

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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More on Old Monterey Adobes

To complete the story of Casa Amesti, which is on Polk street on the Historic Route in Monterey, this column should tell the history of James McKinley, the husband of Carmen Amesti, the daughter of Senor Don Jose Amesti, a Spanish Basque, who built the two-story adobe home in 1825.

In 1824, James McKinley, a Scotch sailor boy was left behind in San Francisco by a whaler, according to notes made during the W.P.A. historical survey in 1935, and other authentic sources. He was supposedly only 11 years of age at this time. In time he became a Mexican citizen, and was thereafter known as Santiago McKinley, which was in later years usually prefaced by the title, Don. For many years he was connected with maritime affairs, and his name is found constantly cropping up in commercial records from 1830 on. At one time he was an agent for Captain J.B. Cooper of Monterey and traveled about much of the time, although considering Monterey his home.

McKinley joined the Compania Extranjera de Monterey in 1832. In 1835, he went to Los Angeles as an agent for Larkin, who was even then intriguing against the Mexican rule. In 1836, McKinley is listed in a padron as a trader and his age is listed as 23 years. From that year to 1840 and later, he was the owner and operator of a schooner plying up and down the California coast. He became a member of the shipping firm of Fitch and Paty in 1842. This firm opened a store in San Francisco in 1843.

McKinley took an active part at Los Angeles in the movement of Southern California foreigners against Micheltorena, the governor, during the years 1844-1845. During these years he purchased some of the Mission lands of San Juan Capistrano and San Luis Obispo. Although apparently residing during this period at Los Angeles he definitely transferred his residence back to Monterey some time prior to 1847. In January of that year he was placed under arrest solely for the purpose of extorting information from him regarding operations in Southern California.

He married Carmen Amesti in 1848, and took up his residence in the Amesti adobe. He was the claimant for

ranchos in 1852 in both Monterey and San Luis Obispo Counties.

Don Santiago became a wealthy man and was held in good repute throughout his long career in California. He died at Monterey in the Amesti home in 1875, leaving a family of several children.

The Amesti adobe is now owned by Mrs. Frances Elkins. Old Mexican fireplaces grace several rooms in the house and are still in use. A charming green garden of clipped hedges and tall yew trees, is a feature of the garden at the rear of the house and is surrounded by a high wall.

On the corner of Franklin and Pacific streets there is a charming old house and garden which was known in former days as the Capitular Hall Adobe. It is the home of Mrs. G.R. Carpenter. Originally the house was a one-story adobe, until a second story frame addition was added.

A verbatim quote from a copy of the original document, in which Fling was granted the property on February 19, 1834, follows: "Capitular Hall, Having produced in evidence the license which the petitioner obtained to enter upon the land, as was required of him the lot he applies for, which is twenty-five varas frontage by as many in depth, fronting the house of (the foreigner) Felipe Santiago and in line with the house of (the other foreigner) Juan B. Bonifacio ... "Signed by Manual Jimeno Cesarin."

Fling sold the property for \$50 to John Donelly, teamster of Company F., 3rd U.S. Artillery, on June 26th, 1848. The soldier did not keep the property long, for the records show that on August 18, 1848, Thomas O. Larkin purchased the place. Donelly was described as a "Teamster in Co. F., stationed at Monterey Redoubt, in the vicinity of the Town of Monterey, Upper California, in consideration of the amount of three ounces of gold (uncoined) he agreed to sell the property." The transaction was signed by Walter Colton, Alcalde. The description of the lot varied little from that of 1846, reading: "Twenty-five varas in front by as many more in the rear opposite the house of the foreigner, Philip James, and in line with the house of D. Bonifacio."

Larkin in turn disposed of the property to Gerardo Hilgueres. In the deed of sale, the name is also spelled as Helgers, and as Gerado Hilgers. Hilgueres shortly after sold it to [xx]nes H. Gleason. Other owners were James Warson, Jose Abrego, Juan E. Gomez, J.W. Gregg and Charles Carr. In 1921, Esther Freeman Steadman is

shown as the owner, and on November 4th of that year the late G.R. Carpenter became the new owner. John Freeman Fling, who erected Capitular Hall adobe, arrived for the first time at Monterey in 1826. He traveled to the Sandwich Islands in 1831 after which he returned to Monterey to settle permanently at the age of 34.

He succeeded in securing a carta from Governor Victoria, and in 1832 joined a compania extranjera, which was organized January 24th of that year for the defense of Monterey. The company was not to be required to leave town under any circumstances. Such men as had to leave their work for military duty were to receive 50 cents a day. W.E.P. Hartnell was elected their leader. From that date on Fling's name appears on Larkin's books and records.

Fling worked at his trade as blacksmith at Monterey, and in 1836 he was living at Buena Vista Rancho, being then only 26 years of age, according to the padron. In 1840 he had a blacksmith shop at Natividad, and is credited by tradition with having refused to remove irons from the legs of the foreign exiles when they were taken from prison and loaded on ships. He later lived in Sonora for some years and then went to Napa about 1850 where he died in 1870 at the age of 80(?) years.

NOTE: Dates and corresponding ages of John (Guy) Freeman Fling are not consistent with the scant historical records found for him.