

NOTICIAS del PUERTO de MONTEREY

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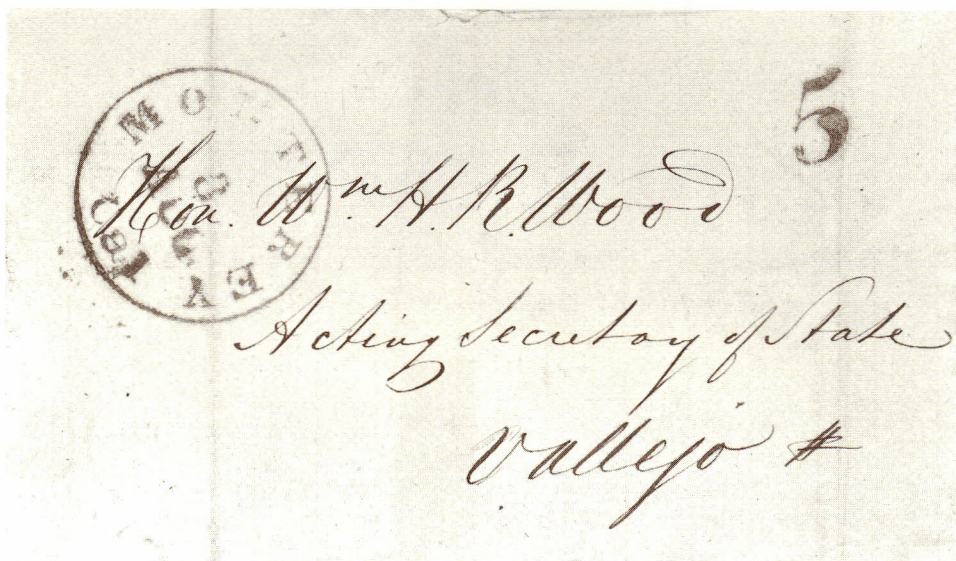
The Early Mails in Monterey County

Old Spanish Cuartel, Monterey, Cal.



Monterey's first post office was located in El Cuartel in 1848. The building pictured above as it looked in the 1860's, was located on Munras Avenue across from where the Safeway Store now stands.

(Richard Wilkerson, a 1964 graduate of Carmel High School, is a senior student of economics at San Francisco State, but he has always been interested in the history of the Monterey area and an avid collector of Californiana. He is the first of our ex-junior members to contribute to the NOTICIAS, and his article, based on years of collecting and study of early Monterey County's mail system, is authoritative and a valuable contribution to local history. Welcome to the ranks of NOTICIAS writers, Rick!—Donald M. Craig)



This folded letter was mailed from the Monterey Post Office on August 3, 1852. Note that it was mailed to Vallejo, where the California Legislature was temporarily convened.

Every student of the Old West has, more or less, one particular favorite aspect of it he enjoys more than any other. It might be early California Music, the Arts during the Mission period, Indian Tribes of the Central Valley, the development of the California style of architecture during the Mexican period, or methods and lines of communications in California during the nineteenth century.

Just as the late Allen Knight devoted himself to the collecting of materials relating to the early ships that ploughed up and down the choppy waters of the California Coast bringing news and provisions to the few main harbors and many isolated settlements, this writer, a number of years ago began seeking out articles pertaining to the early mail service in California.

The great flood of people lured to Golden State during and after the Gold Rush depended solely on the word-of-mouth news and letters brought by the ships from the east. When the mining activity began to decline, many would-be miners who had failed to strike it rich began looking for new livelihoods and new areas to settle. And where they moved, the mails soon followed them.

California's first post offices were located along the coast. From these first few settlements the Californians ventured inland to establish new towns and cities, each needing and demanding communications with each other and the outside world.

The City and County of Monterey provide a perfect example of this inland expansion. During the Mexican occupation the government made use of couriers to carry letters between the pueblos. After the American take-over in 1846, the military government for a time used this same system. It soon became evident, however, that the services of the Post Office Department would be needed to supply the mails that were coming via ship from the east.

In 1848 the federal government sent one of its Postal Agents from Washington to Monterey to survey the situation. On November 21st of that year he established the first post office at Monterey, and the second in California, preceded only by the office at San Francisco, which was established on November 9. At that time the agent was quartered in (El Cuartel); thus it became the first post office building in Monterey.

Until the Overland Stage service was begun, mails were brought by ships from the east to Panama, where the letters were unloaded and carried by pack trains across the Isthmus to awaiting vessels on the Pacific. These ships would then proceed up the coast delivering the mails to the main ports for distribution there and inland. The best description of the conditions of the period is given by Bayard Taylor, who was in Monterey in 1849 for the Constitutional Convention. Upon leaving our city, he wrote:

A heavy fog had for several days lain like a bar across the mouth of the Bay, and we feared that the anxiously awaited steamer from Panama would pass without touching. This was a question of interest as there had been no mail from the Atlantic States for



Courtesy L. S. Stallings
The Pacific Grove Post Office was barely two years old when this letter was left there for transit to Stockton.

more than two months, and the general impatience on that account was painful to witness.¹

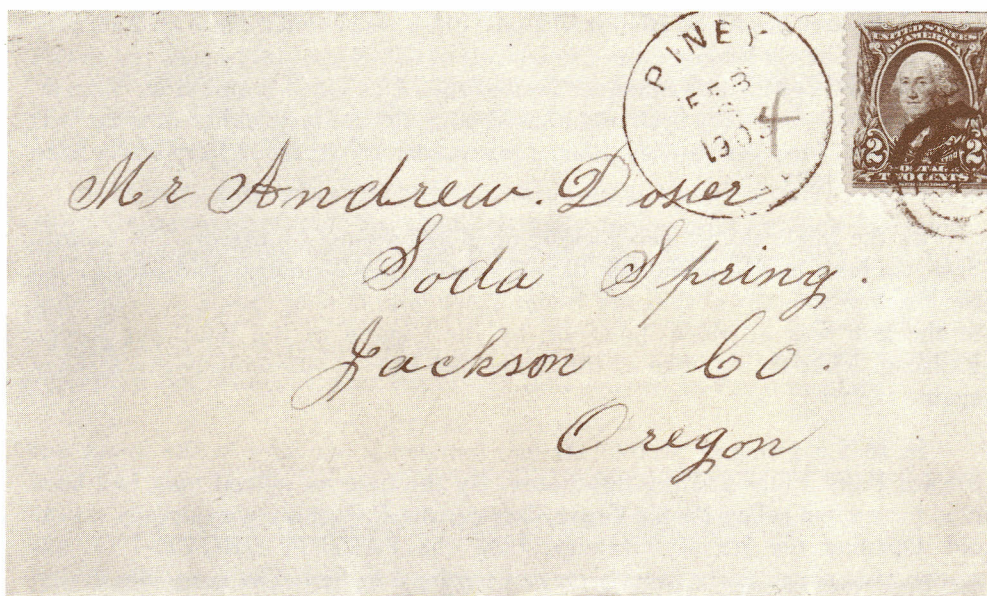
The earliest piece from the Monterey post office that I have ever seen is a folded letter to the east dated early in 1849. The owner of the cover, an authoritative collector in San Francisco, told me that the cancel device, which is a straight line **MONTEREY CAL**, was made from type pieces belonging to the press that printed the state's first newspaper, **The Californian**. The cover illustrated is exceptionally interesting because it was mailed from Monterey to Vallejo, which at that time was the capital of the state. The pictured cover is the oldest I have for Monterey. Perhaps others will turn up, but I fear most have long been lost to the ravages of fire.

The Post Office Department was kept busy in Monterey County beginning in the late 1850's, but from then on most of the new P.O.'s were established in areas other than on the peninsula. **SAN JUAN** was the next to open on July 28, 1851, and it remained a Monterey County P.O. until the creation of San Benito County on the 12th of February 1874. Early covers from this town are quite scarce. On March 31st, 1854, when the **SALINAS** P.O. opened for business, the area of present day Salinas City was no more than a broad empty plain splashed with bright yellow wild mustard. Since the population in that region was quite low until the 1860's, very little mail went out from there; thus these covers are practically non-existent. From 1866 to 1869 there was an office at **ALISAL** but it was soon closed when it was found that the **SALINAS** office could handle the business. In recent years a branch office of the **SALINAS** P.O. has operated in Alisal.

In the days before the Iron Horse thundered down the Salinas Valley the stage lines were the source of all mail deliveries. Natividad was an important station along the stage road between San Francisco and Los Angeles. All inland mail for **SALINAS** and **MONTEREY** in the 1850's and 60's was left at Natividad for transfer. The **NATIVIDAD** P.O. was opened on August 31st, 1855, and was a busy stage stop until the railroad reached Gonzales but after that the town died and the office was closed forever on July 31st, 1908, after years of little or no use. I have made many trips to the Salinas area in search of **NATIVIDAD** covers but the many kind people with whom I visited told me they had destroyed all such "old junk" years ago!

At almost the exact time that Natividad was dying as a town, just about ten miles away a new settlement was coming to life. Juan B. Castro, of a prominent Monterey family, was developing part of a land grant on the other side of the Salinas River in anticipation of the coming of the railroad. Scarcely one year after the town map was filed the U.S. Post Office at Castroville was opened for business on March 14th, 1867. The town held great promise, for the P.O. had put it on the map, but it never became the important rail stop it was envisioned to be. It has been said that at one time in the 1890's the town's

1. Taylor, Bayard. *Eldorado or Adventures in the Path of Empire*. New York. 1850. Vol. I, pp. 192.



In 1904, when this letter was mailed, the Piney Post Office was located on the old Arroyo Seco-Paraiso Spring road that runs along Basin Creek. The postmaster was A. H. Abbott.

population numbered less than 100 inhabitants. In recent years, however, the fortunes of Castroville have been enhanced by the booming expansion of Salinas. Oddly enough, covers from this town are not too hard to find. A lot of mail went into Monterey from there in those days.

Shortly after the opening of the **CASTROVILLE** P.O., Don Jose Soto, on October 15, 1867, filed with the County Surveyors Office a map of the town of New Republic, located scarcely 3 miles due north of Salinas. This town was also to benefit from the coming of the railroad and was intended as a rival to Castroville as it would be closer to Salinas on the rail line. Alas, Soto's relations with the Southern Pacific were not good so the railroad never came to New Republic (or Sotoville as it was sometimes referred to on maps) and the town had barely gotten started before it failed. The **NEW REPUBLIC** P.O. opened on January 20th, 1870, but on June 3rd, 1874, the name of the town was changed to Santa Rita, now only a few gas stations and some old homes on the old highway 101 just outside Salinas. I have never seen any mail from **NEW REPUBLIC** but I do have a rather badly canceled example of **SANTA RITA** which closed up business on July 31st, 1908.²

With rail facilities now at Salinas and extending southward all the time, new settlements and post offices opened up in the immediate area. The **ALISAL** P.O. was moved in 1869 and renamed **GABILAN** until it closed in 1883. I have never seen one of these. There had been, for some time, a settlement

2. It is interesting to note that the **SANTA RITA**, **NATIVIDAD**, and **PRUNEDALE** (which opened in 1894) Post Offices all closed the same day, July 31st, 1908. At that time expanded rural delivery facilities at the **SALINAS** P.O. began serving these areas.

around the area known as **Blanco** so a post office was opened there on February 18th, 1873. The old Blanco Emporium, inside of which can still be seen the clerk's window for "Letters and Stamps," housed the office when it closed on November 28th, 1941. It stands drab and unused now, the solitary edifice in what was once a small business district. Blanco postmarks are scarce. I have never seen one before 1895.

By the 1880's things were picking up in and around Monterey. The County Seat had been moved to Salinas 10 years earlier and Monterey had nearly died the death of so many of the once Boom Town gold mining camps. A great shot in the arm was provided, however, by the coming of the Southern Pacific Railroad. After the building of the Hotel Del Monte, Monterey began to buzz again.

In 1875 a group of Methodists had founded a tent city in the forest out toward Point Pinos and the lighthouse. By the time an official map had been filed for a town called Pacific Grove Retreat, the P.O. there was already a year old. Opening the 5th of February, 1886, the **PACIFIC GROVE** P.O. has grown ever since. Early cancels are not too hard to find. The cover illustrated is a fine early example.

There was, briefly in 1883, an office in the Hotel Del Monte but as all mail went to the **MONTEREY** P.O. anyway, the service was discontinued after a short 10 months. The **DEL MONTE** P.O. reopened on February 23rd, 1901, and was closed on May 31st, 1952. It was made a branch of the **MONTEREY** P.O. after that date.

The Del Monte Express not only brought the mail, it brought new people to live in the area. While many chose to settle in Monterey or Pacific Grove, a few built east of the hotel and so on November 12th, 1890, the **SEASIDE** P.O. was established. Very few articles or photos of Seaside are to be found before World War II. The earliest cover I have ever seen is an envelope postmarked in 1905!

Beginning in the 1880's a small number of settlers moved into the beautiful valley through which the lazy Rio Carmelo slowly winds its way to the sea. Prominent men such as Edward Berwick, an early American farmer in the valley, and William Hatton, a dairy rancher of some repute in the county, were partially responsible for bringing the mails to the valley but they were not the first to succeed in getting a post office to serve them.

Far up the present day valley road between the Cachagua and Paloma Creek there stands beside the road, nearly hidden from view, a stone monument marking the site of the original homestead of the James W. Lewis family, in which was located Carmel Valley's first post office. Lewis is said to have operated a store and livery stable on the premises, so a post office seemed in order. The office was moved twice after it opened on December 22nd, 1886, and when it finally closed on April 10th, 1935, it was because of a lack of

sufficient business. I have never seen any mail from the **JAMESBURG** P.O. dated before 1900, but undoubtedly some is yet resting in a dusty forgotten trunk in some rancher's attic.

Four other post offices operated in this area and were it not for the Post Office Department records we would probably never know of their existence. **RELIZ** operated from 1899 to 1903. **PALOMA** was open from 1923 until 1933 and **PINEY**, an example of which is illustrated, opened on September 18th, 1897, and closed on January 31st, 1905. One can understand a post office at **TASSAJARA HOT SPRINGS** between 1912 and 1944 but with such a sparse population one wonders why the others ever opened in the first place!

(To be continued)

COSAS DE INTERES PARA LOS SOCIOS

The regular meeting of the Board of Directors in August was held on August 5 at the Monterey Institute of Foreign Studies. A lecture by Mr. Norman Wilson, Department of Parks and Recreation was then given for the membership.

Two important meetings have been set for October: On October 15 the General Meeting will be held at the Casa Serrano and on October 21, the new roll of Directors will elect officers for the coming year.

George Clemens, Chairman of the Doud House Asquisition Committee made a progress report at the August meeting on behalf of his committee and those of the Business Affairs Committee and the Doud House Restoration Committee. He praised the cooperation of Arthur Chang and Mr. Sullivan of the Urban Renewal Agency and recommended the purchase of the buildings and a total land area of 6,360 square feet. This will permit landscaping and some parking. All this, at a cost of \$2.00 per square foot, was authorized by the Directors.

Another long-term project, the Allen Knight Maritime Museum, recently received a boost from Hotelman Ben H. Swig of San Francisco. Mr. Swig has made extensive purchases of property along Cannery Row, and stimulated by the idea of Robert Sherry, has looked favorably on the establishment of the maritime museum on his property. Admiral Earl E. Stone is in contact with Mr. Swig and his representative, General Myers, and hopes to work out a suitable solution.

LIBRARY COMMITTEE: Upon recommendation of the President, on motion Robert Ross, seconded by Admiral Stone, the appointment of Mrs. Parrott as Chairman of the Library Ccmmittee and Charles Taylor as Chairman of Postcard Committee were unanimously approved at the July meeting.

THE EDITORS
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