

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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More On Menzies Journal

Archibald Menzies, who visited Monterey between 1790 and 1794 on a trip around the world with Captain George Vancouver, was greatly impressed with the leisure life of the native Californian, with the unwillingness of the natives to raise sufficient vegetables for their own use and with the beauty of the country.

Even in that very distant day the visitors enjoyed fireworks, which delighted the natives, many of whom had never seen such a display before.

To continue with Archibald Menzies journal, which is now on display in the British Museum and a certified copy is in Victoria, B.C., archives:

“On the fifth I went on shore ... on that day a number of officers who dined at the Presidio were entertained in the evening with a ball at the governor’s house said to have been given by Sr. Quadra’s steward.... I accompanied a sporting party that took horse at the Presidio on the morning of the 8th and rode along shore to the eastward for about four or five miles to visit some lagoons that lay in that direction that swarmed with geese, ducks and other aquatic fowl but from our being on horseback, we were not very successful and returned in the evening not much burdened with game.

“The day being fine we however enjoyed our ride as a pleasant recreation and dined on what provisions we had carried with us at a small house near the garden about a league to the eastward of the Presidio. This we were told was the only garden belonging to the garrison, it was not well stocked with vegetables and if it had been, it was scarcely of a size to supply one-half of the inhabitants.

“Nothing more conspicuously showed the indulgence of the Spaniards than their not rearing, in a country like this where the soil is so very productive, a sufficient quantity of vegetables for their own consumption, one would have supposed that a small garden would afford to the soldier when off duty a most pleasant amusement and recreation, setting aside the advantages it would yield to his family, but they live entirely on garrison provisions and indulge in their native indulgences.

“On the ninth in the afternoon, Capt. Vancouver ... and a large party of officers from both vessels, joined the former party of Spaniards at the Presidio and having mounted horses rode out to the eastward and dined under an arbor erected for the purpose in the garden we had seen on the previous day. While the dinner was getting ready, the governor set off with a party to amuse themselves with bear hunting, but after traversing a good deal of ground where they were expected to meet with the bear, they returned without having startled any. Foxes, hares and rabbits were seen and large variegated squirrels, which burrowed in dry sandy ground, were very abundant particularly around the Presidio.”

To give the reader an idea of the extravagance of some of the living even in 1790 in Monterey we quote Archibald Menzies:

“Whenever we went out in this manner Sr. Quadra’s plate and cooking equipage, etc., traveled along with us, so that we had always the luxury of dining in those retreats from silver and on the best of everything he could afford.

“Next day Captain Vancouver gave an entertainment of fireworks to the Spaniards and a large party of officers and gentlemen from both vessels and as the motion of the vessel was so very unpleasant to the ladies of the garrison, to accommodate them in particular on this occasion, it was given on shore in a large tent where upwards to 40 dined at a long table, amongst whom were the governess and a numerous party of ladies who favored us with their company till pretty late in the evening.

“After dark a selection of fireworks were exhibited with which the whole company, particularly the Spaniards were highly delighted, for many of them we believed had never seen anything of the kind before, and on that account their admiration was more excessive. Most of the skyrockets went off well and were much admired but the water rockets, being exceedingly good, never failed of exciting most wonder and applause from the gazing multitude. The evening was spent with hilarity, mirth and mutual good humor between us and the Spaniards, with whom we parted at a late hour.

“The 13th was consecrated to devotional exercise and kept as a holiday at the Presidio, it being ushered in by firing of guns and volleys of small arms which was continued at intervals throughout the day in

commemoration, we were told, of the Lady of Lorette, the patroness of New Spain, a saint highly esteemed and revered throughout this country.”