

# NOTICIAS del PUERTO de MONTEREY

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## MONTEREY'S FIRST PUBLIC LIBRARY

A yellowed copy of the MONTEREY SENTINEL of June 2, 1855 aroused our interest in the public library of Monterey. The paper states:

"The Monterey Library was organized in this place in the year 1849, and is believed to be the first established library in California. This association is placed upon a permanent basis, and is a nucleus around which the friends of literary and social refinement and elevation may cordially unite.

"The greater part of the library was purchased in New York and contains about 1,000 volumes of American, English, and Spanish books, treating upon various subjects of human knowledge."

Our interest was further stimulated by finding in an 1893 publication an interview with Mrs. Milton Little, widow of one of the important American businessmen of Monterey.

"Mrs. Milton Little, still living in 1892, in the enjoyment of excellent health and with a perfect memory, gives this very rational and without doubt perfectly true account, based on her personal knowledge, of the establishment of the first public library in California, at Monterey. She says a joint stock company, with forty shares, was formed for the purpose of founding a public library, and her husband took two shares: and each share was assessed \$40.00 ... \$1,500.00 was thus raised, and sent to Rev. Walter Colton, in Philadelphia, or New York, who selected the books and sent them around the Horn. The stockholders were the prominent citizens of Monterey.

"In 1853 a catalogue issued by the directors, dated Monterey, June 1, 1853 those officials say, among other things: 'The Monterey Library Association was organized at Monterey in 1849, and it is believed, is the first established public library in California.' "

We wondered what type of book was in that library. Certainly they were carefully chosen by Walter Colton to whom the task was delegated, as Colton was well educated, a minister, and interested in the education of the children of Monterey.

Another bit of information about this library was found in the records of the first organizations and companies that filed incorporation papers in Monterey County. On the first microfilm roll we found the following:

Monterey, November 13th, 1857

"State of California  
County of Monterey

We the Judges of an election held this day by the members of the Monterey Library, to elect officers and trustees of that society, do hereby certify that at such election the following persons, shareholders in the corporation, were duly elected the Officers and Trustees of said Library for the ensuing year, to wit

James H. Gleason - as President  
David S. Spence - as Treasurer and  
D. R. Ashley - as Secretary and Librarian

The name under which said society shall be known and under which said Trustees shall act, be called and known, is 'The Monterey Library' which, as a literary and scientific institution is incorporated under the laws of the State of California, and is located at the City of Monterey.

Wm. Curtis  
D.S. Spence  
Jas. H. Gleason  
Judges of Election"

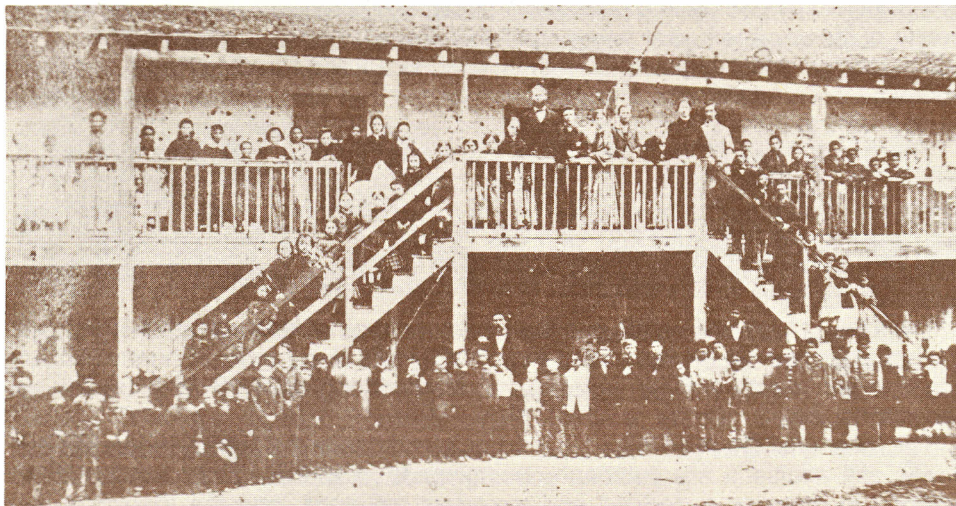
Following the above is a certificate signed by Wm. H. Rumsey, County Judge, that the three men had appeared before him to attest to the document, and on the outside of the record is the notation that the Certificate of Election and Incorporation was filed for Record November 14th, 1857 at 10 a.m. Note the coincidence that James H. Gleason, one of the signers, was also the then County Recorder of Monterey County, and filed the papers.

The other officers, and Judges were also prominent men of Monterey. David Spence, a Scot, had arrived in 1824, married into a fine old family, became a prosperous merchant and ranchero, sent his son to school in Honolulu, and was interested in the development of agriculture. D.R. Ashley was a good lawyer who came west in 1849, became Justice of the Peace, District Attorney, part owner of a newspaper, member of the first Masonic Lodge of this area, State Assemblyman, State Senator, and State Treasurer. William Curtis was a storekeeper of Monterey, having come west in 1846, and served for a while in the California Battalion raised by Lt. John C. Fremont, was elected County Treasurer in the mid 1860s, and also for some years was the official agent of the Quartermaster's Department of the U.S. Army. He had charge of the Military Reserve (present Presidio) all building thereon, and of the Cuartel, etc. — all in the City of Monterey.

One other bit of information we had for some years was that the actual books of the



library were kept in the Quartel. This former Mexican government building, a long imposing two story adobe, was taken over by the military governing officials with the raising of the U.S. flag. It served as headquarters for several years. With the establishment of Statehood, it was used for several purposes. We have reason to believe that the first regular tax supported public school of the Monterey District was held there in 1854, and we know from the reminiscences (in 1911) of S.M. Shearer, that he taught in the public school in the Quartel in the 1860s. Later the school was moved to Colton Hall. But the library books were evidently left in the Quartel building, as several visitors mention seeing them — having to obtain the key to an unkempt, dimly lighted room.



*Children and teachers of the public school of Monterey posed for their photograph on the steps and balcony of the old Quartel. Both the public school and the Monterey Public Library were housed in the long two story adobe during the early 1860s. This photograph may have been taken in 1863 — as in that year John B.R. Cooper noted in his household account book the expenditure of \$1.50 for a picture of "School and children." Also, little Mary Curtis, who was born in 1853 is shown standing on the left stairway with hands clasped. She was then attending the school.*

*photo courtesy the Curtis family*

All of the above was of interest to us, but we still hoped to find an actual book, or possibly a listing of the books that were chosen by Walter Colton as the proper type for Monterey residents and which would, as the MONTEREY SENTINEL of 1855 stated, be "a nucleus around which the friends of literary and social refinement and elevation may cordially unite."

This year we "hit the jackpot!" We have gradually been reading through the material now owned by the National Trust for Historic Preservation — material left in the Cooper House and willed to the trust by Miss Frances Molera. This material is now stored safely and will in time be available on tape for students and researchers.

A small booklet 5½" x 8½", bound in green paper, is entitled "Constitution and Rules of the Monterey Library Association, together with a Catalogue of Books. Organized 1849." The booklet was printed in San Francisco in 1854 by O'Meara & Painter of Clay Street.

The first page of the booklet sets forth the purpose, and we feel that this may be of interest to our readers.

#### "MONTEREY LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

The MONTEREY LIBRARY ASSOCIATION was organized at Monterey in the year 1849, and it is believed, the first established Public Library in California. This Association is placed upon a permanent basis, and is a nucleus around which the friends of literary and social refinement, and elevation, may cordially unite.

"The design of this Association is, through a Library and Reading Room, to afford amusement, entertainment, and profit to a large class who, without its aid, would waste their time in the frivolities and questionable pastimes so prevalent in our State.

"The greater part of the Library was purchased in New York, and consists of English and Spanish books of the best character; and under reasonable and necessary regulations, is open to the use of the whole public. A reading Room has been maintained in connection with the Library, and the best periodicals and journals from various parts of the world, and in several languages, have been regularly received.

"The Library contains about one thousand volumes of well selected American, English and Spanish books, treating upon the various subjects of human knowledge, together with a large collection of Maps, Congressional and Legislative Documents, etc.

"The income of the Association is but small, and hence the Library increases but slowly; still additions are constantly being made, and this Library is doubtless destined to exercise a decided and important influence, and the thanks of the Association are gratefully tendered to those members of Congress and others from whom donations have been received.

"The officers of the Association are

MILTON LITTLE, President

J.B. KNAPP, Vice President

WM. S. JOHNSON, Treasurer

D.R. ASHLEY, Secretary and Librarian

Monterey, June 1st, 1853"

This statement introduces us to three other Monterey residents who were supporters of the Library. Milton Little was a well liked merchant, original developer of what we now call New Monterey, and a personal friend of Walter Colton. Quite some years ago we interviewed a son of Milton Little who informed us that his father, Milton Little, and his mother Jane Eager Little, had been married in the present Stevenson House adobe by Walter Colton, then Alcalde of Monterey, and a friend of both the young people. Our informant, the seventh child born to the Littles, was in fact named Walter Colton Little in memory of the friendship. This close friendship probably was a factor in the choice of Colton as agent to buy the books in the East.

J.B. Knapp, vice president of the Library in 1853, had come to California about 1848 by way of Honolulu, and after a short period in the mines settled in Monterey by



1850. He was Mayor of Monterey in 1852. A sister of Mrs. Milton Little, Arabella Eager, became the wife of Joel B. Knapp. The Knapps later lived in San Francisco.

Wm. S. Johnson, Treasurer of the Monterey Library in 1853, became prominent in the development of Monterey County. He was English born, came to the United States, joined the New York Volunteers for service in the Mexican War, and after his discharge in California settled in Monterey. He married a step daughter of James Stokes, and their marriage in the Stokes adobe was an important social event of Monterey. Their first home was in the present House of the Four Winds, where he was County Clerk. He also was a Notary Public, and by 1855 had established an office (according to his advertisement) in the Library Room of the Quartel. He was also that same year one of the local school commissioners. By 1856 he had another office in Natividad, by 1868 he was again County Clerk, Recorder and a Conveyancer, and, finally ended his working period as a banker in the Salinas area, where he died in 1905.

A review of the men connected with the Library, and of their families, reveals the sincere desire of many local residents during the first years of California Statehood to have available for themselves and children good literature, contact with other languages, and a center of learning. Both Milton Little and his wife had taught school before their marriage, all of the men were educated above the average of their time, and all took part in the orderly development of local, county and State government.

Opening the little booklet we now can read the listing of books which formed the "first public library." There are only 871 titles listed (somewhat shorter than the thousand mentioned by the SENTINEL). The books, magazines, etc. are divided into sections; History, Theology, Poetry, Political, Legal, General Works, Science, Medical, Travels, Miscellaneous, Fiction, Reviews, Magazines, Spanish Books, and a group of Miscellaneous Works largely of Ordinances and Maps.

The Reviews include the North British Review, the Knickerbocker, the North American Review, the American Journal, the Merchants Magazine, the London Quarterly, the Edinburgh Review, and the Horticulturist, beginning from the spring of 1850, but unfortunately ending soon after.

The fiction includes thirty-two titles by James Fenimore Cooper, twenty-seven of the Waverly novels, eight of Melville, and a whole page of Dickens.

The group on Science includes Letters on Astronomy, Gray's Genera of U.S. Plants, Lyell's Principles of Geology, Cuvier's Animal Kingdom, Dictionary of Chemistry, Farmers' Barn Book, American House Carpenter, Builder's Companion, Downing's Fruit Trees, and Cosmos by Humbolt.

The travel section lists Ninevah by Layard, Catlin's Indians of North America, Lewis and Clarke, Humbolt's Travels, Cook's Voyages, Two Years before the Mast, Fremont's Expedition 1842-43-44, and China or Middle kingdom to select a few out of forty-eight titles.

General Works include a Webster's Dictionary, a full set of the Encyclopedia Americana, Newman's Spanish Dictionary, Chamber's Information for the People, MacCulloch's Geographical Dictionary, Ures' Dictionary of Arts, United States Gazeteer, and a volume of Young Man's Book of Knowledge.

The small section of Theology indicates that at least some Chinese either used the

library or were members, as the books include the Holy Bible in both English and Spanish, and the Testament in English, Spanish, and Chinese. There are also the Encyclopedia of Religious Anecdote, Beecher's Lectures to Young Men, and several reports of the American Bible Society.

Several pages are given to the books in Spanish, as Monterey still was largely a Spanish speaking community. We find five titles by Cervantes, Obras Completas of Figaro, volumes by Ochoa, Quintano, the Memorias de Dn. Man'l Godoy, Revolucion Francesa by Thiers, a long listing of Scotts works in Spanish, also those of Cooper, some of Victor Hugo, etc. as well as a Spanish dictionary, La Biblia, and several volumes of the Oficio de la Semana Santa, and Oficio Divino.

The history section is fairly general for the period; Hildreth's U.S., Bancroft's U.S., Prescott's Mexico, Robertson's Works, Thirwall's Greece, Hume's England, Carlyle's French Revolution, Guizot's History of Civilization.

The biography section includes the Life of Jefferson, Patrick Henry, Orators of American Revolution, Living Orators in America, Kings and Queens, Alfred the Great, Cyrus the Great, Queen Elizabeth, William the Conqueror, Julius Caesar, Darius the Great, and Hannibal.

For the budding politician the students of the 1850s in Monterey could read the Statesman's Manual, Webster's Speeches, Jefferson's Manual, Weyland's Political Economy, etc. and those tending toward the law had Kent's Commentaries Blackstone's Commentaries, Wheaton's International Law.

The ladies who so often then wrote poetry could find as examples of good poems those volumes of Pope, Moore, Byron, Coolidge, Burns, Shakespeare, Spenser's Poetical Works, Mrs. Sigourney's Poems, and the poems of Amelia.

The above selection of titles from the various groupings in the catalogue is indicative only — each reader would choose differently we know, but we trust we have given the reader a fair cross section.

The Library Rules as found in the booklet are much the same as any library. Members who had paid for shares could use the books without charge, persons not members had the privilege of taking books from the Library by payment in advance of one dollar monthly, or eight per year. Not more than two volumes could be taken at one time, and all books had to be returned within one month — with the power of renewing. A fine of ten percent per week of the value of the book would be levied for late books, etc.

One interesting point to us is that rule stating, "It shall be the duty of the Librarian to number and stamp all books, maps, etc. in the Library, and they shall be appraised by the Trustees, and the appraised value marked on a catalogue."

Now our hope is that we will in our searching find at least one book among the mementos of some old Monterey family which is properly stamped and numbered as it is listed in the old catalogue.

Surely, when the library was finally closed, the books must have been scattered partly to the families that had paid for the original shares. Who has a book that actually stood on the shelf of the first Monterey public library?



## COSAS DE INTERES PARA LOS SOCIOS

**GIFTS:** The Allen Knight Maritime Museum has received considerable historical information relative to the sardine industry in Monterey. This valuable information will be available for researchers, and all others interested in old Cannery Row. Included are numerous large photographs of Monterey's "SARDINE ERA" — vessels of the fishing fleet, net handling, cannery processing, and the fishermen and women at work. Also included are several big scrapbooks containing pictures and news items of old fishing days from about 1940 through the 1950s. Grateful acknowledgment is made to the donor, Mr. George M. Clemens, of Monterey.

A gift of great help to all who work in the association is the fine copy machine received from Robert McMahan. It is placed in the care of our office secretary Mabel Turner. Bless you Bob!

Mrs. Virginia K. Klemme has showered us with another group of fine items of sterling silver, Spode china, etched glass cake plate, an antique Spanish painted wooden box of the 17-18th century, to list only a few of the last group.

A gift of historical value has been received from W. Stanley Davis of San Francisco. In a small cardboard box were found a group of old photographs including portraits of Rita de la Torre Serrano and her children who lived in our own Casa Serrano, and a treasure trove of handwritten letters dated from 1851 to 1870. These were written mainly from Antonio Carvajal in Mexico City to his uncle Florencio Serrano in Monterey. They are now gradually being opened and laid flat so that some Spanish scholar may translate them.

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(continued page 16)

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(continued from page 15)

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