

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

January 7, 1950

Mrs. Millie Birks has presented a valuable collection of twenty-four items to the Monterey History and Art Association to be presented for future generations to study in order that they might appreciate what an historical contribution Monterey made to these United States.

Before listing the documents presented by Mrs. Birks, a resume of the story of the finding of the letters papers books and magazines, will prove most interesting to the reader.

Some years ago when Mrs. Birks was a young married woman, she saw a group of boys tearing up old papers and playing in a vacant area on Calle Principal. A house was being demolished and cases of old things were being thrown out. She thought that maybe some day these things would be valuable and should be preserved for Monterey, so she sent her husband with a wheelbarrow to bring a load home. They were stored in her aunt's old home, and not again disturbed for many years, until the opening of her son's shop necessitated changes to the old building at Tyler and Scott streets. Mrs. Birks' aunt and uncle were Captain and Mrs. Thomas Lambert. Captain Lambert was in charge of the Custom House and it was there that Mrs. Birks lived as a young girl.

It is hoped that when the new library is completed that the Millie Birks collection will be placed in the historical room along with other valuable items belonging to the Monterey History and Art Association and on permanent loan to the library.

Mrs. Lambert, who had a little wooden building at the point of Calle Principal and Alvarado streets, where she sold sea shells and seaweed to the tourist trade, had collected a group of old heavy books in which she pressed the seaweed. These books are also included in the collection.

There are ten volumes of store records; one record book of the city recorder of Monterey dated 1851; four stamp dies for embroidery work made by Captain Lambert; one old match holder from the Washington Hotel; seven old copies of Harper's Overland Monthly, and the Popular Monthly in the 1870's and 1880's and four books of Rules and Regulations in 1840's.

The cash book covers cash records of June 3, 1851 to October 30, 1852. The invoice book covers the period from June 3, 1851 to Nov. 1, 1852. From it we learn that from June 3, 1851 to April 1, 1852, William Curtis and Milton Little were partners, but in April, 1852, they dissolved their partnership, and it was probably then that Milton Little established his own store, and Curtis continued alone.

The day books and ledgers cover the period from May 1853 to 1867. Some volumes are missing, but in those we have a story of Monterey that has yet to be written. Stories of that period acted often in the present capacity of a bank. There are records of transactions for board and room, real estate deals, shipping records, and the records of wharf income.

After dissolving partnership in April of 1852, Mr. Curtis evidently reopened in May, 1853. Then in June 1853 Simpson Conover is credited with \$2,021.00 and in July of the same year \$2,074.22, both accounts in cash. It is possible that it was at this time that Simpson Conover became a partner of Curtis, because from then on the store was called Curtis and Conover.

Ledger A is almost as good as a census of Monterey, except that the customers were mainly the citizens of American extraction, while the names of the older Spanish and Mexican families are not as prevalent for the first year.

There are almost 300 separate accounts found in the first ledger from the opening day of May 17, 1853, to the spring of 1854. The first charge accounts were: W.R. Post, John Foster, J.W. Bates, David Jacks, and the firm of Sweet and Keating. The second day of business, three new accounts were opened: E.R. Clay, Lewis Belcher and the Monterey Saw Mills.

The Little family were customers; Milton Little, Jane Little, a sister who had been a school teacher, and later went to Texas where she taught for many years; Louis Little, a brother who died in 1856. One of the last entries in his account is dated November 20, 1859, "To cash for digging grave, \$6.00.

There are accounts opened for ships that sailed into Monterey from coastwise ports, from Santa Cruz and San Francisco. These were the Logwood, the Bark Libertad, the schooner John Dunlap, and the schooner Vaquero, in 1853, and the steamer Southerner in 1854. Their accounts include amounts paid in cash for launch, hire, for wood delivered, for cash to officers, and credits

for freight charges paid by residents who received shipments or who shipped pears, beans, etc. to San Francisco.