

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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A history of the Old Whaling Station written by Miss Edith M. March, the granddaughter of David Wight, the builder, has been sent to Mrs. Mary Greene, curator of the Custom House, by Miss Ruth Magaw of Montebello, California. Miss Magaw and her sister, Miss Winifred Magaw, were visitors in Monterey during the Centennial celebration and became so interested in the old buildings and historical displays that they decided to contribute the old letters and documents given to them by Miss March before her death.

Miss March probably wrote the history of the Whaling Station, as it is now known, to read before a club meeting in Los Angeles. Other letters and papers sent by Miss Magaw contribute bits of verifying evidence of the history of the building and the life of the builders.

The paper written by Miss March is entitled: David Wight, Owner and Builder of the Old Whaling Station at Monterey California. It begins:

My grandfather, David Wight, was born in Doddington, England, in 1818. Doddington is 10 miles south of Berwick-on-Tweed and the Scottish border, 10 miles west of Bamburgh and Bamburgh Castle, that fortress on the North Sea in Northumberland, built in 1070 A.D.

"... I will never forget the day I took a motor trip from Berwick-on-Tweed to Bamburgh and return. On the way up the east coast of Britain (this was in 1926) to Berwick I stopped two days at Newcastle-on-Tyne where my mother, Isabella Wight March, was born in 1840."

These two paragraphs, quoted from Miss March's paper, will give the reader a picture of the birthplace of the young couple who pioneered in Monterey, as she writes:

It must have been 1845 or '46 that they came up the coast from South America to Monterey, California, and in 1847 grandfather built their new home, just around the corner from the Old Custom House. My mother told me it was the first two-story adobe residence in Monterey. There were two-story hotels and office buildings. It is next door to the first brick house in California built by Mr. Dickenson.

I met Mr. Dickenson's daughter, Mrs. Lawrey, then an old lady in the 80's, living in Pacific Grove. She told me her father and husband, then a boy of 15, and supposedly some Indians helped by grandfather build

his house. She remembered my grandmother, and said she was so glad to have a home at last. My mother remembered sitting in one of the downstairs windows and learning the letters of the alphabet, taught by her mother."

David Wight was the son of George Wight and grandson of David Wight. This David Wight, the elder, was said to be a builder and had built whole streets of homes in Carlisle, England. Miss March's mother was the eldest child of her great grandfather George Wight's eldest child, David.

When she was one year old, she was taken on a sailing vessel to New Zealand, then the family went to Chile, for a time before their arrival in Monterey.

"In August, 1929, when in Monterey," Miss March continues, "I was able to see the interior of the old adobe with its two-foot thick walls. I was glad to find it so well cared for and furnished in antique style suitable to the place. In 1926 I had visited the old stone home of the Wights in Ayton, Scotland, and I found that the plan of the adobe is almost exactly like that of the house in Ayton; the stairway leading straight up from a narrow hall from the front door, and rooms opening into the hall on each side. The ceiling are very low.

"Poor grandmother!! Her joy in her new home did not last long, for in January, 1848, gold was discovered in the California mountains and streams, and, of course, grandfather and his family had to go to the goldfields. My mother said so great was the craze and rush for gold that people left their houses standing open. Grandfather likely sold his home to the whalers of Monterey, as it faced the bay where any whales came, and they could sit at the upstairs windows with spy glasses and when whales were sighted go after them."

When the Wights left Monterey for the goldfields they went to a place called Dry Diggings - pioneering in earnest. Mr. Wight did not know anything about mining, according to his granddaughter, so he started a grocery store. He rode horseback, rifle over his pommel as he rode to Sacramento for his groceries - \$100 for a sack of flour, \$25 for three pounds of potatoes and everything else in proportion.

"So Grandfather Wight was one of the Forty-Niners, and my mother, too, in her small child way was a pioneer. In Bancroft's History of California, Grandfather's name is listed as one of the pioneers. In after years in Illinois, Grandfather was called was called 'California Wight'

since he made his fortune there in Forty-Nine," the paper continues.

In less than two years Mr. Wight declared that he had all the money he needed and he took his family back to the States, as they were called. On the government ship which took them to the Isthmus of Panama, they enjoyed the companionship of General Fremont, his wife and little daughter. They finally landed in New Orleans where Mr. Wight had his gold dust minted and bought a gold watch, which Miss March still had in her possession at the time of her death.

Later the family settled in Illinois, where the builder of the Whaling Station in Monterey died at the age of 45 – really a young man, but think of the active life he had lived. He is buried in the East cemetery in Jacksonville, Illinois.

Miss March's mother who became Mrs. March in 1860, came to live in Southern California in 1883. She never saw the old home in Monterey again. She died at the age of 82, in 1923.