

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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A Fiery Frenchman

When Monterey had a French Consulate and a Consul from 1843 to 1846, Louis Gasquet, was probably the first representative of the French government to live in the little adobe building now located on El Estero and used as a Girl Scout house.

Yesterday we wrote of happenings in Monterey, as reported in letters written to his government by Gasquet. Among other matters he wrote concerning the arrest and imprisonment of Henri Cambuston, the French school teacher, who struck Captain Narvaez at a ball that was being held at the home of Dr. Stocks (now Gallatin's).

After Commodore Sloat took charge of Monterey, Gasquet had many quarrels with the Americans and always came out second best, but his anger boiled over when sentries were placed around the consulate as he was suspected of receiving couriers from Gen. Castro and otherwise aiding the Mexicans. He became so insolent that Commodore Stockton ordered him to leave Monterey within 48 hours, which he refused to do, so he was held prisoner in the consulate for 51 days, a period he indignantly wrote home as "well counted and very long," and he demanded "glorious reparation."

In October, 1846, Gasquet was sent back to France and M. Moerenhaut took his place. Letters from the consulate describing events in Monterey during his regime are interesting. His appointment as Consul of France to Monterey was for him the culmination of an adventurous career, and the reward for services rendered in assisting in the spread of the French influence and empire in the Pacific. Unlike his predecessor, the obscure Gasquet, who was seemingly elevated from the lower ranks of the foreign service for lack of a better candidate, Moerenhaut was, by a "wholly exceptional measure," appointed from private life to the full rank of consul because of the confidence he had earned by his "devotion to his (Majesty's) service" in the post of consular agent at Tahiti during the critical times in Oceania; according to the account of Dr. Abraham P. Nasatir.

Born in 1796 or 1797 in Elchern, Province of Antwerp, only shortly after its occupation by the French revolutionary forces, Moerenhaut was educated in

France, and as a youth of 15 enlisted in the corps of engineers of Napoleon's Grand Arme'e, in which he served from June 13, 1812, to May 6, 1814. He became an expert in a difficult profession, that of miniature painting. He married a Chilean woman, having gone to Chile as a merchant in 1826.

Moerenhaut was appointed consul of the second class at Monterey on April 26, 1845, at an annual salary of 15,000 francs. He received the news of his appointment in March, 1846, and though delayed by the outbreak of war in Tahiti, soon left for his new post, and arrived in California in October. For the rest of his long life he was to call California his home.

As reported in the Quarterly of the California Historical Society Moerenhaut, after the unfortunate, though somewhat comic, clash with the inept Gasquet, entered at once upon his duties here as French consul. Thoroughly French in attitude, he looked at the world through "French colored glasses," and his patriotism seems at times to have influenced his judgment in respect to claims of French citizens against the American military authorities then in possession of the territory. His accounts of the war are especially detailed, and on more than one occasion he urged French occupation of the country. But he also reported fully and accurately the social, industrial and commercial developments, and the discovery of coal, quicksilver and gold.

Moerenhaut did, however, serve French interests well as consul at Monterey, and in his visits to all parts of the rapidly growing region he sought to guide and regulate French immigration and commerce in the country. As a result of the revolution of 1848 in France, however, the consulate in Monterey was suppressed, though he remained in charge until 1859, when he returned to France to attempt to obtain a reappointment.

On March 11, 1852, the Prince President Louis Napoleon, appointed him "Vice Consular agent at Monterey with the title of Honorary Consul of the Second Class" as a salary of 6,000 francs and all receipts of the office, subordinate, however to the French Consul at San Francisco, then M. Dillon. He returned at once to California. During his absence from Monterey his house had been sold at auction at a great loss to him, and Monterey had meantime lost most of its importance as the former capital of the Californias. It was no longer visited by commercial vessels, and it was no longer the port of entry for immigrants.

In 1859 the vice consulate at Monterey was transferred to Los Angeles, where Moerenhaut was impressively inaugurated on October 29. He took up these new duties with enthusiasm and became widely known and greatly respected. At his residence he presided in 1876 over an enthusiastic celebration of the centenary of American independence.