

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

June 28, 1950

A Sherman Letter

Dr. Helen Johnston of Des Moines, Iowa, who was on the Peninsula attending the American Medical Women's Association convention at Del Monte Lodge, has left a valuable historical item for the archives of the Monterey History and Art Association. She brought west with her a letter written by W. T. Sherman when he was a first lieutenant at the Presidio of Monterey under the command of Colonel R.B. Mason to John Burton, alcalde, Pueblo of San Jose.

The letter had been given to Dr. Johnston by her mother, Mrs. Lou Colton Johnston, and her father, Rufus Sherman Johnston, when they learned that their daughter would visit Monterey during her stay in the West. By a queer coincidence the middle names of both Dr. Johnston's parents are well known in Monterey history. It is probable, according to Dr. Johnston, that the letter came to her mother through her father who was, even in those very early days, a collector and she inherited his papers upon his passing a number of years ago. He was the secretary of the State Legislature in Iowa, probably elected because of his very fine and beautiful penmanship. The family originally came from Maryland and settled in Iowa in the 1830's. Mr. and Mrs. Johnston are now 80 and 88 years old, respectively.

The letter follows:

Headquarters 10 Mily Dept.
Monterey, Cal., Sept. 6, 1847

Sir:

Your letter of the 2nd inst. Reached Colonel Mason the evening before last. Six days had passed since the Indians had succeeded in driving off Capt. Fisher's horses and it was therefore too late to pursue them from this place. An expedition will start from here for the Tulares as soon as it can be fitted out, to look after these thieving Indians and to adopt such measures as may check for a time their depredations.

The people of every neighborhood or district should, however, the moment they hear of an Indian stealing or attempting to steal a lot of horses, collect together, pursue and kill them, or at least show them that a pursuit was made. You may tell the people of your

district that if they catch Indians in the act of stealing or of attempting to steal their horses, they should shoot them. But if they are merely loitering about them, to lead them to the nearest alcalde, who will judge whether they are quiet Indians or hostile thieves.

Ramifications are now being issued through all California for the Indians belonging to pueblos, settlements or ranches to acquire from their employees or the alcaldes of their districts, papers which they must keep about their person so that all other who are found without such papers will be treated as horse thieves and enemies.

I have the honor to be your humble servant,

W. T. SHERMAN

1st Lieut., 3rd Inf.

To John Burton,
Alcalde Pueblo
San Jose.

John Burton, to whom the letter was written, came to San Jose in 1829, according to Bancroft's History. He claimed to have arrived as master of the Juan Battey, lost at San Diego. In 1830 he was a farmer and also engaged in trade. He married Juana Galindo. He was often named in various records after this time; regidor of San Jose in 1837, arrested in 1840 as a formality, but not exiled; he was a witness to Naile's murder; signer of the call to foreigners in 1845, alcalde in 1846-1847.

"War is hell," was the dictum of the famous general who, as Lieutenant W.T. Sherman, wrote the letter on loan to the Monterey History and Art Association. He was on duty in Monterey during 1847 and 1848, living much of the time in an adobe house owned by Larkin and still standing, well preserved in the garden at the Larkin House, the home of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Toulmin. Sherman was one of the early American enthusiasts of life in Monterey. After Civil War honors he wrote a book, much of it concerning those days.