

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Monterey's Charter

This column recently related the story of the steps taken by a group of citizens to make Monterey a duly incorporated town, which was accomplished on April 30th, 1851, by an Act of the Legislature.

A petition was duly drawn up on Saturday the second of February and signed by a large group of the residents and sent to the state governing body. It was my privilege to see the original of this historical document and to be able to copy the names of the signers from the original signatures with their distinguishing rubrics below. It is in the private collection of Californiana owned by T. W. Norris, one of the most ardent collectors on the Peninsula.

The document reads:

To the Honorable

The Senate and Assembly of the State of California.

The undersigned, Citizens of Monterey, respectfully petition that your honorable body grant them the "Charter of Incorporation of the City of Monterey" which was adopted by a meeting of the citizens held on Saturday, 2nd of February, in the Town Hall pursuant to public notice and which now accompany this petition.

It is believed by the undersigned that powers asked for in the plan of a charter, presented to your Honorable Body, are such as required by our position and are such as are enjoyed by our sister cities in the oldest states.

And they shall every pray – signed:

The petition is signed by 206 men, many of those names are still familiar both in history and in everyday life of Monterey. There were: Philip A. Roach, who was the last Alcalde and first mayor of Monterey; Jacinto Rodriquez, one of the signers of the State Constitution; H.W. Halleck, a delegate and signer of the Constitution, who had also been a military aide to President Lincoln; William G. Macy, secretary of the Constitutional Convention; David Spence, a prominent Scottish merchant of the old days, who was associated with William P. Hartnell; Dr. James L. Ord, who came to California in 1847, under contract with Co. F., 3rd US. Artillery, and later married Dona Angustias Jimeno, widow of Don Manuel Jimeno. She was the daughter of Don Jose de la Guerra of Santa Barbara.

Other signers were: Thomas O. Larkin, first and only American Consul to Monterey, whose home still bears his name; Josiah Merritt, James McKinlay, Salvador Munras, Juan Gutierrez, Jose Abrego, Antonio Soberanes, Salvator Osio, Rafael Sanchez, and Feliciano Soberanes and F. Serrano, all associated with old adobe homes still standing in Monterey; Jacob Leese and Job P. Dye, both of whom were partners of Thomas O. Larkin at various times; Milton Little, pioneer merchant and owner of most of the land that is now New Monterey; William Curtis, an early day store owner; George Oliver, a soldier who became a coffin and church pew maker and married one of the Duarte sisters; Jose de Amesti, a Basque, whose wife was Prudencia Vallejo.

In the March issue of Sunset magazine there are two columns devoted to "Side Trips into Old California." The article begins: "The California of 100 to 150 years ago, some of it labeled and well preserved and some of it unmarked and in ruins, is only a few minutes drive off the busy main highways in many places."

The Sunday afternoon tour, as recommended by Sunset, should include San Juan Bautista where a walk about the plaza is suggested to take one back 125 years. The Mission, the home of Jose Castro, acting Mexican Governor; the Plaza Hotel, at which many an historical figure stopped; and the home of Angelo Zanetta, the ancestor of Elmer Zanetta of Monterey; are on the "must" list for the tourist to visit.

After a visit to Fremont Peak, the motorist should continue over the San Juan grade to Natividad which is the site of an indecisive battle between a small band of Californians and the U.S. irregulars on their way to join Fremont at Monterey in 1846.

A few miles further, to quote Sunset, is tiny Alisal Creek. The creek runs through the land on which W.E. Hartnell, an Englishman, founded a school, El Colegio de San Jose, where sons of the Dons could study selected subjects. One of the pupils, Pablo de la Guerra, later became a member of the Constitutional Convention and a state senator. Fremont camped on a part of the rancho, but later left to fortify himself on Gabilan Peak, when General Castro ordered him out.