastered and whitewashed, and are commodious and comfortable. (*4)

As the climate and character of disease at the fort and in the town of Monterey are precisely alike, it will be understood that both are included in my remarks. The population of Monterey is from six to eight hundred, three-fourths of whom are native Californians.

Climate. - The atmosphere is humid, the temperature agreeably warm and equable; the prevalent winds are sea-breezes from the west and north; the land winds from the east and south are much less prevalent, blow less strongly, and may frequently be detected alone by the uncomfortable feelings they produce, without reference to the weather-vane. There is one rainy season, from November till April. This is about the average time the rains begin and terminate, although sometimes considerable rain will fall as early as October, and continue until May. During this period, there are frequent intervals of fine weather of

(*2) El Estero.

(*3) The mission rafters collapsed in 1852 and the greater part of the roof fell in.

(*4) This coastal defense, called **El Castillo**, first consisted of earthworks thrown up in 1818 to repulse the Argentine privateer Hippolyte Bouchard. After 1846, it was strengthened by Commodore Sloat and named Fort Mervine. This was later changed to Fort Stockton and when the army had Lieut. Henry Halleck of the engineers rebuild it in 1848, its name was again changed to Fort Halleck. In 1902 the army officially made it The Presidio and built barracks there for troops returning from the Spanish-American War. This area is now the site of the Defense Language Institute.

such extraordinary beauty and balmy temperature, that the traveller arriving on the coast might well imagine, with Colonel Fremont, that it resembled the climate of southern Italy. During the dry season the fogs rise from the sea late in the afternoon, float over the town, and disperse usually by 9 P.M. There is also a fog generally in the mornings until 10 A.M. I may add here that these fogs are found on the entire coast of California as far south as Point Concepcion. In the rainy season, in which time the winds are from the south and east, there are no fogs; the sky, when not raining, being clear and cloudless. To give some idea of the temperature of this place, the following memoranda, extracted from the meteorological register of the post, is here inserted:

Mean annual temperature for 1850, 55° Fahrenheit; coldest day, March 25th (mean for the day), 39°; warmest day, September 18th (mean for the day), 77°.50; highest range (September), 94°; lowest range (December), 30°. Mean temperature for 1851, 57°.54; coldest day (being mean for that day), 46°.50; warmest day (being the mean for that day), 73°.50; highest range (August), 75°; lowest range (December), 40°. There is a difference between the mean temperature of the summer and winter months of only 6° to 7°; and hence the annual temperature is very uniform, although the diurnal changes may be very considerable.

Diseases. - I have little information of the diseases of this neighborhood previous to my arrival at Monterey in the spring of 1849. In 1844, I am informed, the smallpox visited this place, carrying off a large number of the inhabitants, chiefly Indians, who had not been vaccinated. At some of the missions in California, at the same period, nearly the entire population died of the same disease.

I do not know that any particular disease can be said to be endemic to this locality. The diseases from which the inhabitants are entirely free, are contagious or infectious fevers except the exanthemata (*eruptive diseases with fever, such as measles or smallpox*), calculus, diabetes; those from which they are nearly exempt are consumption, dyspepsia, aneurism, and malignant tumors; and those which are mild and of rare occurrence, are diarrhea and dysentery.

On my arrival in Monterey in 1849, I found whooping cough and measles of a mild form prevailing in the town. On inquiry I learned that these diseases were unknown here previous to the arrival of the Americans in 1846, who brought them with them from the States. A few cases of these complaints occurred here the following year, since which time they have disappeared, and owing to the peculiar climate, and the prevalence of the strong and constant winds from the ocean, I do not believe they will reappear until imported *de novo*. During their prevalence some cases of rubeola (*German measles*) so much resembled scarlatina (*scarlet fever or a mild form of it*) that it was difficult to distinguish one from the other. Some cases of scarlatina were reported to me, but I am unable to say whether they were genuine, not having seen them. So far as I was acquainted (and my practice was very general throughout the town), but few cases proved fatal.

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My predecessor, Assistant Surgeon Murray, has reported several cases of typhoid fever in Monterey, in the fall of 1847. These cases occurred among recruits just arrived from a protracted sea voyage, and are, no doubt, attributable to the long confinement on ship-board, and a want of a proper supply of fresh and wholesome food. Since that period to the present time, I am not aware of any instance of this fever, except one in an emigrant who arrived in Monterey overland, after enduring incredible hardships and sufferings, and who died shortly after his arrival.

Although now and then intermittents are met with here, yet in every instance, according to my experience, they are found among recruits, who have contracted the disease elsewhere, or miners, who have been living in the valleys of the Sacramento and San Joaquin, where the disease prevails extensively, and who have come here for the benefit of their health. Off from the coast, as far interior as the Salinas river, a few cases are met with, but I have never known a case of intermittant (*malaria*) fever *originating* in Monterey.

The only epidemic common here is influenza, and in the autumn, particularly when the winds blow from the land, (which they usually do a short time before the advent of the rain), nearly the entire population become affected. I am inclined to believe, owing to the situation of the lagoons already described, that, were it not for the setting in of the rain shortly after the commencement of the land breezes, Monterey would be much more unhealthy, it being to the seaward of these lagoons and, therefore, exposed to any injurious influences emanating therefrom. To the unfavorable influences of these winds the inhabitants are accustomed to ascribe an unusual feeling of discomfort and want of energy felt at this time.

(To be concluded in March, 1967)

* * *

THE MYSTERY OF THE SOTO HOUSE MING FRAGMENTS

In the announcement of the death of Mary Little Greene which appeared in the September, 1966 issue, mention is made of her restoration of the old Joaquin Soto adobe that stands on the Via Joaquin leading south off El Dorado Street. Some things that turned up in the restoration process were of unusual interest, especially to a museum curator like Mary.

The building had stood vacant and dilapidated for some years before she bought it. The old baked clay tiles on the roof were said to have come from the Carmel Mission after the secularization decree of 1834 had removed the mission from the Franciscan padres and released the Indians from supervision. Since the house is variously said to date from either 1820 or 1847, and was originally thatched with tules, the story of the origin of its age-blackened mossy tiles was not impossible. However, the tiles were not the only interesting things about the house.

Outside, near the door, there still remained the fireplace where all the cooking was done in the pre-American days. Few people realize that none of the

old adobe homes constructed in the traditional manner had an indoor kitchen. Everything was prepared in an outside leanto or separate building as in the plantation mansions of the Old South, and brought in to the table. Coarse clay pots were the utensils, and frequently suffered the usual fate of clay dishes. The broken dishes dug up at the Soto place, however, were something special.

The Soto adobe, was a treasure-trove of fragments of Chinese porcelain. Mary had them inspected by Theodore Y. Hobby, then Assistant Curator of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and head of its Department of Far Eastern Art. He pronounced them to be from the reigns of the Ming Emperors Hsian Te (1426-1435), Ch'eng Hua (1465-1487), Hung Chih (1488-1505), Wan Li (1573-1619) and the Ching ruler K'ang Hsi (1662-1722). The majority of the pieces were from the Wan Li period.

Why should the Soto adobe, originally certainly a very humble one, present such a wealth of early Ming and Ch'ing porcelains? I have not heard of such extensive finds at other sites. Although Monterey had been established as a frontier guard post and a relief station for the Manila trade ships, it was no emporium and the Chinese silks, satins, embroideries, porcelains and jewelry carried by these ships went on to Mexico.

Considering the almost unbroken run of emperor periods, and the lack of post-1722 dates, it would seem that a guess at an arrival date between 1770 and 1820 would be reasonable. Shortly after 1820, the Spanish Manila ships ceased to make the Pacific crossing because Mexico gained her independence in 1821. The supply ships to the missions had stopped even before that,—in 1810.

On such voyages, some of the Chinese imports must have been broken. If the cargos were over-hauled in the safe anchorage of Monterey Bay, fragments of bright and pretty porcelains may have been carried off by the poorer people to decorate their homes. It is still a common practice in Latin America and Spain to embed broken pieces of tile or glazed porcelains in a decorative design in fountains, jars, walls and niches.

If the above solution to the mystery seems possible, it must not be overlooked that there was once a considerable settlement of Chinese fishermen west along the shore from where Cannery Row now stands. The huts and shanties may have been unimposing, but within the drab exteriors there was often a rich store of ceremonial silk robes, jewelry and porcelains and pottery from the famous kilns of old China. Color, texture and age are esteemed qualities in Chinese pottery; the fact that the youngest of the Soto Adobe fragments is about 150 years older than a sizable Chinese colony in Monterey is therefore no impediment to a conjecture that they were brought to the Soto house from the fishing village between 1860 and 1906.

Since there was no previous house on the site and it was never a dumping ground, it appears that either explanation of the presence of Ming porcelain at the Soto house is tenable. As to the true explanation, it remains a mystery.

— Donald M. Craig

COSAS DE INTERES PARA LOS SOCIOS

Honorary Director Claude Faw told the Board at the October meeting that he has about 300 color slides of places and things of historical interest in Monterey and that he has used them extensively in giving talks at schools and clubs. We greatly appreciate Claude's outstanding service to our association; his slides and talks make history a living fact.

* * *

President Stanton has put the bronze gates and Spanish altar rails, which were donated by Mrs. Ralston, in a warehouse for safe-keeping until we find the proper place to use them. (Wouldn't they look beautiful in a new civic art museum?)

* * *

Professor A. Boyd Mewborn attended the Conference of California Historical Societies meeting in Bakersfield and brought home a great many ideas for the Board's consideration. The meeting in Bakersfield was such a success that he suggested that our organization invite the Conference to hold its 1970 gathering in Monterey, as part of our Bicentennial Celebration. The motion to do so was seconded and passed.

* * *

President Stanton reported that the city has revised its plans for grading the parking lot behind the Casa Serrano and that a proposed retaining wall eight feet high along our property line has been reduced to about three and a half feet. At the December meeting, the directors voted to shift the clubhouse's restrooms to the north side of the building. It is a good time to make the move; the place is torn up, the water lines must be re-located and parts of the old wood are rotten. The shift will also open up the garden completely across the back.

* * *

The preservation of the historic Doud House still hangs fire. No meeting of minds has yet occurred between the heirs, the Urban Renewal Agency and our association. To let this beautiful old house, a relic of 1849, be battered to pieces by a bull-dozer would be the most shameful act of 1967. What can you do to prevent it?

* * *

The Bicentennial preparations are warming up. Our president, Robert Stanton, is also chairman of the local committees. The directors at the December meeting approved his request for permission to send an urgent letter to Mr. Fred L. Jones of the State Beaches and Parks Board so that the Custom House Plaza contract may be put into effect and work started.

* * *

This issue completes ten years of publication for our **Noticias**. In all modesty, we say that it has merited the confidence with which the association began it in 1957. Over 120 articles have appeared, all of historical interest, many of unique importance: translations of unpublished documents, recordings of previously unknown material, preservation of oral history and folk-tales, as well as the bringing to light of long-forgotten articles from books, newspapers and magazines which help to illustrate our own times. We were instrumental in saving the Fremont Adobe by giving wide publicity to the association's plea for funds. We helped make the members aware of the threat to the Casa Serrano; we are doing our bit now for the Doud House.

THE EDITORS
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To find the article wanted in an unindexed book of 320 pages is like trying to find a needle in a haystack. It greatly hampers research in the University libraries where the **Noticias** . . . are filed. Therefore, the directors voted in October to print a table of contents and index. You will receive this shortly. If you wish to complete your ten year set, there are a few extra copies available at .50 each, or \$7.50 the complete book. Let us know soon.

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The following volunteers have been added to the list of ladies serving as hostesses at the Casa Serrano: Mrs. John Doud, Miss Dorothy Peacock, Mrs. George Clemens, Mrs. Charles Bentley, Mrs. Florence Gates, Mrs. Ivan Wilson, Mrs. Wm. McC. Chapman, Mrs. Allen Knight, Mrs. Anne Bethel, Mrs. Talbert Josselyn, Mrs. George Tomlinson, Mrs. Jeanette Gallegos, Miss Marian Eley, Miss Lila Adams and Mrs. Elizabeth Buckley. Their cooperation is much appreciated.

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Father Lawrence Farrell has resigned his directorship to devote full time to his duties at the California State Prison at Soledad. The Board promptly created the new post of Chaplain to the association and named Father Farrell to it. To fill the vacancy Mr. Walter A. Haluk was elected a director at the October meeting. In November, Mrs. Robert Fergusson was elected to fill the place of Director Joseph Fratessa who resigned because of press of business. The Board seat left vacant by the tragic death of John Alexander in an auto accident; members will vote on this directorship at the general meeting.

New Members:

Mr. and Mrs. Hugh H. Bein, Lt. Col. and Mrs. W. W. Downer, U.S.A. Ret., Mrs. Stuart Kerr, Mr. and Mrs. Victor Cooley, Mrs. Ivan L. Wilson, Miss Eloise Ewing, Dr. and Mrs. A. C. Daniels, Mr. Andrew G. Zorbas, Mr. and Mrs. Herbert G. Niemoller, Mr. and Mrs. Jon Konigshofer, Mr. and Mrs. John V. Urnes.

Deceased:

Mr. and Mrs. John Alexander.