

NOTICIAS del PUERTO de MONTEREY

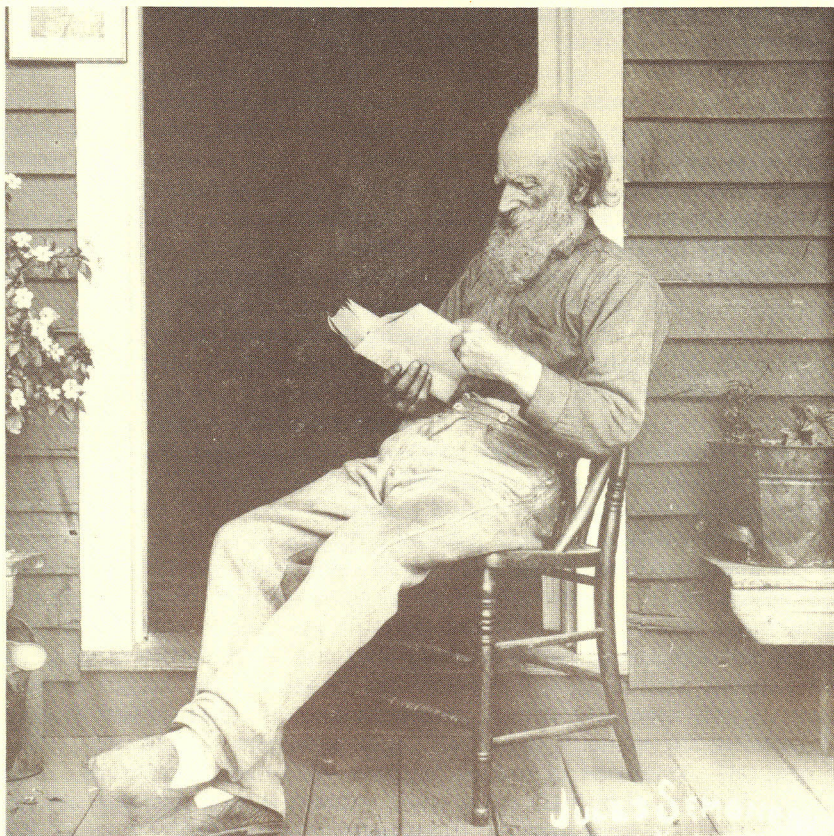
**A Quarterly Bulletin of Historic Monterey Issued by
The Monterey History and Art Association**

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

Vol. XXVIII, No. 1

March, 1987



French restaurateur and philosopher Jules Simoneau reading on the porch of his Van Buren Street home. Story begins on page 2. (Original photograph by Wm. L. Morgan)

INSIDE: The French in Monterey

INSPIRATION AND FRUSTRATION

The French Presence

by HELEN SPANGENBERG

The first painting, one of the first consulates, the first bakery, the first foreign pottery, the first drawing teacher--these are some of the contributions of the French to Monterey and California. In return, the Gallic temperament, transplanted to the raw edge of the New World, produced some notable examples of inspiration and frustration. The setting of Monterey, with its dramatic coast and countryside, served as an inspiration for any number of French artists, while France's failure to gain a political toehold in Alta California was the despair of many a French official. Monterey's first state visitor, *Compte Jean-Francois Galaup de la Perouse*, arrived in 1786, and although his ill-fated expedition was officially of a scientific nature, French ambitions on the Pacific Coast did not go unnoticed by the United States. On August 14, 1785, Thomas Jefferson, then ambassador to France, wrote Secretary of State John Jay that he would like to be assured that the French "are perfectly weaned from the desire of possessing colonies in America."

With the *La Perouse* expedition was the artist *Gaspard Duche de Vancy*, whose painting of the Carmel Mission is generally acknowledged as the first actual depiction of a California scene.

Several French ships called at Monterey following *La Perouse's* visit, seeking to enter the lucrative fur trade, but none made much impact until 1818 when the French freebooter *Hippolyte Bouchard* exposed the vulnerability of the California coast by sacking and burning Monterey. Although *Bouchard's* crew was drawn from waterfronts all over the world, the Frenchman was very much in command, and his raids in California were probably motivated as much by his dislike of the Spanish as his desire for loot. His four hundred man landing force outnumbered the local garrison by ten to one, forcing the local troops to retreat for a week to the vicinity of what is now Salinas, while *Bouchard* and his men occupied Monterey. Almost ten years later, in August of 1827, the French merchant ship "*Le Heros*," under the command of *Auguste Bernard Duhaut-Cilly* dropped anchor in Monterey. The ship had spent the previous several months cruising the California coast in search of trade. *Duhaut-Cilly* was a keen observer of the local scene and later published an account of his visit in France. He was also an artist of considerable talent and his paintings provide a graphic view of early California. In the next several years the French vessels "*Venus*" and "*Artemise*" stopped in Monterey on round the world voyages and further reports were published in France of the opportunities on the Pacific Coast. Captain *Cyrille Pierre Laplace*, commander of the *Artemise*, first advised Governor *Alvarado* that his visit was simply part of a scientific expedition. But in a private conversation later, according to *Alvarado*, the French commander alluded to the establishment of a

protectorate in Alta California, saying that although France could not take the initiative, he had the authority to say that if a "qualified person" made such a proposal, it would be given due consideration. Alvarado commented that "I feel no embarrassment in attributing the visit of the 'Artemise' to an order of the French Admiralty Board." Whether by accident or design, Laplace, as well as Duhaut-Cilly, was a talented artist. An engraving of the Carmel Mission was later included in a book illustrating his voyage.

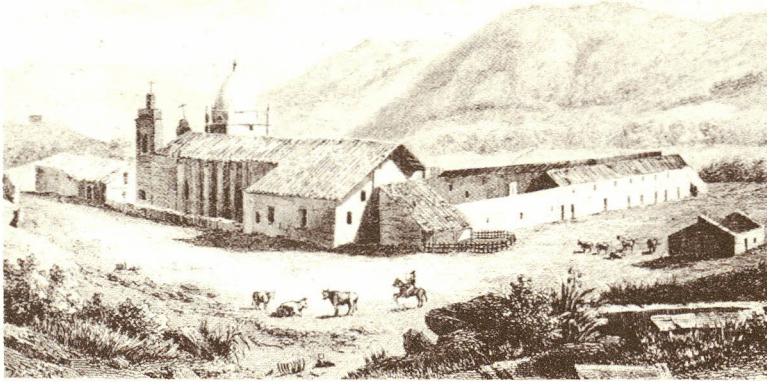
In 1840, Monterey came under the guns of the French corvette "La Danaide" commanded by Joseph de Rosamel. Rosamel had received an erroneous report that a number of Frenchmen had been killed and captured during a roundup of Americans and other foreigners. The roundup was ordered by Governor Alvarado who believed that the expatriates, led by an American, Isaac Graham, were plotting to overthrow the government. Although several French citizens were arrested, they were quickly released without incident. Graham and several other Americans were deported to Mexico, but were allowed to return later.

"La Danaide" arrived on June 11 ready for action. Rosamel and his crew were greatly disappointed, however, to find their presence unnecessary, according to a report by an American, Captain William Phelps, who was in port at the time on another vessel.

The Frenchman (Rosamel), clothed with power and authority to obtain immediate redress, was much disappointed in not finding one of his own countrymen on the list of those who were sent away; had there been a single one claiming the protection of France, perhaps the flag of that nation . . . might now be floating over California. The Frenchman, with his broadside swung on the town, was only waiting for an excuse to open his battery. But, finding none, his officers enjoyed themselves hugely, for a few days, in giving and attending parties, which was more agreeable to the people of Monterey than to have their houses battered down, while our (American) officers, from the force of circumstances, were obliged to manifest a coldness toward the natives which they did not feel. The Frenchmen were on the best of terms with them and were the especial favorites with the fair sex. One morning, at the old Presidio church, during some particular service to the Virgin, which called for the attendance of all the (young ladies) of Monterey, the French officers were there also, and so marked were their attentions to the fair devotees, that the officiating priest ordered the strangers to leave saying that they "only came there to coquet the girls." Thereupon arose a tumult. The devotees exclaimed "Let them stay; they are as good Christians as we are"; and the padre had to submit.

After leaving Monterey, Rosamel wrote the French ambassador to Mexico, Baron Alleye De Cyprey, recommending that a French consulate be established in Monterey. Although no immediate action was taken, an attache of the French embassy in Mexico, Eugene De Mofras, was dispatched to Alta California to survey the situation. He arrived in Monterey aboard the "Ninfa" in May of 1841 and busied himself visiting the surrounding missions and settlements. The French agent also reportedly attempted to convince local Mexican authorities to sign a petition asking for the establishment of a French protectorate in California, but was generally met with ridicule. On his return to France, De Mofras recommended that two French frigates should visit the California coast each year.

"England and the United States flatter themselves alike with the idea of taking California," he wrote, commenting that it would ultimately belong "to



Engraving of the Carmel Mission, 1839, by the French Captain Cyrille Laplace. The view is from a spot just West of the corner of Rio Road and Santa Lucia. From the book "California Pictorial," by Jeanne Van Nostrand and Edith M. Coulter.

whatever nation chooses to send there a man-of-war and 200 men."

De Cyprey, although French ambassador to Mexico, felt the same. On March 22, 1842, he wrote Foreign Minister Guizot, his superior:

... it seems to me that at the present juncture France cannot remain inactive. . . there is nothing that would suit her better than the Californias. . . if that necessity presents itself, it is of easy accomplishment. The Pacific station is powerful enough to take possession of that territory. . . a small expedition leaving our ports could double Cape Horn, and would transport new troops to complete the occupation of the Californias. . .

Such an impetuous move, however, did not meet with universal approval in the French foreign office. Instead, one Louis Gasquet was appointed "acting consul" for French interests in Alta California and was directed to proceed to Monterey. The assignment apparently did not please Monsieur Gasquet for he wrote a letter to the minister complaining that the 4000 francs allotted as salary was not sufficient to maintain the dignity of a French diplomat on foreign soil, particularly a post so far from the delights of Paris. In a following letter, he resigned, but then apparently thought better of it, and after a protracted and hazardous trip, arrived at Monterey May 1, 1845. Although mainly concerned with British intentions toward California, Gasquet's arrival did not go unnoticed by the Americans. The appointment of a salaried French representative, coupled with the show of force by the "Danaide" and the strange visit of De Mofras caused a flurry of dispatches between Thomas O. Larkin, United States consul general at Monterey, and Washington, D.C. A British consulate had also been established in Monterey and in 1845 Larkin informed Secretary of State Buchanan of the existence of the two diplomatic missions.

"There is not one French or English vessel doing business on this coast nor has there been for years. These consuls have nothing to do apparently. Why they are in service, the government best knows and Uncle Sam will know at his cost," noted Larkin. The American consul may also have been aware that Governor Jose Castro and others had been overheard discussing the establishment of a French protectorate and that Colonel Iniestra, who was dispatched to California in 1845 with troops (but never arrived) had received his military training in France and was rumored to have a number of French soldiers in his company. Buchanan responded by saying that it was apparent that the appearance of the two consulates "is well calculated to produce the impression that their respective governments entertained designs on that country."

Gasquet received a "distinguished welcome" from the Mexican authorities upon his arrival and took up residence in an adobe on Fremont Street, between Munras and Abrego. Larkin described him as being "a gentleman of about fifty-five, and of much respectability in appearance (who) lives very retired."

Soon after taking up his post, Gasquet began bombarding the French foreign office with letters expressing his fear that California would fall into the hands of the Americans and urging that a French naval vessel be sent to visit the area. It was his actions, and not his words, however, that soon got him into trouble with local authorities.

The first incident concerned one Henri Cambuston, an intensely patriotic Frenchman, who had been imported as the first art teacher in Alta California. During a party at Dr. Stokes' house, Cambuston struck one Captain Narvaez, a friend of Prefect Manuel Castro. When Castro sought to arrest the teacher, Cambuston refused to surrender on the grounds that Castro was not of legal age to be Prefect. The hot-headed Frenchman was seized and imprisoned, however, rousing the ire of Gasquet, who demanded his release. The matter was finally resolved by Governor Pio Pico who asked that both parties be reprimanded.

Gasquet continued to press for a French military presence in California but his hopes were dashed when a force under Commodore Sloat raised the American flag over the customhouse in July, 1846. Frustrated by this action, the French consul refused to recognize the authority of the Americans and was placed under house arrest while the troublesome Cambuston was jailed as a spy.

Gasquet continued to plead for decisive action by France, claiming the French were well respected in the area and it was only the lack of a French naval vessel that prevented the local populace from rising up and calling on France to establish a protectorate. He characterized Commodore Stockton, now in charge of American forces, as being "a man of violent and impetuous nature, uneducated, disreputable, walking about armed to the teeth, a man of large fortune who supposed anything could be bought for money."

When he was finally released from fifty-one "well counted and very long days," he furiously denounced the scandalous outrage against the dignity and honor of France and asked his government to demand a "glorious reparation."

Research by historian Abraham Nasatir, reveals that the French foreign office paid little heed to Gasquet's pleas and late in 1846 he was replaced by Jacob Antoine Moerenhout. Gasquet had one final scene to play in Monterey before his departure, however, and it took place when his replacement arrived aboard the French corvette "Brillante." The story is told in Moerenhout's first dispatch back to France:

Upon our arrival in Monterey, the Captain, desiring to communicate as quickly as possible with M. Gasquet, sent an officer ashore to announce his arrival (and) notify him that a boat would be at his orders when he wanted to come on board. Asking whether the ship commander was a "full captain," Gasquet declared that he would not go on board and that (the captain), M. de Boouzet, being merely in charge of a corvette owed him the first visit. He added that, "as for M. Moerenhout, I am ready to turn the consulate over to him, but I do not owe him a visit."

This unfortunate punctiliousness put delay and coolness in the communications; for the captain, primarily displeased because Gasquet's reply had been verbal and in the presence of two foreigners, believed himself to likewise be in the right. . . Believing I could not stop at such puerile pretensions, I went to M. Gasquet's house the next day, then took up lodgings in town and four days later persuaded the two men to meet and exchange explanations, which did away with all appearances of misunderstanding."*

Moerenhout was vastly different in character from the ineffectual, and rather pathetic, Gasquet. He had served in the Corps of Engineers; made and lost several fortunes; been an able administrator in French Oceania on which he wrote several definitive volumes, married a Chilean woman, and was a talented painter, so accomplished, in fact, that he made his living at one time painting miniatures. He served French interests well in California until the Monterey consulate was suppressed during the French Revolution of 1848. Moerenhout remained in the area, residing in a spacious house in Monterey with a beautiful rose garden. He served intermittently as a French representative, depending on the shifting political situation in Paris. He was temporarily replaced in 1850 by Jules Lombard.

According to dispatches found in French archives, Lombard "loved France, Frenchmen and French things," except for his compensation which he complained, like his predecessors, was far below the level needed to preserve French dignity in a foreign land. His letters also indicate a distinct "dislike, distaste and distrust" for America and American ways. He was extremely pessimistic about the United States in general and California in particular, commenting that deception was the state's "only and greatest asset." He predicted the failure of the gold mines and ruin for French merchants, warning potential immigrants to stay away.

Despite this, the Revolution of 1848 left many Frenchmen impoverished and with little hope for the future. News of the gold discovery in California and reports of marvelous opportunities in the new land fired the imagination of many. "La Californie," a bi-monthly publication printed in France, was devoted exclusively to such accounts. A typical clipping read:

There is no French province which does not have products accumulated which could not be sold with immense profit. . . in California. . . Our agriculture, our commerce, our industry and our capital of all kinds can draw greatest advantages. . . from the discovery of great treasure in California. Let us not lose this chance to increase our riches and to efface from memory the suffering of this past year (1848). We cannot urge the French too strongly to profit in these marvelous discoveries so that they shall not pass into the hands of others.

And come they did. French merchants, gold-seekers, restaurateurs, ar-

tisans, shop-keepers, dreamers, scoundrels, artists and those simply bored or frustrated with the old world joined the hordes looking for a new life in a new land.

As gold served as a magnet for the newcomers, it also drew away Monterey's old political, social and commercial power to the shores of San Francisco Bay, with its more commodious anchorage and easier access to the gold fields. During the 1850's the old capitol's influence waned and the need for a local consul disappeared. Moerenhout served as vice counsel to M. Patrice Dillon in San Francisco until he was transferred to Los Angeles in 1859. In the 1952 issue of the "California Historical Quarterly", a letter was reproduced from "the second French consul to his superior," dated February 10, 1851, suggesting an auction of consulate real estate, with the hope the house would bring 39,000 francs and the adjacent grounds 15,000. It was purchased by the Wolter family and passed through several hands before ultimately being known as "the tamale parlor." The building was slated for demolition for construction of a garage in 1932 when, through the efforts of the Monterey History and Art Association under the direction of Colonel Roger S. Fitch, the building was saved and moved to its present location at El Estero.

Even though the French diplomatic base had moved, emigres continued to provide a strong Gallic influence in Monterey. Among these were Honore Escolle, the merchant; Jules Tavernier, the artist; and Jules Simoneau, who was by profession a restaurateur, but by inclination a philosopher. He is best known for his friendship with Robert Louis Stevenson during that writer's stay in Monterey, but, in a broader sense, he was a friend to many vagrant artists and writers in Monterey, feeding them when hungry and serving as a sounding board for their artistic ideas and metaphysical ruminations.

After a hard day of painting on the rocks at Point Lobos, the artists socialized in Simoneau's cafe, many times "paying" for their beans and bread by painting murals on the walls with "beer and bootblack." One of the most famous of this group was Jules Tavernier, who spent four years in Monterey and, during that time, attracted a number of other artists. Many took up residence in the nearby hotel belonging to the Frenchman Jean Girardin. It was then known as the French Hotel, after its owner, and until its most famous boarder, Stevenson, gained world reknown. Another family, the Lepperts, were close to the Girardins, until one of the hotel's guests almost destroyed the friendship. The guest was Francis McComas, a young artist, who eventually became one of the area's four national academicians. McComas' habit of emptying his wash basin out of an upstairs window and into the Lepperts' yard led to harsh words. McComas was eventually forced to move.

Jules Tavernier was a social animal, outspoken as well as talented. He studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, then served as a war-correspondent during the Franco-Prussian war, until his political activities forced him to move to England and, finally, to the United States. Before settling in Monterey, his drawings and sketches had been published in "Harper's Weekly" and he had exhibited in San Francisco. Moving to Monterey, he continued his convivial ways until his penchant for drinking and ignoring debts again forced him to move, this time to Hawaii. Upon his death there in 1889, the Bohemian Club furnished a granite block to mark the grave of "this



Simoneau and the building which housed his restaurant. It was the hub of Bohemian Monterey in the 1880's, serving such customers as Robert Louis Stevenson and the artist Jules Tavernier.

talented and extravagant little Frenchman, who lived, painted and died by his own code of passionate intemperance."

Probably the most successful local emigre was Honore Escolle, who arrived in Monterey by way of New Orleans and San Francisco. Along with an ad in the Monterey Gazette of 1869, the paper editorialized that "M. Escolle is the most energetic and rustling (sic) businessman in town and deserves a large share of the public business." In 1866 he bought the Stokes house, known for having one of the "largest salas in town," from the estate of Dr. James Stokes. He opened a bakery on the premises, and then opened another store in the Cooper adobe. When he found the clay surrounding the house was suitable for making pottery, he sent to France for an assistant, Pierre Lambert, and two professional potters, Bernard Lambert and Antonio Lobino. According to an article by Mayo Hayes O'Donnell, "the pots were made in the garden at the back of the adobe on Hartnell Street and were baked in a kiln which stood near the rear wall which enclosed the property." A newspaper clipping of 1871 reported that "by Pacific (railroad) M. Escolle sent to San Francisco some 5,000 flower pots of Monterey manufacture. They find ready sale (there)."

Recent excavations at the Cooper-Molera site, and near what is now the public library, have uncovered pottery believed to be from Escolle's kiln.

Escolle eventually became the owner of thousands of acres in and around Monterey, including much of what is now the city of Carmel. He sold the bakery in 1887 to his son-in-law, A.A. Manuel, who, in turn, sold it to the Lepperts in 1891. The Escolles had eleven children, three sons and eight daughters.

The Gallic presence did not leave as strong an impression in Monterey as did several other nationalities, but without it, the area would lack some of its character and much of its color.

FOOTNOTES:

*It is not known whether the affront to Gasquet's honor was widely known, but it was almost surely common knowledge on the waterfront where a vastly different type of Frenchman spent his days. Pierre—or Pedro, as he was known,—Artellan arrived in Monterey in 1835 and, unlike the first French consul, had little trouble fitting into the local scene. He became coxswain of the Custom House launch and in 1844 was named assistant tax collector. During a fracas involving an Indian who was either drunk, bent on robbery, or both, Artellan's eye was pierced by an arrow. As this occurred while in the line of duty, he was paid a pension by the Mexican government until the American takeover when it was discontinued. Artellan married one Maria Antonia Garcia, granddaughter of one of the early Spanish soldiers, and many of the collateral descendants of the twelve children born of this union live in the area today. Pierre died in 1891 at the age of 78 and is buried in Monterey. A picture of him, minus one eye, hung for many years in the Custom House.

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PAGES FROM THE PAST

Frank Berry's Surprise

It takes a good deal to astonish Frank S. Berry, the S.P. company's station agent at this place, but some parties who had visited the depot very early Saturday morning prepared a surprise that certainly did astonish him.

He found the elegant (?) (sic) depot office in a state of wreck and confusion difficult to realize, when he came down at a quarter past six to open up for the day's business. An investigation revealed the fact that burglars had been at work, and that they had not taken any very special pains to prevent damage to the building.

Both the outer and inner doors of the safe had been blown off and shattered into fragments. The largest piece, so large was the explosion, crashed through the lower part of the office door, crossed the track and made a hole in a fishing boat drawn up on the beach about a hundred feet away. Other fragments went through the upper part of the door...into the waiting room and broke things up generally. Every pane of glass in the building was shattered. Hanging on the wall by the safe Mr. Berry had three suits of clothes and these were so badly torn by the flying fragments of the safe door as to be completely ruined.

The burglars only secured \$32. There was \$33 in the safe, but one dollar was subsequently found among the debris in front of the safe.

The office clock stopped at 1:40 by the explosion, indicating the hour the crime was committed.

There is little doubt that the burglary was committed by a couple of strangers who had been in town for a couple of days (and) were not to be found Saturday morning...One of them rented a room at the St. Charles hotel and had given orders for an early call and breakfast in time to take the morning train. When the clerk went up to call him, he found the room empty and that the bed had not been occupied.

No trace of the robbers has yet been obtained, though Sheriff Matthews and the local police have made diligent search.

The Monterey New Era, January 20, 1896

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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MONTEREY HISTORY
AND ART ASSOCIATION
Post Office Box 805
Monterey, California 93942**

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