

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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A Glowing Tribute

"A Tour of Duty in California, Including a Description of the Gold Region; and an Account of the Voyage Around Cape Horn; with Notices of Lower California, the Gulf and Pacific Coast, and the Principal Events Attending the Conquest of the Californians by Joseph Warren Revere, Lieutenant U.S. Navy, Lately in Command of the Military District of Sonoma." All the above is the title of a small book published in 1849 in New York and Boston – one of the many valuable volumes contained in the private library of the late Miss Vida Jacks, which she bequeathed in her will to the Monterey Public Library.

Maps and plates from the original designs are also included in the publication by Joseph N. Balestier of New York. The book is dedicated to the Honorable 'John Y. Mason, secretary of the Navy, whose able and upright discharge of his public duties has won for him the respect and applause of his countrymen, and endeared him to the gallant service over which he so acceptably presides."

Writing of the Pacific Coast and Monterey, the author begins:

"The approach of these almost virgin shores showed us a high bold coast, totally different from the flat and barren coast of our Atlantic seaboard. The magnificent and prominent mountains of the coast-range skirting the backgrounds, with their wavy and picturesque play on lines; the apparently well wooded heights stretching their somber foliage to the brink of the ocean; the abrupt and broken precipices, whose projecting points caught the last rays of the setting sun – all these accessories reminded me strongly of the Maritime Alps, as seen while coasting the northern shores of the Mediterranean."

Lieut. Revere continued his description of entering Monterey Bay, writing that it was always best to make Point Ano Nuevo first by falling in with the land, that being far to the westward of Point Pinos and then having gotten well under the highlands of Santa Cruz, a southeast course by compass takes one directly to the anchorage at Monterey.

The ship evidently arrived at a very interesting time. A Junta was in session composed of some of the leading Californians, who had met to take into consideration

what line of conduct should be adopted in the existing state of affairs. The Californians had just succeeded in getting rid of Micheltorena, the last Mexican satrap sent to plunder them and maladminister the affairs of the province," he relates.

Jose Castro a native, had been elected commander-in-chief and the civil governor was Don Pio Pico and the views of these two worthies entirely corresponded both being in favor of annexation to a European power."

Don Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, born in California of Mexican parents, did not hesitate to oppose with all his strength the views advanced by Pico and Castro, and said in a letter to Don Pio Pico that he refused ever again to assist in any project having its end the adoption of any protection other than that of the United States.

A description of the appearance of General Castro might be interesting as it probably is also the description of the dress of many of the native Californians of a hundred years ago. His excellency, when out of the filagree Mexican uniform, was dressed in the calzoneros, botas, gaiters, sarape, etc., usually worn by the Californians, and his heels were armed with spurs of formidable length. His hair, black as a raven's wing, is arranged in thick, clustering curls.

Writing of Monterey Bay and the anchorage here, the Lieutenant relates: "The anchorage at Monterey is in the southeast corner of the bight which forms the harbor, anywhere inside of a line from Point Ano Nuevo drawn through Point Pinos, or where the two points lap. The bottom is apt to be either rocky or too hard for good holding ground in any other part of the harbor, which, being open to the N.W., is rarely smooth anywhere else. In from four to six fathoms you have in that part of the road a stiff clay bottom."

A delightful account of a horseback ride from Monterey to Salinas is interesting reading: "The fresh morning air was redolent of the sweetest perfume ever wafted to the celestial daughter of the dawn. It was one of your commonplace Atlantic atmospheres, but laden with fragrance; soft and voluptuous, yet not enervating but gently bracing. In truth there was a pervading reality in the sweet gales which wooed us, seeming to impart to them intense vitality, and to establish sympathy if not familiarity with the viewless spirits who 'people the sunbeam.' Our way lay through delicious plains, richly enameled with those exquisite wild flowers varying from palest blue to brightest flame color, which are

produced spontaneously in all parts of California.

Occasionally we wound through groves of oaks, verdant with mistletoe and arranged in clumps with a skill which man might vainly imitate, through the opening in which startled deer dart with lightning speed as our cavalcade dislodged them from their leafy coverts.

I have traveled in all sorts of ways, in all sorts of countries, in the toiling diligences of France, and on the broad pack saddle of a contrabandista's mule in Spain. I have been whisked across the Pontine marshes by half-wild colts, guided by shouting postillions; been jolted half to death in Syria and Egypt on the unsteady deck of a desert ship," conducted by Arabs clamorous for 'baksheesh', traveled 'dawk' in India, with the last new novel in a palankeen, and once had the pleasure to back an elephant on the Island of Ceylon. But all these were vulgar joys compared with the rapturous pleasures of traveling in that part of the United States called California. Seated in your firm chair-like saddle your horse held well in hand going in full gallop, which is the traveling gait of the country, what can be more delightful, more satisfying surrounded as you are with such glorious accessories, breathing the fullness of life into every sense? Who care for the artificial world across the continent when he can thus enjoy wild and uncontrolled independence?"