

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

May 4, 1950

### **Some Old Clocks of Monterey**

The old Custom House and the Stevenson Memorial, both state monuments, have recently come into the possession of three very interesting, very old and historical clocks, through gifts and loans from families and individuals who wished to share their treasures with others. All the clocks date back to the early 1800's, and are under the custodianship of the Monterey History and Art Association.

The latest clock to be placed in the Old Custom House Museum is a small mantel clock of delicate design and size which has been placed there for an indefinite period by Mr. and Mrs. Paul Pioda of Salinas. Mr. Pioda's great grandfather, James Watson, was the former owner of the clock. He was also the grandfather of Mrs. Fred Treat of Carmel. Mr. Watson came from England about 1830 and settled in Monterey where he was a competitor of Thomas O. Larkin in the mercantile business.

Mr. E.L. Williams, Paul Pioda's grandfather, wrote an article for the Santa Cruz paper in October of 1884, in which he told the history of the clock which is now on display at the Custom House. His wife was Narcisa Watson, the daughter of Mr. James Watson; and their daughter, Helen Williams, married Charles Pioda and became the mother of Paul Pioda.

In the Monterey Republican, dated April 28, 1870, there appeared a news item as follows: "Mr. Prindle of the Washington Hotel is repairing a clock the history of which is of more than passing interest. The clock was brought to these shores from the Oriental continent over 100 years ago by the Franciscan priests and 30 years ago the clock was brought here from San Gabriel by W.E.P. Hartnell, administrator of the Missions, who raffled it at this place for \$250. Mrs. James Watson, now deceased, winning.

"In 1847 the clock was sent to the Sandwich Islands for repairs by Mr. Watson and after its return and at his death he left it to his son, Thomas, the present sheriff, and a jolly specimen of corpulence and jollity. The clock is one of London manufacture and the works are of unusual excellence. Mr. Thomas Watson has been repeatedly offered \$300 for the relic but has as often refused to part with it. It is a good time keeper, calls for

repairs but seldom and seems to be but little the worse by the incessant friction of the wheels of time. We dare say it is the oldest clock in California.

In another article written by Mr. Pioda's grandfather, E.L. Williams, dated Santa Cruz, October 1884, there appears this item concerning the clock: "CLOCK WITH A HISTORY. More than two hundred years ago the Spanish government ordered made in London three clocks for the principal missions then existing in South America and Mexico. Afterwards, about one hundred years ago, the clocks were brought to California, and placed, one each, in the Mission of San Gabriel, San Juan Capistrano, and San Miguel – all being north of San Diego and south of Soledad. About the year 1831, the missions in California were all secularized, which means that the property belonging to them was seized by the then government and sold. Among the possessions thus confiscated by the government were the mentioned three clocks. They were sold at Monterey for five hundred dollars each.

"The buyers were James Watson, W.E.P. Hartnell, and James McKinlay, who were residents of Monterey at that time. These parties are dead and this is the only existing clock of the three. It bears upon its face the name of the maker and the word "Londres," being the Spanish for London, but no date. The word "Silent" indicated by a painter shows that it may be allowed to strike the hour and the half hour, or not, as its owner wishes. The maker probably did not know the Spanish word for silent, so used the English.

"The works are of brass and very heavy so much so, that experts say it will go on for another century without wearing out. It is a seven day clock with a musical sounding bell, entirely unlike in sound [to] those of the present day. While in the possession of Mr. Watson, the former owner, it stopped: and he, for a time, felt lost without that which had been his companion for many years. There was no watch maker in California then, and no one whom he knew could give speech, tone, and movement to his trusted friend.

"A vessel which had come to Monterey from the Sandwich Islands, was about to return to the islands to commence another like voyage. Mr. Watson with many injunctions of care to the captain of the vessel, entrusted the clock to him, to have it put in order, and bring it back to him again. This was about the year 1844.

“In course of time the vessel returned to Monterey and its captain instead of bringing the clock to Mr. Watson, brought him a bag containing six hundred dollars, all silver. There was no gold coin in those days. Some person in the islands, knowing the clock and its previous history, had prevailed upon the captain to leave it there and take to its owner the money.

“Mr. Watson indignantly refused the offer of six hundred dollars, made to him and demanded the clock should be brought back to him which was done upon the succeeding voyage.

“When Mr. Watson died, he bequeathed the clock to his daughter, Narcisa; because, as his will recited, ‘I know it will be taken care of.’

“The writer some ten years ago (1874), had a gentleman residing in London make a search in the old directories of the city for the name of the maker of the clock, that some idea might be formed of the date when it was made.

“The answer returned was, that after looking as far back as two hundred years, the name could not be found, and he suggested therefore, that the maker was in business and discontinued before the publication of the oldest directory of the city of London that he had been able to find.”