

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

July 10, 1950

Monterey's Trees and Gardens

The Spaniards, the first of the early settlers in Monterey found, indeed, a virgin territory. In power until 1822, they did not change greatly the aspects of the land. The walled-in presidio, the main characteristic of Spanish Monterey, having for its purpose the function of defense, was not conducive to an enlarged landscape treatment. Later residents of the Spanish period, who built houses outside the Presidio walls, had an opportunity to plant gardens and fruit trees. Never on a large scale, though, those gardens consisted of the staples of potatoes, beans, maize, cabbage, onions, pumpkins, peas, garbanzos, turnips and peppers.

Governor Fages in writing to Romeu in 1790 (according to provincial state papers in the Bancroft Library), tells of his garden in Monterey:

"You will find in this casa real, which is sufficiently capacious, the necessary furniture, a sufficient stock of goats and sheep which I have raised; and nearby a garden which I have made at my own expense, from which you will have find vegetables all the year, and will enjoy the fruits of the trees which I have planted."

All illustrations of Monterey in the Mexican period tend to point out the disregard for landscape treatment. The illustrations of Monterey in 1842, made for Thomas Larkin show planting only in a few places. Larkin, himself, had a garden and sold flowers at times (it is mentioned in his accounts); and there were trees planted to one side of his house and in the rear. There were shrubs in the Amesti yard, and also, in the yard of Mariano Estrada. What impresses one most however, is the apparent lack of trees and shrubbery around the houses and along the streets.

Travelers and inhabitants of Monterey spoke of the scarcity of gardens in Mexican Monterey. The following statements are typical findings of a researcher: "Hardly a house in the whole country possessed a vegetable or flower garden,"; "even in the towns " it was a rare thing to see flowers or shrubbery about the houses of the Californians"; "They would sometimes have little shrubbery and flowers, perhaps a grapevine about their houses, but very little in the way of adornment, very little cultivation of fruit."

During the American period not much change came in the landscape treatment until the 1880's. True, that which had been planted earlier grew to immense size and beauty in certain circumstances. Early newspapers speak of the beautiful roses. A San Francisco paper had an article on Monterey in the early part of those years which read: "But one feature in this sleepy hollow redeems much of its oppressive torpor, and that is the wonderful roses, of every shade and family, trailing over porches and creeping up the sides of houses hanging over garden walls, and clustered together in a wilderness of beauty; the roses give the town an honor which its later born sisters do not possess."

The start of the real consciousness upon the part of Monterey, regarding the lack of trees and shrubbery, was caused, probably, by an editorial in the Monterey Gazette, of March 31, 1866. The editor, Mr. Hubbell, realizing the situation, penned the following appeal to the citizens:

"Plant trees – the comparative absence of trees, fruit or ornamental, in Monterey and its suburbs, has often been a matter of wonderment to us. They are generally among the first evidences of progress and enterprise. It is not because the climate and soil are not adapted to their culture for we have on the surrounding hills, in great abundance, a tree that is already known for its vigorous growth and systematic proportions. The Monterey Cypress is sought for and cultivated more than any other ornamental tree in all parts of California; while a walk through our streets will not reveal half a dozen in the entire town. The houses look barren and cheerless in their whitewashed monotony, unrelieved by a tree or scarcely a shrub.

"Not only are we devoid of shade and ornamental trees, but the same may be said of fruit trees. The magnificent slopes that stretch from the hills to the shore of the bay, seem to be especially adapted to the growth of fruit trees. Plant trees, that the birds may lodge in their branches and gladden you with their songs; plant trees that ye may breathe the fragrance of their blossoms, languish in their grateful shade, and when autumn brings of maturity, ye may gather the golden harvest."

That editorial had its effect. A year later, the paper printed the news that trees were being planted on Alvarado Street in front of the premises of Mr. Callaghan and John Roth. In 1868, two-year-old cypress trees were being sold by Lewis Little and M. Hughes; and in 1869, David Jacks was selling Monterey cypress

and pines. It is said that David Spence planted the first almond trees in Monterey. He also planted 100 fruit trees for W.E.P. Hartnell at the Hartnell home, a large adobe residence which stood where the Monterey Hospital now stands.