

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

November 6, 1950

The Lady Carpenter of Monterey

For many years we have wondered about the row of little houses on the west side of Tyler Street near Scott. They were built so very close together at the very rear of the lot and next to them was a small separate cottage and then the two-story locksmith house – all very interesting and curious. Then one day we came across an item about a Monterey Woman who was a carpenter and that woman had been the aunt of Mrs. Millie Birks. So we have gotten an unusual story about Mrs. J.G. Lambert, who was living refutation of the charge that not one of her sex could drive a nail straight.

The row of little houses had been built by Mrs. Lambert to house the lumber for her lumber yard which occupied the block on Tyler Street. When the houses were no longer needed for the above purpose, the fronts were added and they are now rented.

The upper story of the lockshop was once a one-story building located where the little park is at the intersection of Alvarado and Calle Principal and the cottage next door was moved many years ago from a lot north of the Monterey Theater.

Mrs. Lambert was born in Ohio and in her childhood played about her father's saw mill. She never tired of watching the machinery and the logs. As she grew older she ceased to play in the sawdust and quite often lent a hand in the work her uncle was doing. In this way Mrs. Lambert acquired a taste for carpentering and for work such as men do. Her father was Peter J. Masters an early day jeweler in Monterey, but that is another story.

The girl married a Martha's Vineyard sea captain and sailed with him on many voyages. At last, tired of roaming around the world, the couple settled in Monterey, where the ocean is a near neighbor and seafarers feel at home. Here Capt. Lambert became a justice of the peace and a notary public. At the same time he was agent for Goodall and Perkins at Monterey.

Then Mrs. Lambert's active life began. When her husband was appointed agent for the steamship company she became the wharfinger of Monterey, and her duties were not turned over to a deputy. The family made its home in the Old Custom House and it has been said that each time the captain went away Mrs.

Lambert boarded up another of the porches to make another room and that is the reason so many of the old pictures of the Custom House do not show the balconies as they are now. In wet weather she wore thick, heavy boots and a skirt which in no way hampered her work. She did not believe in women wearing trousers, no matter what work they were doing.

After several years Capt. Lambert bought the lumber and planing mill in Monterey. Mrs. Lambert busied herself in a shell and curio store. When the foreman at the mill did not prove satisfactory, and things were running at sixes and sevens, Mrs. Lambert sold out her curio store, dismissed the foreman, and decided to run the mill herself.

Mrs. Lambert learned how to run every bit of the machinery. She used to start the engine in the morning, her niece reports, run the hand saw, jig saw and all the other saws like a first-class workman and understood and machines well enough to keep them in order. She could turn out ornamental corners for door frames that were perfect.

In the old item about Mrs. Lambert which caused this study to be written was the following: "Among the visible results of her labor the woman mill hand and carpenter points with pride to a row of large sheds opposite the mill. These she built by herself out of odds and ends. Under these sheds all the Lambert lumber is stored.

The personal appearance of Mrs. Lambert was striking, according to all who knew her. She "was almost five feet six inches in height and was finely built. She had square shoulders and a very excellent figure. Her step was firm and long being almost a stride. Her iron-gray hair was short and parted on the side (before the time of short hair for women). She always wore spectacles while at work. She wore a checked gingham frock which was described as "like the high-necked and long-sleeved play apron of childhood." She never wore a hat and as a consequence the Monterey air had bronzed her face and hands, but the color of her skin suited her gray eyes and hair well. Her hands were brown and knotted as all carpenters are and she wears no ornaments of any kind except the plain gold band of wifedom."

(More Tomorrow)