

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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An Active English Settler

A desire for travel and adventure led James "Santiago" Watson to run away from his home in England while he was yet a boy and for some time afterward to sail on British ships. As a member of the crew of an English whaling vessel he came to California as early as 1824 and when anchor was cast at Santa Barbara he left the ship and walked over the mountains to Monterey. From that time until his death almost 40 years later he was intimately associated with commercial, civic and educational enterprises for the development of this locality.

The business that in the early day attracted the attention and enlisted the efforts of James Watson was the buying of hides and tallow for shipment to other countries. The Spanish cattle were driven from various parts of California to the vicinity of Monterey, where they were slaughtered for the hides and tallow, the meat being free to all who wished it. The silver dollar was almost the only money in circulation and this was cut by the silversmiths into halves and quarters. In the midst of the alien civilization he retained his enthusiastic devotion of his native land and cherished the hope that the Mexican authority in California might yield to English supremacy.

J. Alexander Forbes was another Englishman who favored British rule and on one occasion he sent a letter from San Jose to Mr. Watson urging him to raise the English flag over Monterey, adding the request that a flag be made if none was to be secured in the town. In later days Mr. Watson recognized the advantages to be derived from a union of all the states from the Atlantic to the Pacific shores and he became intensely loyal to the highest interests of his adopted country.

As early as 1832 James Watson was a member of the Compañia de Extranjeros de Monterey, an organization of foreigners formed for the defense of Monterey. The group was headed by W.E.P. Hartnell and often met in the Hartnell home. During 1836 he acted as auditor of accounts of the Monterey Council and often he was chosen to serve as a member of the body, which in those days was called by its Spanish appellation of ayuntamiento. When General Sutter obtained his naturalization papers in 1840 Mr. Watson and David Spence were witnesses of the instrument. During the

same year Mr. Watson and a Mr. Allen were competitors with Larkin in trading at Monterey. In 1844 he was one of eight citizens who donated \$100 each for the purpose of maintaining a public school of higher grade than was then held in Monterey, and throughout all of his active life he was enthusiastic in his support of educational projects

In Sir George Simpson's travel letters during his visit to Monterey in 1842, he described Mr. Watson as a "Londoner from Redriff (a part of London), whose father has been in the public line, keeping the Noah's Ark between Globe stairs and the Horse Ferry." Mr. Larkin described James Watson as an unassuming, honest man, who did not meddle in politics. Others named him as a very generous man.

In 1836 Mr. Watson took out naturalization papers and while, as stated above, he never became active in politics, he was always interested in the development of the county and the welfare of the people.

About 1830 he married Mariana Escamilla, who descended from a noble Spanish family long identified with Mexico and California. Purchasing the San Benito rancho in 1850, he remained there until his death in 1863 and his burial at San Antonio Mission.

Within a short distance of the Santa Lucia range of mountains and also in proximity to the Salinas River, stood the adobe ranch house, which had been constructed with portholes, so the story is told, in order that the inmates could see out and better protect themselves from attacks. For a long period the house was brightened by the presence of children but as they left to make a place for themselves in the county, the old house fell into decay.

There were 12 children in the James Watson family, of whom the following reached maturity: Thomas, Frank, Alfredo, David, Mrs. Canfield, Mrs. Gomez, Mrs. James Gleason, Mrs. E.L. Williams and Mrs. Joseph Hartnell.

When the entire family of James Watson was living on the ranch, in order to supply them with meat a large beef was killed every three days. Mrs. Fred Treat of Carmel is the daughter of Thomas Watson, who was elected sheriff of Monterey County in 1866; and the granddaughter of James Watson. Paul Pioda, Salinas attorney, is the grandson of the late Mrs. E.L. Williams and the great grandson of James Watson.