

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

January 9, 1950

Saturday we began an account of the interesting items in a collection of old books and manuscripts presented to the Monterey History and Art Association recently by Mrs. Millie Birks, and we are continuing with a part of the interesting review today.

An entire story could be written about four persons who had accounts at the Curtis and Conover store in Monterey in 1853 and thereabouts. We find Anastascio Garcia, Isaac B. Wall, Thomas Williamson and Charles Layton. Anastascio Garcia was one of our early bandits and was hanged by a mob in the Colton Hall hail, for the murder of Isaac B. Wall and Thomas Williamson. Isaac B. Wall was Custom Collector of Monterey from May 28, 1853, to that fatal day in November, 1855.

There are variations of the story that have been written in years past, and I suppose we will never know the true story. E.L. Williams, who was a prominent resident at the time, has written of the murder, claiming that there was no proof that Garcia committed it, but most other stories of the time claim he did.

Isaac Wall, accompanied by Thomas Williamson, the constable, was on his way to San Luis Obispo. According to Williams they went on a hunting trip; according to Wall's deputy in his report to Washington they were on official business to San Luis Obispo, where there was a deputy collector; and according to family tales of old residents they were absconding with part of the fortune of the widow of Jose Maria Sanchez.

Wall and Williamson were found shot to death, a posse was raised and an attack made on Garcia's house near old Hilltown. In the confusion that followed, Joaquin de la Torre was killed and Charles Layton was wounded. Charles Layton was the lighthouse keeper at Point Pinos.

The murder occurred November 9, 1853. Garcia was attacked and escaped on the 10th, and Charles Layton died from wounds on November 19th. Layton left a wife and several small children. She was later appointed as lighthouse keeper in his place. We wonder if she might have been the first woman in the West to have such a position.

In the old store records there are other groups of names, all closely connected. James Watson came to Monterey in 1830 and opened a small store. He married

Mariana Escamilla and they had a large family and later lived on San Benito rancho. In the year 1854, E.L. Williams was county clerk, Dr. Colbert A. Canfield was coroner, and James Gleason was superior judge. All three of these men married daughters of James Watson, and their descendants include many prominent present-day residents of this county. Thomas Watson, a son of James, was for many years a sheriff of Monterey County, and although his account is not found in the earliest ledger, as he established his own home in later years, we can find the items he bought.

Let us continue with some of the customers of the first year: John Anthony, colored man, who did hauling; Captain B.G. Baldwin of the Presidio, who bought shot, powder, and a ream of paper, and borrowed cash (probably until the government check arrived); William G. Badger, who evidently was a shipping merchant out of San Francisco, buying pears, potatoes and peas from local farmers, and bringing large shipments of merchandise to Monterey; F. Beeman, who rented A. Saloman's house at \$6 a month (from the 1852 assessment rolls we find that A. Saloman owned property where the Pat Wall Gallery on Oliver street is now); Doctor Blankman, who bought a set of silver and three goblets for \$100 from a traveling salesman; Carter, the cook, who "commended work March 28, 1854 at \$35 a month."

M. Morenhout the French Consul; John Comfort, the stage driver between San Juan and Monterey; the Washington Hotel, that paid cash; Joseph M. Gregg, James Meadows and John R. Mason, pioneer farmers who shipped out of Monterey by boat; John O'Neil, retired army officer, who had played in the first plays at the First Theatre; two of the Ord brothers – James L. and Pacificus; James Gardner, the early school teacher, who was paid with the first county warrant issued from school funds for Monterey District; Warren the express man; Reuban Morey, Captain Charles Wolter; Captain J.B.R. Cooper; Thomas Cole, early teamster; Bob the fisherman, etc., etc.

There is a story behind the few items in the account of J. McElroy. Mr. McElroy was the publisher of the "Monterey Sentinel" in Monterey in the early 1850's. But Monterey fast went down the hill after the state capital moved away, and Santa Cruz was becoming a fast growing town, so in the summer of 1856 McElroy moved his earthly possessions and his paper there and renamed it the "Pacific Sentinel." The paper was still in

existence in 1906 when the 50th year edition was published. It is now called the San Cruz Sentinel.

Mrs. William Kneass the curator of the Stevenson House and former assistant at the Old Custom House, has made an extensive study of the Millie Birks collection, and to her we owe much of the information in these articles.