

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **A Visit to Governor Alvarado**

M. Duffet de Horfas, the French traveler, and Sir George Simpson, governor-in-chief of the Hudson Bay Company, visited Monterey in 1842 during their trip around the world. On their visit they were entertained by David Spence, the Scotch merchant, and James Watson, associated with the commercial, civic and educational activities of Monterey from 1824 until 1863. James Watson was also the great-great-grandfather of Virginia Pioda, who will attend La Favorita at the Merienda on Saturday.

Sir George Simpson writes in "An Authentic Narrative of a Journey Around the World" of his impression of Monterey and its inhabitants:

"On landing we found that the good folks were all engaged at mass; and accordingly, though rather late for the service, we followed them to church. There was a tolerable congregation of about 200 people, principally females, who were all dressed alike, with a shawl over their heads, hanging down on their shoulders; and the priest was attended by two or three Indians, who appeared to be well versed in kneeling, and crossing, etc., to be perfect masters in short, of all the ceremonial drudgery of the Romanish services.

"We entered the edifice only in time to receive his reverence's benediction, which I am afraid profited us but little, as Father Jesus Maria Real was said to bear a far stronger resemblance to Quigas of San Rafael than to Gonzales of Santa Clara. After mass, the pastor and his flock went to christen a bridge, which had lately been thrown over the little river of the town, and was now fairly decorated with banners, etc., for the occasion.

"In California, Monterey excepted, much is dedicated to some saint or other, a mockery of names which forms a curious contrast with the pollage of everything else. General Vallejo has been the only nonconsistent spoiler, having substituted, as I have already said, the old term Sonoma for the name of the saint whom he had robbed of lands and herds and priests, San Francisco Solano.

"As we took very little interest in the christening of the bridge, we readily attached ourselves to Mr. Spence, a native of Huntley in Aberdeenshire, who had conducted a flourishing business here for more than nine years.

After being introduced by that gentleman at the door of the church to several of the principal inhabitants, we were carried by him to the residence of Governor Alvarado.

"Making far less display than his compeer Vallejo, the governor had no soldiers about him, and lives in a small house which is but poorly furnished. We were ushered into his excellency's best apartment, which contained a host of common chairs, a paltry table, a kind of sofa, a large Dutch clock, and four or five cheap mirrors, boasting, however, the unique feature of three large windows that reached to the floor, and communicated with a balcony overlooking the town and the bay.

"We found the governor lame as we had already found the commander of the forces, the cause in the one instance being not less characteristic than in the other. Vallejo had been thrown from his horse while amusing himself with a lasso; but, about a month ago, Alvarado, who had been entertaining the priest and one other friend in honor of the saint of the day, probably the very saint who had been forced to contribute the wine – managed by means of his windows and his balcony, to fall to the ground and dislocate his ankle.

"His nephew, in fact, possesses little of the talent and decision of the uncle, being, at least according to the present practice, more remarkable for love of conviviality than for anything else. Whatever ability he may have displayed in rising from inferior rank to be the first man in California, he has not allowed the cares of government to prey on his vitals, for the revolution of 1836, amid its other changes, has metamorphosed its champion from a thin and spare conspirator into a plump and paunchy lover of singing and dancing and feasting. He received us very politely, but declined on account of his lameness, my invitation to dine with us next day on board the Cowlitz.

"After half an hour's chat we took our departure for Mr. Spence's house, where we had the pleasure of being introduced to his pretty and lively wife, a Donna, of course, of the country. Thence we boxed the compass through the town, tacking and beating in every direction in order to pay our respects to some of the inhabitants at their own houses. Among others, we visited an unsophisticated cockney of the name of Watson from "Redriff" whose father had "been in the public line," and had kept "The Noah's Ark 'tween the Globe stairs and the 'orse Ferry."

“Though he had been 18 years in California, yet he was apparently unconscious of any lapse of time, for his notions of persons and places were pretty much the same as he had imbibed under the paternal roof. He talked as if the churchyards had enjoyed a sinecure, and as if the docks and railroads had committed no repasses; and yet, while he supposed the rest of the world to be standing still, he himself had contrived to scrape together the largest fortune in the province.

“Watson’s simplicity did not greatly surprise us, for even if he had been less deeply immersed in hides and tallow, and perhaps more delicate speculations, he would hardly have obtained the means of regular and continuous information. To take our own case, we had left the Atlantic nine months before, having tarried one month on the Red River, and at least two months on the Columbia, besides making an offset to Sitka. And yet, in all California, we found no later news than our own from Great Britain or the United States.

“The demand for knowledge is necessarily inconsiderate. The only seminary of education in the province is a pretty school at Monterey; and though, under the old system, parents were by law obliged to send their children to the nearest mission for instruction, yet very few individuals of any age can either read or write.

“While returning to our boats, we were saluted by a horseman in Spanish costume, whom we at length recognized, through his disguise, to be Mr. Ermatinger, one of the Hudson Bay Company’s officers, who had left Vancouver for California about the time of our return from Sitka, in command of our annual party of trappers.

“Having heard at Sonoma that he had arrived on the banks of the Sacramento, I requested him by letter to follow me if necessary to Monterey, that we might have an interview on matters of business; and he accordingly hastened to Yerba Buena, whence, finding that the Cowlitz had got the start of him by a few hours, he had pursued his journey by land.”