

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Another Early Impression

In Archibald Menzies' journal of his trip around the world with Captain George Vancouver between 1790 and 1794 on board the Discovery, he described his visit to Monterey. After relating their landing and their inspection of Mission Carmel and dinner there, he records his impression of a dance at the governor's house.

"We returned in the evening to the Presidio where we were invited to a dance at the governor's house. It was to begin at 7 but the ladies had such unusual preparations to make that they could not be got together til near 10, and as they entered they seated themselves on cushions placed on the carpet spread out at the end of the room. They were variously dressed, but most of them had their hair in long queues reaching down to their waist, with a tassel of ribbons appendant to its extremity. They danced some country dances, but even in this remote region they seem most attached to the Spanish exhilarating dance called the Fandango, a performance that requires no little elasticity of limbs as well as nimbleness of capers and gestures. It is performed by two persons of different sex who dance either to the guitar alone or accompanied by the voice; They traverse the room with such nimble evolutions, wheeling about, changing sides and smacking their fingers at every motion; sometimes they dance close to each other, then retire then approach again, with such wanton attitudes and motion, such leering looks, sparkling eyes and trembling limbs, as would decompose the gravity of a stoic.

"The Presidio is in the form of a large square surrounded by a wall 12 to 14 feet high, with a row of houses, one story high all around the inside for the purposes of dwellings and store houses for the governor's officers and soldiers, together with a decent church in the middle of the side facing the entrance, so that a large clear area is left in the middle for parading and exercising the men. It contained at this time between 60 and 70 soldiers and their families under the command of the governor who was a lieutenant in the army, and a sergeant with one or two corporals, but its military establishment is, I believe, considerably larger as we were informed that a number were necessarily dispersed to guard the mission and

outposts, to keep the Indians in awe and take care of the cattle, on which their substance greatly depend. Six nine pounders and three smaller ones were mounted on carriages before the entrance and we saw four nine pounders without carriages laying on logs of wood on a small eminence abreast of the anchorage and these we believed were all the artillery which the settlement at this time could boast of.

"It is pleasantly situated on a low plain and just before it, between it and the anchorage, there is a salt water lagoon (El Estero) which at this time swarmed with a great variety of wild aquatic fowls that afforded much diversion to our sportsmen. The lagoon was filled only at spring tides and near it at going to the Presidio we passed over some low, moist, marshy ground where good water may be got by digging wells at any season and it is only in this manner that the garrison is supplied with this necessary article, for there is no constant spring or good run of water within some miles of it.

"As Sr. Quadra lived on shore at the Presidio, the governor and himself kept an open table for the officers of the shipping in the bay, at which large parties of us dined almost daily and partook of the indulgence of their hospitality without reserve and in justice to add that they were equally ready to contribute to our amusements, by providing horses and guides in a most liberal manner for those who chose to take the recreation of riding through the country; and those who were fond of shooting and sporting were suffered to indulge in their favorite pursuits without the least restraint, so that parties were out daily traversing the country in almost every direction for 10 or 12 miles around.

"On the fifth I went on shore... We strolled toward Punta de Pinos by a pleasant walk along the seacoast, sometimes passing through woods...."