

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Jack Swan Recalls

It was in October of 1843 that Jack Swan, the builder of the First Theater in California, stepped upon the shore at Monterey following a voyage from Mazatlan, in Mexico.

In 1878 Mr. Swan wrote an article telling of the journey up the coast and of his first impressions of Monterey.

"There were not as many houses in Monterey as at present" (1878) he wrote, "but there were more ships in the harbor. The old church had no wings to it at that time so as to enable it to fly if it took a fancy to; the mission buildings and church at Carmel were in good condition; the cemetery in Monterey had a stone wall around it to keep out livestock; now both wall is down and the fence open, and horses, cattle and goats have free leave to roam over the bones of the dead. This is not as it should be and it don't look well in a Christian town to see cattle pasturing in a graveyard. The Indians on the northwest coast of America treat their dead better than that for the bodies are placed several feet above the ground, good blankets hanging up near them should they get cold, and a pipe at hand if they want to have a smoke."

"There was no Pearl Street then; the trees, both oak and pine, came nearer to the bay than they do at present for the wood had not been thinned out; but few of the houses had windows with glass, and still fewer chimneys; glass panes in windows being the exception, and iron and wooden bars in the windows being the rule, according as the owners were rich and poor."

Although there were fewer people, there was more society, thought Mr. Swan, for the people then were more social. As the land was cheap and easy to be obtained, there was but little difference between owners of ranchos and those who had none, provided the latter bore a good character, he wrote, and they did not then value a man for the clothes he wore or gauge his brains by the depth of his purse. The inhabitants of Monterey then, and in California generally were a very happy people. Instead of having a ball or fandango once in several months, they had them every week, and picnics to Point Pinos, Point Aulones, and Mussel Point, as often.

"On Saturday, October 7, 1843, I left the schooner and came ashore in Monterey and did not again leave it, with the exception of a visit to Carmel one day, until I sailed for Mazatlan in the California with Captain J.B.R. Cooper. Tom, the colored cook, also went on board the California, which sailed on the 13th day of October for San Francisco; Jim joined the California on her arrival in Monterey from San Francisco on the 12th day of November. Captain Charles Wolter joined on the 8th of December."

"A few days after I landed I walked out to see the Mission and church at Carmel. The mission buildings were then in good condition, and a wall enclosed them, with a gate to go in. Some families lived inside the wall, the Manjaros family being one of them. The church was in a fit state for the priest to perform service in. That it is not so now (1878) is not much credit to the Montereyans... On leaving the mission, I walked up the valley to where Lazaro Soto had his house near where St. John has his upper dairy how, and then returned to Monterey. As it was then toward the end of the dry season, and everything was dried up and no green grass. I thought, like other newcomers, that California was not a fertile country. Some people may like California best as the grain turns yellow, but I like it best in the spring, and I think the state puts on its best suit of clothes when dressed in green.

I boarded at George Kinlock's house for three weeks after I came ashore. James Meadows and Edward Watson were then putting a fence on a lot at present (1878) owned by John B.H. Cooper, but then owned by Captain Smith, who put up the first saw mill at Bodega. Meadows still lives in Carmel, Watson died at Dry Creek near the Consumnes River in the latter part of 1848.

The Old Custom House was not as large as it is now, for there was an addition made to it in 1845; it had four Customs House officers that I know of and may have had more. Pablo Noriega or dela Guerra, W.E. Hartnell, and Rafael Gonzales are now dead, Jaciento Rodriguez is still alive (1878). The officials had a boat and a crew of four men and a coxswain, old French Pedro, (Pierre Artellan) who lost one eye from a cut he received from one of Micheltorena's soldiers, who were always cutting someone..."

Mr. Swan wrote an interesting account of the early fandangos in Monterey. He also relates that there were blacksmiths in Monterey at that time, but the horses were generally allowed to go barefooted as the

blacksmiths employed their time in making bridles and bits for the horses and spurs for the heels of their riders and that the time that should have been spent shoeing the horses was spent in silvering their bridles to make them look nice.