

# NOTICIAS del PUERTO de MONTEREY

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The Monterey History and Art Association

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Flensing a whale off Custom House rocks about 1890 - Courtesy Monterey Public Library

## "Recollections of Early Days in Monterey"

Written about 1900 by

ELLEN CLARK SMITH DAVENPORT

Widow of Captain Davenport—To Julia Phillips Page

*(At the directors' meeting in December, Mrs. Van Court Warren showed us this letter which her old friend Mrs. Julia Phillips Page had sent her. We requested permission to publish it, for through such informal letters we often get a clearer picture of ordinary life in early California than in the books written to amaze, impress, disillusion or amuse us.*

*Although there are but brief allusions to whaling in the recollections of*

*Mrs. Davenport, that Monterey Bay industry of the 1850's owes its special character to her husband, Captain John Pope Davenport. Captain Davenport first brought his whaling ship around the Horn to California in 1849. In 1851 he went back to his home in Tiverton, Rhode Island, married Miss Ellen Smith and returned to Monterey. The letter gives a candid picture of what the young bride found at journey's end.*

*Captain Davenport is credited with organizing the system of shore-based whaling here in 1853 or 1854. He had twelve men and two whaleboats in his Monterey Whaling Company. The men, mostly Portuguese, worked ashore until a school of gray, fin or humpback whales was sighted by the lookout. At his call, they sped out into the bay in the boats, made their kill, brought the carcass ashore at the landing, tried out the blubber, baled the whalebone, and after the season passed, went back to farming or laboring until the next whale migration started.*

*According to all accounts, Captain Davenport had a poor first season. The price of oil fell and he withdrew. The Portuguese organized their "Old Company" in 1855 and had fair success. In 1858 Captain Davenport returned to business with his "New Company", and it may have been at this time that he established the Moss Landing whaling station. He sold out the Moss Landing establishment in 1865 and moved to Soquel.*

*In 1867 the whaler moved to what became known as Davenport's Landing, at the mouth of the Arroyo del Agua Puerca, about one mile north of the present cement plant fourteen miles north of Santa Cruz on Highway One. Davenport's Landing reached its peak as a whaling center about 1875, but thereafter the industry declined rapidly and by the 1890's it was almost extinguished.*

*Captain Davenport had a numerous family. Mrs. Page's sister married his son James and the widow of another son, Mrs. Harry A. Davenport, still maintains a lively interest in the history of Monterey. Old Captain Davenport became a Justice of the Peace and had a real estate business in Santa Cruz when he died there sometime after 1888.*

*We are grateful for the use of this letter and we urge others to share their old documents with us. Never fear, they will be returned safe and sound.*

*Donald M. Craig)*

*"In October, 1852, we sailed into the Bay of Monterey, in the bark "Otrante", that had been chartered for a whaling cruise along the shores and into the bays of the Pacific, as whales at that time were more numerous near land than now.*

*It was a pleasant Sabbath morning and the little town, or city, I should say, looked very pretty to us, though quite different from our Eastern village of Fairhaven, Massachusetts, that we left so recently.*

*The custom house officer came ashore and when leaving, the gentleman who was with him, invited us to visit his family when we went ashore. He was a Castillian and had married the daughter of one of the wealthiest men*



in the country. One of our party was quite proficient in the Spanish language, so he could converse with them, while the rest could only listen and wonder what they were talking about and why they were telling each other to "see" so often. We learned afterwards that "si" meant "yes".

Their houses were quite different from those we had been accustomed to, for the most part, one story, built of adobe with tiled roof and few rooms but large. This reception room was very long and contained three dozen chairs, placed straight against the wall, very pretty but of a style not to be found anywhere at the present time, a fine piano and portraits in oil of the family which we thought exceptionally fine. It may seem strange that we noticed such little things, but we had nothing else to do and when we heard "si" supposed we were to look.

We became better acquainted with the family afterwards and liked them very much. Now mother and father are lying in the old church, beneath a slab in front of the altar.

At that time there was no Protestant Church, I think it was in the late seventies before one was built. The religious services were few and far between and were held in Colton Hall, which was also used for the Court House. Some years the Methodist Conference would send a minister, who would reside there, other years one would come once a month. There were not many American people and as some of them were Catholic and none very well off, we could not support a minister.

There was no public school; a private school was taught by the Sisters in the convent and was all the schooling the children of Monterey had for years. They did not seem to have given as much attention in educating their people as they do now, for very few of their women could read or write, even among the wealthy. The first public school was taught in the old barracks. We had good teachers, so our children compared favorably with those of other places.

The church services were strange to me as I had never been to a Catholic Church in the East. This Monterey Church is one of the oldest in the state and at that time was not as comfortable as now, as it has been enlarged and modernized to some extent. There were few if any seats. People stood or knelt on the hard stone floor. The ladies dressed mostly in the Spanish fashion, dresses full and elaborately trimmed, but no hats or bonnets, their shawls or mantles covering their heads and shoulders.

The burial customs were quite different also. The first funeral I attended was with a friend of the family. Upon leaving the house, we were given a lighted candle. The body was carried by friends and a table was taken along so at intervals they could rest and the priest perform the services for the dead and as the burial place was a mile away, the stops were quite frequent. All this, the lack of school and church privileges, the funeral and other customs, the daily association with people so entirely new, seemed strange to a young person from a New England home and just out of school.

The amusements were like the rest of our experiences. As we were out of the way, traveling shows did not get to us often, so, balls, cascarone parties and picnics occasionally, were all there was to relieve the monotony. But I suppose the lack of these tended to draw us closer together and the friendships formed were more sincere and permanent.

One thing hindered the development of lasting friendships and that the moving about of the white population, sometimes from necessity, sometimes from choice for there was nothing to hold a very great number in Monterey for any length of time. There were no manufacturies. A small sawmill at one time, supplied the people with lumber of a very poor quality and would be quite a curiosity in these days.

There were two whaling companies but these were manned mostly by Portuguese. The country around was farming and dairying land and all the products were taken to Monterey for shipment but as there was not much in volume and the work of handling it was easy, the natives did most of it, so the newcomers would leave for other parts.

Spanish was the common language and even the children in their play preferred it to English.

Monterey had been the county seat since the removal of the capitol, but because of its inaccessibility, it was moved to Salinas in 1872. The officials and others went too and the town got another step backwards and not until the Southern Pacific built a road running to the town did it awake from its long sleep.

The laws were not strictly obeyed. Murder and theft were common occurrences. Men would be killed for small amounts of money, for the clothes they wore or on the least provocation. One old man was murdered within a mile of town, while lying under a tree, sleeping off the effects of his visit and the men confessed they only got six dollars and a bottle of whiskey. They were hung soon afterwards from the same tree.

Murders were so frequent and for so simple reasons that the better class both native and foreign organized a Vigilance Committee and kept such a strict guard and punished with death those caught that the country soon became a better place in which to live.

Monterey, like most California towns, was well equipped with saloons and men who should have been living examples of what education and good social advantages brought in blessings to people, were patrons of these places and no matter what their standing in the community eventually came down to the same level, namely a drunkard's grave. One doctor and others who filled the positions of sheriff, county clerk, and school teacher committed suicide and nearly all the deaths, especially among the foreigners were due directly or indirectly to drunkenness.

It was asked "Why do men fall into this habit?" They gave as one reason the lack of amusements, no place to go and bad water. The women had no better social advantages and drank the same water and I do not remember



a single instance of any trouble with them except occasionally with the lower class.

These are the recollections of Monterey many years ago. The city now has churches and good school buildings. The railroad has brought her in reach of the outside world and shows her people what energy and thrift could have done. How much better to live and be part of the active, busy world than to have simply existed in an easy, indolent and useless life."

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## NOTHING BUT TROUBLE, TROUBLE, TROUBLE . . .

being a translation of

Apuntes Para la Historia de la Alta California

por

Don Florencio Serrano, 1877

*(Don Florencio Serrano, whose old adobe home is now the headquarters of the Monterey History and Art Association, was a man who deserved better of Fate.*

*He was a student of medicine in Mexico City when the death of his parents thrust upon him the responsibility for the support of his widowed sister and child. An uncle offered to maintain him, but the proud young man believed that he could do better in a new land, California. Ambitious, independent of spirit and well-educated, he listened avidly to the stories of opportunity that Hajar and Padres, promoters of a colonizing expedition to California, had to tell.*

*Young Serrano took his sister and the little boy and joined the chosen band of professional men, farmers, craftsmen and artisans that was to settle the lush valleys near Sonoma and hold the northern frontier against the Russians at Fort Ross. He was promised free land, a government loan to tide him over the first year, animals to start his farm and free transportation to the promised land.*

*But nothing worked out. The sponsors of the expedition became entangled in politics, the padres feared that mission lands would be confiscated to provide for the colonists and the California rancheros and officials were jealous and apprehensive. In the end, the colony broke up. Some men went home, others like Abrego, Malarin, Janssens and Serrano stayed and provided California with some of its most responsible and stable citizens.*

*Don Florencio's education steered him into local government. He was administrator of San Antonio Mission in 1834, town secretary in 1838, assistant mayor in 1844, town schoolmaster and in 1846, when the Americans seized Monterey, he was recorder and secretary for the prefecture.*

*He married Rita de la Torre in 1845 and brought her to the adobe house he had purchased, but with the change in flags his governmental career was ruined. He tried business unsuccessfully and finally settled down to teaching.*

*Don Florencio was very much respected. He was a member of the first*

jury in California and alcalde after the departure of Walter Colton, but he was a proud man and an "unreconstructed Californian"; he never reconciled himself to the conquest of his country and held aloof from the Americans.

He had suffered from weak eyesight for many years and toward the end of his life he was totally blind. His prodigious memory was accurate, however, and in 1877, only a month or so before his death, Hubert H. Bancroft, the great historian of California, sent a secretary to take down the old man's memoirs. This document is now in the Bancroft Library, University of California, and some time ago we received permission to translate and publish it.

Like all reminiscences, there are arid stretches in Don Florencio's tale but on the whole, this uninhibited view of men and events now long forgotten may be of interest to those of us who walk the same streets that Don Florencio walked and whose horizon is still bounded by the same blue bay and pine-clad hillsides.

Donald M. Craig)

In the month of April, 1834, a colony, sponsored by the Supreme Government and composed of more than three, but less than four hundred men, women and children set out from the city of Mexico. For the most part, the colonists were young people and they were destined for Upper California in the north of that territory in order to settle in the place called Santa Rosa. Don Jose Maria Hajar was Chief Director of this expedition and Lt.-Colonel Don Jose Maria Padres, the Assistant-Inspector (of California) was Sub-Director.

It was agreed that these colonists were not only to be transported at government expense, but that from the day of their enrollment they were to enjoy a salary of 50 cents daily for those eighteen years of age and over, and 25 cents for those who were less than eighteen. The day they boarded the ships that were to carry them to California, however, this pay would cease, not to be resumed until they arrived at their destination. Once in California, they would be provided with all the assistance necessary for them as settlers, such as breeding animals, lands for sowing crops, and town plots where they might erect their homes.

On the day of their departure, the families sallied forth in carts roofed over with canvas awnings to protect them against the intemperances of the weather. The men were mounted after the fashion of the urban militia, and they had elected their officers from among themselves. Since they were a protective force, they were issued horses, saddles, rifles, a small sword which served as a bayonet, and two boxes of cartridges.

Thus organized, and making short marches of from five to seven leagues (at the utmost), the colony arrived at Guadalajara. In this city it suffered a delay of about a month, without the colonists, for the most part, knowing the cause, for since they were young, they thought only of enjoying themselves and seeing the town. Afterwards, when they were in Tepic, they began to be aware that the difficulty arose because the Treasury of the State of Jalisco failed to



supply the necessary financial resources. The Director at last succeeded in overcoming this stumbling-block and giving word for all to gather at Tepic, began to send off the colonists in small parties.

(To be continued in Next issue)

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## COSAS DE INTERES PARA LOS SOCIOS

Although it happened three months ago, we are still in a state of shock at the generosity and civic-mindedness of the Custom House Associates. Out of a blue sky, George Walker, representing the firm, appeared before the directors on October 9th and informed them that the Winmar Development Company intends to give us the Doud House after it takes title to the property from the city early in 1968! We have been trying to stave off its demolition for almost a year, George Leutzinger and George Clemens have been laboring persuasively to bring the property within reach of our finances, we seemed to be lost in conflicting authorities and plans, — and lo! — here is the whole historic structure and ample ground to make it a showplace given to us free, gratis and for nothing!

Blessings on you, Custom House Associates, Winmar Development Company, Urban Renewal Agency, our Business Affairs Committee and City Council of Monterey! Now we have to roll up our sleeves and prepare to put the Doud House in shape for the great bicentennial celebration in 1969-1970.

\* \* \*

Mrs. Dan La Mothe has been named chairman of the Adobe Tour for 1968 and Mrs. Gertrude Bisnett chairman of the picnic. We hope that this year the Doud House will form part of the historic structures on view. If it is in the process of restoration and all torn up, so much the better. How often do you get to see the bare bones of a home built in the 1840's?

\* \* \*

On the evening of October 16th, Mrs. Settemo Lucido (Angela Ferrante) gave an extremely interesting talk to the membership about the early days of the sardine fishing industry, which was founded by her father, Pietro Ferrante. Mrs. Lucido has also made a tape recording of her recollections for our oral history collection

In appreciation of the historic role played by Pietro Ferrante and the Italian community in the development of Monterey, the directors approved at the December meeting a proposal by his descendants to place a piece of sculpture in the Custom House Plaza as a memorial to him.

\* \* \*

### GIFTS:

Mrs. Marge Muir reports the following imposing list of treasures received in the last quarter: A copy of Robinson Jeffers' unpublished poem "The Beaks of Eagles", signed and dedicated to Albert Bender from Dean William N. Keeler, Berkeley; a painting, "Oliver's Back Yard and Garden", given in memory of Myron Oliver by the artist, Mrs. Margaret Fogg; fifteen photographs of old buildings in Monterey and a copy of a map of two city lots dated July 20, 1850, from Mr. Julius Trescony; a copy of the old etching "Raising of American Flag . . . July 7, 1846" from Mrs. William Oberholtzer, and a section of the rudder of the **Natalia**, given to the Maritime Museum by Mr. and Mrs. James Martin. The ship was lost in Monterey Bay in 1834 and was legendarily the vessel that carried Napoleon from Elba in 1815.

Other items are a lovely lace tablecloth and a Russian samovar of the 1890's with tray and bowl from Col. William Chapman; 44 punch cups from Mrs.

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**Cosas -(continued)**

George Giet; a Lincoln rocking chair from Mrs. Elizabeth McAlester; a black lace mantilla, a black lace stole, and two large embroidered Spanish shawls from Mrs. Richard Still. Mrs. Anthony Bruyañoc gave three Belgian linen tablecloths and Mrs. William (Mayo Hayes) O'Donnell has given the 70 piece dinner set of Imari that belonged to her old friend Maude Lukens. This will remain on display at the Casa Soberanes.