

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

May 5, 1950

Two Clocks From the Early Days

Notes on the face of the old grandfather clock in the Stevenson Memorial, one of the three clocks about which we wrote yesterday, read "R. Whiting, Winchester." This clock has been generously loaned to the old adobe which is now a State Monument, by Mrs. Elizabeth Hamilton of Monterey, and is under the custodianship of the Monterey History and Art Association.

From the Furniture Treasury, volume three, by Wallace Nutting, Mrs. William Kneass, the curator of the Stevenson Memorial, found the following revealing item: "Whiting, Riley-Winsted (town of Winchester) Conn. 1807-1835. In 1807 with Samuel and Luther Hoadley, he stated making clocks at Winsted. When Luther died and Samuel retired, Mr. Whiting continued business. He died in 1835.

"The machinery of these wood clocks was carried by a tin wheel on an upright iron shaft. The cog-wheels were of cherry, the pinion was of ivy, or calmia (mountain laurel), and the face of white-wood, all home products. These, with a little wire, a very little steel, brass, tin and of cordage, made up the staples of material of the old one-day shelf clocks which they produced and scattered all over the United States and Canada."

The clock in the Stevenson Memorial is a tall, long, or grandfather's clock. It is difficult to put an exact date on this clock, but it was probably previous to Mr. Whiting's death in 1835. Also Nutting states that after 1802 most clocks were shelf clocks. Tall clocks were manufactured but dropped off gradually, until by 1835 it had nearly ceased except in very conservative sections like Pennsylvania. After Whiting's death, Lucius Clarke bought the business and joined William L. Gilbert as the Clarke, Gilbert & Co. The company was organized in 1871, and is still doing business as the Wm. L. Gilbert Clock Company in Winchester, Conn.

So, to get further information about the clock, we wrote to the Connecticut company and received the following letter from S.A. Ransom, the service manager:

"This will acknowledge your letter regarding the grandfather clock which you have with the name R. Whiting, Winchester, on the dial. It so happens that the writer has a clock somewhat identical to the one you

describe with the exception that the top does not have the eagle but a wooden finial. The lower part of the clock, however is identical and has a native cherry case together with a wooden movement. (We drew a very crude picture of our clock to send along with the inquiry.)

"Riley Whiting began the manufacture of clocks on the site of our present factory in the year 1807 and continued in operation until the year 1835. This, of course, definitely establishes the fact that your clock was manufactured sometime between these dates. After Riley Whiting's death in 1835, the name of the company was changed to Clark, Gilbert & Company and the name Riley Whiting was completely removed from the name of the organization.

"In regard to the repairs necessary to your clock, it would be impossible for us to supply the missing hand and new weight, as these parts were used up a great many years ago.

"We are much pleased that you have written us concerning the clock."

The third clock of historic value which now stands against the south wall of the Old Custom House beside the fireplace, was purchased by the Monterey History and Art association in 1944 from Mr. S.T. Butler of San Francisco. It has been known through the years as "The Governor's Clock," it having been in the possession of Governor Juan Bautista Alvarado for some years. When wound up with an almost crude iron handle on one side, it plays a tune, much to the amusement of all who have been privileged to hear it.

The clock was made in Germany about the year 1789, and purchased by a Britisher who installed it in his London home where it remained until brought to Monterey by W.E.P. Hartnell in 1829. The early Montereyans, with their faculty for apt names, promptly nicknamed it "El Monitor de Tiempo" and it was known by that name for years.

When Juan Bautista Alvarado became governor in 1843, he purchased the clock from Hartnell for 500 "cueros" (hides). It remained in the possession of the Alvarado family until David Spence acquired it and he gave it to Anastacia, a domestic in the Spence home. Anastacia was married to a Spaniard, Juan Alvarez. And according to Fred Feliz of Camp Steffani in the Carmel Valley, Alvarez died when Fred Feliz was ten years old. Anastacia was fond of the boy and gave him the clock.

Fred Feliz's mother from Baja, California, married George Hayden, who was the builder of the home in which her daughter, Mrs. Thomas Fussell, now lives on Van Buren Street. Later she married Jules Simoneau, who was the intimate friend and benefactor of Robert Louis Stevenson during his stay in Monterey.

The clock finally found a resting place for a time in the reading room of Jules Simoneau's restaurant on Pearl Street (now torn down), where, as a writer of the day said, "It ticks as clearly and plays as sweetly as it did in the days of yore."

Later, Mr. Feliz gave the clock into the keeping of his sister, Mrs. S.F. Butler, and when Mr. and Mrs. Butler moved from Monterey to San Francisco they took the clock with them. Now it is back home where it is a valued part of the historical exhibits in the Old Custom House.