

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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'Equal to the Best'

The little handbook of Monterey and vicinity, published in 1875, also includes Monterey's sister city, Pacific Grove, then called Pacific Grove Retreat – the M.E. Encampment Grounds.

The introduction to Pacific Grove by the authors, Walton and Curtis, has this to say as to location: "The eastern boundary is about one-half mile west of Chinatown, and following the seashore, the tract extends to the line fence of the dairy farm this side of the lighthouse. This last boundary is marked by a conspicuous pile of rocks, which, looking as if it might be a Druidical monument, is the termination of the promontory that breaks the force of the northwesterers, and shelters the sea line of the tract."

Continuing with the description of the beach and the reason for the choice of the location, the booklet says: "Under the lee of the promontory is a beautiful little cove, possessing a smooth beach, and being almost entirely free from surf. This is the spot, selected for the bathing houses. Behind this cove are pine woods interspersed with oaks, covering a surface of sufficient extent and smoothness for accommodation of any congregation of auditors. Here, therefore, as this survey indicates, will be placed the stand for the preachers. The site selected for the hotels, or hotels, occupies ground centrally located with reference to the sea, upon which the buildings, therefore, will look our directly. A broad avenue traverses the grounds, with side streets separating lots, upon which villas are expected to be erected."

In that year Pacific Grove was just beginning to be a real estate man's paradise. One hundred acres were divided into residential lots, a park, a pleasure ground, a grand avenue, minor streets and avenues, and the town. The lots were divided into sections, ranging from 30x60 to 30x125.

The principal buildings in the town were to be the preacher's stand "an elegant structure, carefully and substantially built by Prinz of Monterey, containing a platform for ministers, and seats for the choir. It faces the congregational grounds, which are arranged in a perfect circle, 200 feet in diameter, with a ring of tents around it, and a roadway of seventy-five feet."

This building had aisles ranging from four to twelve feet in width Five thousand people were accommodated on benches and the whole was covered by the shade of pine trees – "tall, straight young trees, through whose branches the sunlight falls subdued."

There was a restaurant measuring 33x90 feet, but a short distance from the congregational grounds. It was run on a ticket system by R.C. Worms, who will be remembered by many old timers here. There were also provided a grocery and provision store and a furnishing and clothing store, in close proximity and with the same floor space as the restaurant.

On the opposite side of the street from the shops there were, in 1875, the dormitories, each 24x50 feet, and a laundry. "Admirable arrangements are made for the conveniences necessary to civilization," according to the publicity the Retreat had in 1875.

There also were suitable arrangements, "a few rods off, on the Monterey side, around a large wall"

In that year new tents could be bought on the grounds at wholesale price, or rented at a very low figure. Ordinary campers, except during a meeting, were charged 50 cents a head, which included water, wood and cleaning up.

The executive committee for the Pacific Grove Retreat were: Rev. J.O. Ash of Salinas, "the indefatigable chairman," the Rev. J.W. Ross, George Clifford, James Allyton of San Jose and George F. Baker.

"The liberality and untiring energy of Mr. David Jacks should not go unnoticed, for by the aid of this gentleman's purse and advise many apparently insurmountable difficulties have been surmounted."

The Chamber of Commerce of Monterey or Pacific Grove could not have done better in publicizing the Peninsula than those editors. Messrs. Walton and Curtis did in 1875 with the following descriptions:

"The encampment commands a splendid view of the Bay of Monterey, and the magnificent scenery surrounding it, with pretty bays for bathing places and beautiful groves of rambles. In close proximity to the Light House within a morning's walk to that pearl of beauties, Cypress Point; with good sea fishing, sailing or boating; with opportunities for all kinds of outdoor occupation and enjoyment; and all within three miles of Monterey, and its railroad and steamboat connections with all parts of the State; with a climate beyond

reproach, a temperature, with one or two exceptions, the most equable in the known world, and with a location so healthy that doctors scarcely make a living, it bids fair to become an unrivaled summer resort.”

Bishop Peck, who was making an Episcopal visit on the coast in 1875, said, as printed in the handbook: “I have some acquaintance with our splendid retreats for camp meetings and health to the East, and I have no hesitation in saying that this is fully equal to the best I have seen.”