

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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First Frame House

The first frame house in California was erected in 1847 by William Bushton. Previous to that time there were many log cabins or block houses built, especially in the northern part of the state. But these do not fall into the category of "frame houses."

Early in 1847, William Bushton, a carpenter by trade, arriving in Monterey from Australia with his wife and sick daughter, thinking the climate would restore her health, so the story goes. The intention had been to land in San Francisco, but the captain, who was a New Bedford trader, had been traveling all over the world, going from foreign port to foreign port, for over five years. In all that time he had never reported to his company, and as a consequence, he was afraid to land in San Francisco, as he realized he was liable to arrest as a pirate.

After sighting the Golden Gate he turned back, saying he would have to go to Mexico in order to make a safe landing. But he had not reckoned with his passengers and crew; the unanimous wish was to stop in California. As a consequence, the next day, after the ship's course had been turned south, mutiny arose. The captain was seized, put in irons and the mutineers brought the ship to Monterey. The captain's hard luck continued, for officers arrested him and he was scheduled for trial in the federal court. His ship was also confiscated.

In the hold of the ship, which had taken nine months to make the voyage from Australia, Bushton had shipped boards and other timbers, cut and matched perfectly for the erection of a comfortable residence destined for his family. His task consisted in putting them all together. Since nails were scarce, every joining in the entire structure was mortised.

Bushton bought land at the corner of Munras Avenue and Webster Street and it was not long before the 12-room house was completed. Each room is said to have contained a large open fireplace. The two-story section of the building fronted on Munras, while the long rambling one-story portion faced on Webster street.

It was not long after the house was finished that Bushton died, and his widow married Thomas E. Allen. There were two sons born by this union: Edward Allen, who latter resided on Pacific street in Monterey and

served as city councilman; and Thomas Allen, who was a peace officer for nearly 25 years.

When Thomas E. Allen passed away, Mrs. Allen rented the south wing of the building to a group of Australians as a residence. During their occupancy, the Custom House was robbed and some \$30,800 of United States money was stolen. The crime was laid to a man named King, then Collector of the Port. King was liberated for lack of evidence and soon after left the country. Mrs. Allen, however, became suspicious of her Australian tenants and notified the officers of her suspicions.

When the officers arrived no objection was made to the search, but it was noticed that one of the women sat firmly on the third step of the narrow staircase leading to the second floor, and that she would scarcely move in order to allow the officers to pass. One of the officers called for an axe. He then chopped a portion of the staircase down, resulting in finding \$30,000 in gold, divided into smaller sums and placed in boxes under the stairs, a box under each stair. The floor was also torn up and \$800, in silver was unearthed in the floor under the table. Long prison terms were meted out to the culprits.

Mrs. Allen married a third time when she became the wife of Jacob Krampner. The couple had one daughter, Rebecca, who later married Judge David Wallace of Salinas. Thomas Allen, Jr., with his family occupied the house until it was torn down in 1923, seventy-six years after it had been built. Here children to the fifth generation of the Allen family were born, the last being a great-great-grandson, Robert Winslow, born October 1, 1922.

The house has been said to have been the most photographed structure in Monterey up until the time of this destruction. The lumber was ironwood and was used by Mr. J.C. Anthony, who tore it down, to make a gavel for the Women's Civic Club and also the back gate of the clubhouse property on Pacific street, is constructed of the same material and was a gift of Mr. Anthony.

On May 27, 1910, the Monterey *Daily Cypress* printed the following news story: "Thomas W. Allen, owner of the pioneer first wooden house built in California, situated on the corner of California (Munras) and Webster streets is making arrangements to have a number of penholders made from the ironwood of the building, similar to the penholder made by A. Chaine,

and presented last Sunday to Mrs. Lillie, grand president of the N.D.G.W.

“These penholders and other similar useful articles, such as rules and gavels, will be sold as souvenirs of Monterey to those who take an interest in the historic past of the first capital of California.”

Descendants of Mrs. Allen are still living on the Peninsula. Her granddaughters are Mrs. Henry Yeager, Mrs. Julia Sigleman, Mrs. Mary Burwell, Ms. Tanner Brown all of Monterey and Mrs. Henry Jung of San Jose. Ray Allen of Monterey is a grandson. The children and grandchildren of Judge Wallace of Salinas are also descendants of the builder of the first wooden house in Monterey.