NOTICIAS del PUERTO de MONTEREY

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

Member: National Trust for Historic Preservation
California Historical Society • Conference of California Historical Societies

Vol. XXVII, No. 3 **September, 1986**

Monterey's First Official Visitor-Compte Jean-Francois Galaup de la Perouse arrived in Monterey 200 years ago this month. Story on Page 2.

(Engraving from the Rex Nan Kivell Collection, National Library of Australia.)

Monterey's First Official Visitor

In September, the sun throws hazy shadows on the old courtyard walls of Mission San Carlos Borromeo. Tourists stroll the grounds while the sounds of a ball game can be heard from a neighboring field. Two hundred years ago the sights and sounds were vastly different, but there were tourists then too. In fact, this month marks the bicentennial of the first official visit to Monterey and Carmel by representatives of a foreign power: Compte Jean-Francois Galaup de La Perouse of France and his party of scientists and seamen.

The scene was caught by the party's official painter, Gaspard Duche de Vancy, in a famous drawing, of which only a copy exists today. In the center of the drawing stands La Perouse, then forty-five years old, and, in spite of his wig, fancy naval uniform and an inclination toward plumpness, a seasoned naval hero who fought with the French fleet in support of the Americans during the Revolution. Greeting the La Perouse party is Father Fermin Francisco de Lasuen (la Suen), succcessor to Father Junipero Serra, with several Franciscan priests. Accompanying the French are the Spanish Governor Pedro de Fages and his men. A file of Spanish soldiers is shown on the right of the picture; the Indians--men, women and children-- watch stolidly from the left.* La Perouse later made the following observations:

Before we entered the church, we had passed through a square in which the Indians of both sexes were ranged in a line. They exhibited no marks of surprise in their countenance, and left us in doubt whether we should be the subject of their conversation for the rest of the day. The church is neat though patched with straw. It is dedicated to St. Charles, (San Carlos) and adorned with some tolerable pictures, copied from originals in Italy . . . On coming out of the church we passed through the same row of Indians, whom the Te Deum had not induced to abandon their post. The children had only removed a small distance and formed groups near the house of the missionaries . . . The Indian village stands to the right, consisting of about 50 huts, which serve for 740 persons of both sexes, including their children . . .

These huts are the most wretched that are anywhere to be met with. They are round, and about six feet in diameter and four in height. Some stakes of the thickness of a man's arm, stuck in the ground and meeting at the top, compose the framing. Eight or ten bundles of straw, ill-arranged over the stakes, are the only defense against the rain; and when the weather is fine, more than half of the hut remains uncovered . . .

The Indians, as well as the missionaries, rise with the sun and immediately go to prayers and mass, which last for an hour. During this time three large boilers are set on the fire for cooking a kind of soup, being made of barley meal. . . of which the Indians are extremely fond. They eat it without butter or salt, and it would certainly to us be a most insipid mess.

The time of repast is three-quarters of an hour; after which they all go to work, some to till the ground with oxen, some to dig in the garden while others

Visit to the Mission. This often reproduced picture is believed to be a copy of a sketch made by de Vancy who accompanied the La Perouse expedition. See Footnotes.

are employed in domestic occupations, and all under the eyes of one or two missionaries. The day generally consists of seven hours' labour, and two hours of prayer; but there are four or five hours of prayer on Sundays and festivals. The converted Indians have preserved all the ancient customs which their new religion does not prohibit; they have the same huts, the same diversions and the same clothes. The clothing of the richest consists of a garment of otter skin, which descends from the waist somewhat lower than the groin. The most indolent have simply a piece of cloth, which the mission supplies, to cover the nudities, and a small cloak of rabbit skin, tied under the chin, which covers their shoulders and descends to their waist. The rest of their body is absolutely naked, as well as the head. Some of them, however, have straw hats, which are neatly made.

The clothing of the women is a mantle of deer skin, badly tanned. Those of the mission have generally a small corset with sleeves, which, with a small apron of rushes, and a petticoat of deer skin descending to the lower leg, is the whole of their dress. Young girls of more than nine years of age have simply a cloth around their waist, and the children of both sexes are entirely naked.

The hair both of men and women is cut to the length of about four or five inches. The Indians living in other villages have no instruments of iron, performing this operation with lighted fire-brands. They are likewise in the habit of painting their bodies red, in general, and when they are in mourning, in black. The missionaries have forbidden the first of these paintings; but they are obliged to tolerate the other, because these people are so strongly attached to their friends. [1]

Despite admissions by the clergy that leg-irons were used and the whip occa-

sionally employed, La Perouse was generally approving of the mission system, at least as observed in Carmel. He comments:

It is with the happiest satisfaction that I can make known the pious and wise behaviour of these priests who are carrying out so perfectly the aims of their order; I will not conceal what I considered reprehensible in their internal practices; but I will say that, being individually good and humane, they temper the austerity of the rules drawn up by their superiors with their gentleness and charity. [2]

During his ten-day stay in Monterey and Carmel, La Perouse was treated to far better fare than he found at the mission. His host, Governor Fages, did all he could to make the French comfortable.

La Perouse's voyage was patterned after those commissioned by the English in 1772 and 1779 under the command of Captain Cook. Despite Cook's tragic death, the stage was set for large scale, government sponsored expeditions, ostensibly to observe and record scentific phenomenena and to help fill in the blanks on oceanic charts. There were, of course, other motives--political and commercial--and they were carefully spelled out in La Perouse's royal instructions from Louis XVI:

It appears that Spain has entertained the design of extending her claim of possession as far as Port de los Remedios . . . but nothing indicates her having formed a settlement there . . . As far as possible to judge by such accounts as have reached France, the actual possession of Spain does not extend beyond the harbours of San Diego and Monterey, where she has erected small forts, garrisoned by detachments from California or New Mexico.

The (S)ieur de la Perouse will endeavor to learn the condition, strength, and object of these establishments; and to satisfy himself, whether they will be the only ones formed by Spain on the Coast. [3]

La Perouse left the port of Brest August 1, 1785, with two ships specially outfitted for the expedition, the **Boussole** and **Astrolabe.** In addition to the crew, the vessels were crowded with a number of scientists, two artists, including De Vancy, five cows tied to the mainmast, 30 sheep in the longboat, 20 pigs along the gangways, 200 hens in cages along the poop deck, dried fish hanging from the shrouds, trading goods and all manner of other fresh and dried food. The ships made an easy passage around Cape Horn and hugged the South American coast as far as Concepcion, Chile, where the visitors were royally entertained for three weeks by the Spanish. It was to be the expedition's last taste of comfort until they reached Monterey, almost six months later.

From Chile, the courses of the two ships described a large arc to the north, briefly touching Easter Island, spending several days among the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) where Cook had been killed, and finally making landfall on the North Pacific Coast, near what is now Mt.St.Elias in Alaska. One of La Perouse's objectives was to determine if there was indeed a Northwest Passage which would allow vessels to cross from the Atlantic to the Pacific without fac-

ing the usually dangerous waters around Cape Horn.

He moved south, using his small boats to reconnoiter the foggy, treacherous coastline, until he reached a wide bay ringed with giant glaciers. Not finding it marked on his chart, he named it Port des Francais (now known as Lituya Bay) and speculated that it might serve as a French fur-trading post. After spending almost a month in the area, the ships were preparing to depart when tragedy struck--an omen of what was ultimately to befall the entire expedition. Two of the ships' longboats overturned near the entrance to the bay, drowning six officers and fifteen men.

Despite the tragedy, the voyage continued, down the coasts of Alaska, British Columbia, Washington and Oregon. Thick fog and contrary winds prevented identification of the Straits of Juan de Fuca or the Columbia River, although a number of other prominent features of the coast were sighted and named. Finally, still enveloped in fog, the **Boussole** and **Astrolabe** warily entered Monterey Bay on September 15, 1786, guided by guns fired by the Spanish to help them find their way to safe anchorage. Governor Fages had already been alerted about the impending visit and offered the weary French party every courtesy, as well as undertaking the complete re-provisioning of the ships. La Perouse was impressed with the area around Monterey:

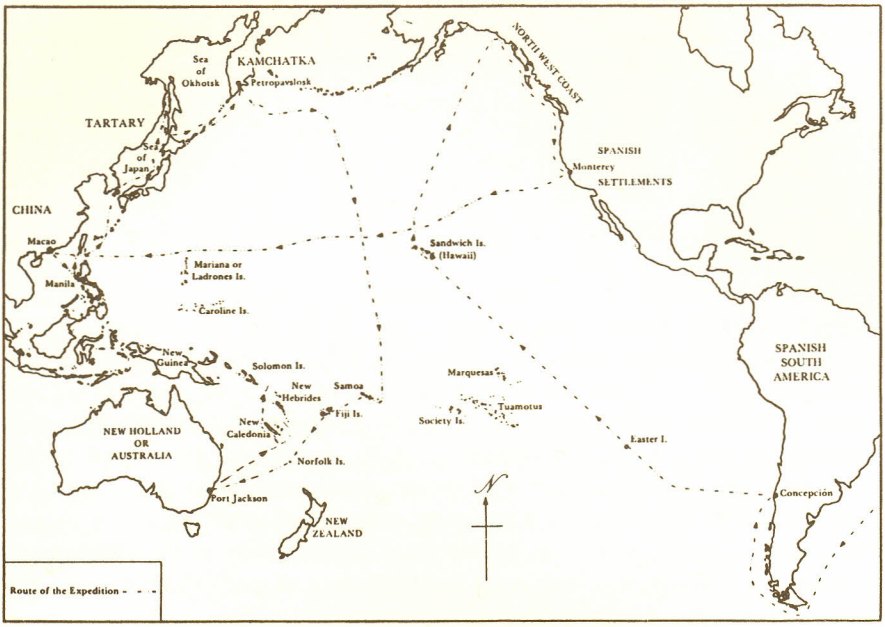
. . . the country is inexpressibly fertile; all kinds of vegetables succeed perfectly there . . . Fruit trees are still very scarce there but the climate suits them to perfection. It differs little from that of our southern provinces of France. At least, the cold is no sharper while the summer heat is much more moderate because of the continual fogs which supply an humidity very favorable to vegetation. The forest trees . . . grow without underbrush and a turf on which it is very pleasant to walk covers the ground in these forests. In them are found open spaces of several leagues extent, forming vast plains covered with all kinds of game . . . The nearest flowing water to the presidio is two leagues distant. This brook, which flows near the mission, was called by the ancient navigators the Carmel River. This too great a distance from our frigates did not permit us to get water there. We obtained it from some ponds behind the fort, where it was of very mediocre quality, scarcely able to dissolve soap. [4]

M. De Monneron, Engineer in Chief of the expedition, was also enthusiastic, reporting:

The land around Monterey, although dry, appears adapted to profitable cultivation and we have proof that our European grains yield good and abundant crops. Butcher's meat there is of the highest quality. Thus it is certain that, considering the excellence of the port, if this establishment ever becomes prosperous, one or several vessels at a time would find nowhere in the world a better port of call . . . [5]

He was less sanguine, however, about Monterey's immediate prospects:

A century will pass, perhaps two, before . . . north California will be able to attract the attention of the great maritime powers. For a long



Voyage of La Perouse before and after his visit to Monterey.
(Illustration from John Dunsmore's Pacific Explorer.)

time to come that one which is now in possession (Spain) may not dream of founding colonies able to make great progress. Meanwhile its zeal for the propagation of the faith has scattered several missions over it but it is to be believed that even the pirates will not go to disturb the friars . . .[6]

Time was approaching to continue the voyage but La Perouse could not leave without expressing his thanks to the Spanish, who, he said "received our ships like two of their own." By September 23, everything was on board.

We made our adieux to the governor and the missionaries. We took with us as much provisions as when we left (Chile). The poultry yards of M. Fages and the friars has been transferred to our hen-coops. The friars had added to this grain, beans, peas and had kept back only what was absolutely necessary for themselves. They did not wish any payment and yielded only to our argument that they were only administrators and not proprietors of the missions.[7]

In return for this bounty, Nicolas Collignon, the expedition's gardener, left behind a number of seeds and grains from Europe and South America to be planted in the mission gardens. A small grist mill was also donated to expedite the milling of cereals.

On September 23, the two ships set sail bound for Macao, China. "I can only inadequately express my gratitude," La Perouse wrote later of the visit. From China the two ships turned north through the Sea of Japan, successfully navigating the dangerous waters off Siberia before emerging again into the Pacific through a strait that still bears La Perouse's name. The expedition con-

tinued north, along the Kurile Islands to Kamchatka, furthest outpost of the Russian Empire. It was here that La Perouse dispatched Jean, Baron de Lessups, the only member of the expedition who spoke Russian, across the frozen steppes of Siberia with reports of the expedition's progress to date, including the accounts of the California visit. This trip, by boat, foot, sled and carriage, is a saga of its own and was not completed for almost a year when de Lessups turned the documents over to the French ambassador in St. Petersburg. The exhausted messenger was not aware--nor was anyone else--that by this time the entire expedition had vanished.

After dropping de Lessups, La Perouse took his ships almost due south toward Australia, stopping at a number of small islands en route. Here again, disaster struck, when 12 members of the expedition were massacred on the Samoan Island of Tutuila while refilling water casks. The expedition continued on to Australia, reaching Botany Bay in January of 1788, where the men were rested for about six weeks. While there, La Perouse turned over the final section of his journal to a homeward-bound English naval lieutenant as well as a number of letters and reports from his men. They were duly delivered-- the last words from the ill-fated voyage.

On March 10, the **Boussole** and **Astrolabe** set sail for New Caledonia and the Soloman Islands. No white man ever saw the members of the expedition again.

Despite French efforts to determine the fate of the two ships, it was almost 40 years later that an Irish sea captain, Peter Dillon, stumbled on traces of the expedition. While in command of the trading schooner St. Patrick, he called on the island of Tikopia, part of the Santa Cruz group, in 1826. There he was shown a silver sword guard and learned that a number of other objects of foreign manufacture had been found on the adjacent island of Vanikoro. Contrary winds prevented him from visiting the island, but later, in command of a research vessel outfitted by the British, he found further objects from La Perouse's two ships and actually talked to an islander who remembered the shipwrecks as a young boy. According to his account, the ships were driven on the reef outside the island by a tropical storm. One (he knew not which) was completely destroyed and the survivors who waded ashore were killed by the natives; the other washed up on the beach along with several hundred members of the crew. There, they erected a palisade to hold the islanders at bay and set to work constructing a small two-masted ship from the wreckage on which they sailed away, vanishing forever into the vast expanse of the Pacific. Two crew members were left behind and reportedly lived on the island for thirty years during which time no foreign ship called. Dillon was able to salvage a ship's bell and other relics from the site of the wrecks and these objects were later identified as belonging to the expedition by de Lessups. Further expeditions, continuing today, have brought up a substantial number of relics from the coral-encrusted remains of the **Boussole** and **Astrolabe** resting forever among the reefs of Vanikoro.

After many months of silence, it finally became apparent that some disaster had overtaken the expedition. The French were shocked by the disappearance of the men and ships. There is a story, recently repeated in a national news magazine, that Louis XVI, as he was being led to the guillotine seven years later, asked plaintively, "Has there been any news of La Perouse?"

Despite the fate of Cook and La Perouse, the Spanish mounted a similar ex-

pedition under the command of Alexandro Malaspina. Touching Monterey in 1791, five years after the French, Malaspina found La Perouse and company were still fondly remembered:

Several persons had known him and all united in admiring the qualities that characterized the individuals of that expedition. The observatory (they built) remained in the storehouse on the beach . . . de Vancij (Vancy) had left a little sketch of much skill representing the reception given (them) at the mission, and finally, we had found, as worthy tokens of the expedition and of the humanity of their leaders, a number of seeds and fruit trees, now propagated at the mission in the neighborhood, and also, as a gift to the fathers, a small machine for the grinding of wheat . . . [8]

DLW

FOOTNOTES:

* According to Mrs. James L. Ord, in her book, "Ocurrencias en California," a mission priest, Father Rafael Moreno, gave the picture to her brother, Juan de la Guerra, about 1833. He, in turn, gave it to her on his death bed several years later. She reports that it was stolen from her trunk about 1838 or 1839. The picture, or one very like it, later showed up in the Museo Naval, Madrid. Since Spain was no longer in control of California at that time and since Mrs. Ord's description differs somewhat from the Spanish version, it is generally assumed the picture in the Museo Naval is a copy of the original, probably made by Tomas de Suria, an artist-engraver, who accompanied Malaspina's Spanish expedition to Monterey in 1791.

REFERENCES:

(1) From La Perouse's " A Voyage Round the World, Performed in the Years 1785, 1786, 1787 and 1788." The journal was not first published in France until 1797, nine years after the explorer's disappearance. An English translation was made in 1799 and an American translation commissioned for and printed by Joseph Bumstead, Boston, in 1801. Another translation was made by Charles N. Rudkin, Glen Dawson Press, Los Angeles. 1959. All English versions were used in preparing this text.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ibid.

(4) Ibid.

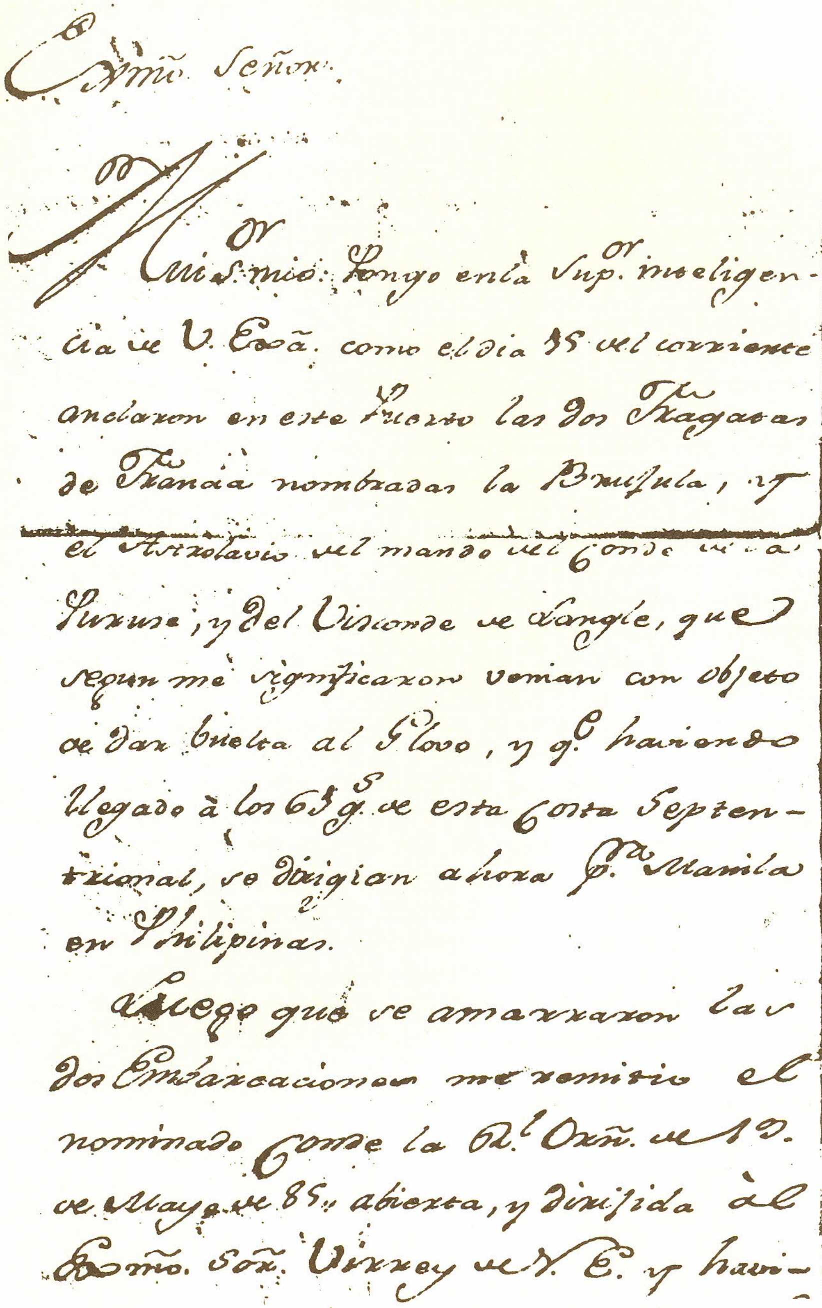
(5) From a letter of M. De Monneron, Engineer-in-Chief of the expedition, written on board the Boussole, December 24, 1786.

(6) Ibid.

(7) From La Perouse's journal

(8) From Malaspina's "Viaje alrededor del Mundo," translated by Mrs. Edith C. Galbraith, California Historical Society Quarterly, Vol. 13, No. 3, Octoober, 1924.

Special acknowledgement is due John Dunmore for the details of the voyage contained in his book "Pacific Explorer," first published 1985, Dunmore Press, Ltd., Palmerston, New Zealand; printed and distributed in the United States and Canada by the Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, Maryland.


Exmo. Señor.

Muy Sr. mio: Pongo en la Sup. inteligen-
cia de V. Exa. como el dia 15 del corriente
anclaron en este Puerto las dos Fragatas
de Francia nombradas la Brujula, y
el Astrolavio del mando del Conde de la
Perouse, y del Visconde de Langle, que
segun me significaron venian con objeto
de dar buelta al Globo, y q. haviendo
llegado à los 63 g.s de esta Costa Septen-
trional, se dirigian ahora p.a Manila
en Philipinas.

Luego que se amarraron las
dos Embarcaciones me remitio el
nominado Conde la R.l Orn. de 10.
de Mayo de 85, abierta, y dirijida àl
Exmo. Sor. Virrey de N. E. y havi-

Portion of a report on La Perouse's visit to Monterey made by Governor Fages to Jose de Galvez, Spanish Minister of the Indies. It is dated September 28, 1786, four days after the expedition left Monterey, and details supplies given to the French, including 44 head of beef, 200 chickens and 8 tunny fishes.

(Photocopy of this letter, located in the National Historic Archives, Madrid, Spain, was furnished by Eric and Conchita Beerman to Amelie Elkinton and is used here with her permission.)

PAGES FROM THE PAST

Road to the Valley

Although construction of a Hatton Canyon highway is being hotly contested again, the best way of getting from Carmel Valley to Monterey has been a concern for much longer, as this article from The Monterey New Era points out. Caltrans officials might take particular note of the estimated cost. --Ed.

H.S. Ball, R.F. Johnston and County Engineer Lou. G. Hare, the viewers appointed at the last meeting of the Board of Supervisors to investigate the proposed new road though the Canada Segunda have completed their labors and filed their report with the clerk of the board Monday. The length of the road as surveyed, from the mouth of the Canada Segunda to the Del Monte blacksmith shop, is five and two-tenths miles long, which means a saving of one and three-quarters miles in a single trip from upper Carmel Valley to Monterey or three and a half miles in a round trip . . .

There are no difficulties in the way that would make the road an expensive one, indeed the settlers along the route agree to build the road providing the county will procure the right of way and fence it. The maximum grade is ten per cent and there is only a half mile of that; moreover it is on the Monterey side, where the heaviest loads will come down hill. Only two miles will need to be graded, the settlers having built a mile and three quarters....The estimated cost of construction, including grading, is between $700 and $800. The report strongly recommends the opening of the road as a public highway as it is greatly needed. The district to be benefitted by it comprises the upper Carmelo, Cachagua, Tularcitos and all the country between the summit of the coast mountains and the Carmel River, an area of about 175 square miles. Of course there is within that area a considerable amount of totally useless land, but there is also a large amount of choice arable land that is rapidly being brought into cultivation. The region has proved to be admirably adapted to fruit culture and promising young orchards are becoming quite numerous, so that while there is pressing need for the road today, every day increases the urgency of the necessity.

The Monterey New Era, June 3, 1896

Wanted

Wanted at this office, a bulldog of any color except pumpkin and milk; of respectable size, snub nose, cropped ears, abbreviated conformation and bad disposition who can come when called with raw beefsteak and will bite the man who spits tobacco juice all about the editor's room and steals the (newspaper) exchanges . . .

--The Monterey Sentinel, October 13, 1855

LETTERS

Dear Editor:

The staff of Noticias welcomes letters from readers on matters of historical interest. The editor reserves the right to abridge or reject contributions because of the dictates of space or because the material, in his opinion, falls outside the focus of this publication.

No reluctant dragon

Dear Editor:

In reference to the article concerning the raising of the American flag in the June issue of Noticias:

Sloat, unhappily, has been the target of criticism by many California writers. Chief of these was H.H.Bancroft, a historian of the last century.

The principal charge was a lack of agressiveness. A persistent local myth also holds that Sloat would not have acted at Monterey without the urging of the U. S. Consul Thomas O. Larkin.

I quote here from two letters that Larkin wrote to James Buchanan, U. S. Secretary of State, on July 20, 1846--13 days after the takeover:

"From Monterey to the North affairs, in general, appear quiet. From the South, there is no information for several days. The undersigned, although he wished Commodore Sloat to postpone his proceedings two or three weeks, assisted in drawing up the Proclamation so that he might modify it to the wants of the people.

"The undersigned was very anxious to proceed to Panama in the Levant and proceed directly to Washington, but Commodore Sloat would not admit his being absent, nor will Commodore Stockton agree that he shall leave the coast until affairs are happily arranged.

"Although the undersigned regrets that a farther time could not be had to produce our flag in this country in another form, being confident of its success, yet he would say that the deed being done (by the Act of Commodore Sloat) the views of the United States are fully opened to the world, who will take no excuse of palliation for this act, the flag should henceforth remain where Commodore Sloat has placed it, now and hereafter. Could the Natives have their Vote on the subject two years hence, they would adhere to it."

These quotes make it very clear that if there was a reluctant dragon around, it was not Sloat.

Sincerely,

Rear Admiral Edward J. O'Donnell, USN, Ret.

Noticias del Puerto de Monterey is a quarterly publication issued by The Monterey History and Art Association every March, June, September and December.

ISSN No.: 0886-7151

Changes of address should be directed to the Association office: Post Office Box 805, Monterey, California 93942

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1986 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

September 21 ..... Annual Meeting