

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

February 16, 1950

Trees Decided Issue

Under a heading "Tall Trees May Have Swung Early Capital to Monterey" Lee Shippey writes in the Los Angeles Times about a Christmas Card sent to him by Thomas W. Norris of Carmel. The card was a reprint of a letter from Sebastian Vizcaino, written in Monterey on December 28, 1602. It tells that Vizcaino had been ordered by the Count de Monte-Rey to explore the harbors of the "the South Sea" from Acapulco to Cape Mendocino, having been sent out with supplies for eleven months.

He had left Acapulco on May 5 of that year and the difficulties had been so great that some of the men had died and the provisions and munitions were too low to permit him to go on to Cape Mendocino.

Mr. Shippey relates that while we are digging up history in this grand climax year of California's centennials, many of us may have wondered why Monterey was chosen as the capital of this province of New Spain. San Diego, the first settlement, was blessed with a natural harbor, was in much closer touch with the Viceroy's court in Mexico City and seemingly might well have been the logical choice.

However Vizcaino was sure that Monterey Bay, which he had named in honor of the Viceroy, was the ideal place to afford safe anchorage for warships to protect the Manila galleons, and pine trees grew down to the water's edge and there were also forests of oak.

Thus, he said, it was the place for repairing galleons which had suffered from storms or attacks by buccaneers. Tall, straight trees, suitable for masts for ships "of even a thousand tons burden" all but waded out to sea to meet the damaged ships.

Those trees probably were the reason why Monterey was chosen as the Capital of Alta California. "But," Mr. Shippey writes, "I'd like to have history delvers clear up one minor point. Monterrey, Mexico, named for the same Viceroy, is spelled with double r and a historical pamphlet I read while there said it was founded by the Count de Monterrey. Pretty small point, but I'll bet it will agitate some of the earnest history delvers plenty."

The California Historical Society held open house at their headquarters on McAllister street in San Francisco on Monday, showing the Society's collection of rare

manuscripts, pictures and other items, much of which pertains to the early history of Monterey.

The Monterey History and Art Association is a member of the state historical society and many Peninsula residents are also contributing members of this worthwhile group. Mr. Aubrey Drury is the president and Joseph R. Knowland is a vice president. Among the patron members are Mrs. Henry Potter Russell and Miss Margaret Jacks, both of whom are also interested in the History and Art Association and the Foundation in Monterey. Allen Griffin and Mrs. Harry W. Toulmin and Mrs. John Payson Adams are numbered among the sustaining membership list.

The Colonial House and Garden Symposium will take place in Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia, in February and March, under the sponsorship of House and Garden and Colonial Williamsburg. A. Lawrence Kocher, brother of Dr. A.R. Kocher of Carmel, will be one of the speakers at the sessions, the first scheduled for February 27th, and the second for March 6. Mr. Kocher is a well known architect. He formerly headed the School of Architecture at the University of Virginia and has been a member of the advisory committee for the restoration of the Virginia colony since its inception.

The board of directors of the Monterey History and Art Association will meet Monday afternoon, February 20th, at 4:30 p.m. in the Old Custom House. Thomas W. Norris, the newly elected president of the Association, will preside and matters of importance to the group will be discussed.