

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The Life of a Whaling Man's Wife

For 33 years Captain Lambert was the government custodian of the old Custom House, and it was there that our heroine of yesterday's story of the woman carpenter of Monterey lived.

Her niece, Mrs. Millie Birks, lived with her. Mrs. Birks still owns the property where the Lambert Lumber yard once was and the two old buildings which were moved to the location on Tyler street from their original sites on Alvarado.

Before Mrs. Lambert fired the foreman and entered the management of the lumber yard herself, she had a shell store at the intersection of Calle Principal and Alvarado. It is told that she hired boys to collect birds of various sorts for her. She would skin them very carefully, dry them, pack them and ship them to the Liebes firm in San Francisco to be used for trimmings of various kinds, for which she would be paid. She collected shells from the beach, many of which had to be scrubbed, washed with lye water, and treated in various tedious ways, to make them saleable. She sold many varieties of jewelry-shell and abalone. She did dressmaking and the collection of tin patterns in the case in the upstairs exhibit room at the north end of the Custom House are some of the patterns made for her by Captain Lambert.

She had many small boats and boat houses down by the fisherman's wharf which she rented by the hour or day.

Mrs. Birks has inherited from her aunt several pieces of lovely old jewelry which was made by Mrs. Lambert's father, Peter H. Masters, whose store was also near the end of Alvarado street. In the Monterey Hand Book of 1875 there is an advertisement which read: "Peter H. Masters, goldsmith and jeweler." The jewelry which Mrs. Birks now has was made from gold, quartz, taken from the mines of Mokolumne Hill. Mr. Masters had come to California in 1840 and later joined Captain and Mrs. Lambert in Monterey.

The story of Mrs. Lambert would not be complete without telling a bit of the life and work of Captain Lambert, her husband. In Guinn's history of Monterey I found this recording: "One of the most interesting men in Monterey (1903) is Captain Thomas G. Lambert for years one of the most potent upbuilders of this beautiful town, but erstwhile a seasoned salt, with

many years of practical experience upon the deep, and a whaler whose unerring aim has terminated the watery career of hundreds of members of the monster finny tribe. He was born on the island of Martha's Vineyard in 1826, and came of a family associated with that historic piece of land since about 1661."

When about sixteen years of age Captain Lambert embarked upon a long contemplated career amid the fascinations and dangers of the sea. On board the whaler John Coggsell, he set out for Honolulu around the Horn and arrived at the Sandwich Islands as a commissioned officer. For two years thereafter, he engaged in whaling in the waters of the islands. He returned to the east coast in 1850 but set out again that same year, going to South America. This trip lasted for 44 months and eight days and during that time the catch comprised 47 sperm whales, which when rendered, yielded 2,458 barrels of oil, the market price of which was \$126,000. In 1854 Captain Lambert assumed charge of the ship John Milton, from Boston to San Francisco. After that he sailed along the coast for several years. It was in 1869 that he abandoned the sea for Monterey.

Captain Lambert was one of the foremost promoters of a movement to erect a monument to John Drake Sloat, and the meetings for the furtherance of this design were held in his home. The monument was built and can be seen on Presidio hill overlooking the Bay of Monterey.

Another old camphor chest should be added to the list of historic items at the Stevenson House. It is an interesting leather bound, brass studded chest loaned by Mrs. Edith DuChesne and is on display in one of the upstairs bedrooms.