

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **A Consul Reports**

Today we will continue with the history of the French Consulate and the consul who lived in Monterey in what is now the Girl Scout House on the El Estero, from 1846 until 1859, with an extended visit to France during the revolution in 1848.

After the removal of the Consulate to Los Angeles from Monterey and late in the seventies the economic "pinch" then being suffered by the Third Republic in France led to the suppression of the Vice Consulate at Los Angeles.

Moerenhaut wrote to his banker in Paris that "this announcement strikes me at a very fatal moment," his property being then very unsaleable. He asked for consideration of his age and 40 years of service, and at least to be allowed to live in California, where the climate was favorable to his asthma, for "the short time that is still left to me to live." The suppression dated from May 20, 1879, but a special salary was allowed him – 9,000 francs (his full salary) to May 1, 1879 and 3,500 francs thereafter. On July 11, however, he died at his home.

The Sacramento Record-Union contained the following notice of Consul Moerenhaut's death: "J.A. Moerenhaut, vice consul of the Republic of France at Los Angeles died in this city (Los Angeles) this afternoon, aged 83 years. The last appearance in public of M. Moerenhaut was on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, when he participated in the celebration, wearing his consular uniform. He entered the consular service in France in 1827, and has been in office in various parts of the world almost continuously since that time, and in 1859 he was granted permission to retire with the honorary title of vice consul of France at Los Angeles, where he was held in high esteem for his many virtues.

"Jacob Antoine Moerenhaut was a rather handsome man, honest, upright and active. He was a typical Frenchman, a good observer, but always a bit anti-American and pro-French in attitude. In Monterey he owned a spacious home, with a beautiful rose garden, shrubs and trees, but of late the old house on Fremont street has suffered from neglect and has fallen into decay."

Through the efforts of the Monterey History and Art Association the house was moved to its present site on the El Estero facing Franklin street.

Better informed and more experienced than his predecessor, Gasquet, Moerenhaut nevertheless strove to achieve similar objects and aims during his incumbency at Monterey. His reports were more authoritative and disclosed a better balance. They were likewise less denunciatory in tone, and they were no doubt received with more confidence and respect at Paris than either those of Gasquet or of Lombard, who followed Moerenhaut after his departure for Paris in 1850, in the opinion of Dr. Nasatir.

The following notice appeared in The Californian on Saturday, October 3, 1846:

"The French corvette Brillante, commanded by E. de Bouzet, arrived in our bay on Thursday evening. She is at last from San Francisco, at which place she arrived in 48 days from Callao. Her captain, whom we met elsewhere, combines the accomplishments of the officer and gentleman.

The Brillante has on board M. Moerenhaut Esq. consul from His Majesty of France, for Monterey. He has been recognized in his official capacity by the governor general of California and is to hoist his consulate flag. His good reputation has preceded him, and he will receive from the whole community a cordial reception."

Here follows the account of Gasquet's refusal to go aboard the Brillante on the ground that the captain owed him "the first visit," so it was not until the next day that the new consul met the old consul, whose place he was to take.

Writing of trade in California in 1846 and 1847, Moerenhaut reported to France and the minister of foreign affairs: "Commerce with the Sandwich Islands has greatly increased since the United States took possession. Mexico also sends generally one or two small vessels with sugar and some cloth, especially rebozos, a sort of shawl of silk or cotton made in Mexico; mangas, a kind of poncho but very much larger than the Chilian ponchos, also either of silk or wool, and often selling for from one to two hundred piastres; and serapas (serapes), like in form to the mangas but only in wool and generally ordinary (in quality) for the use of the Indians and of those who tend cattle. The English have tried to imitate the rebozos and the mangas, but

with little success, as those made in Mexico are the only ones sought after or saleable here.

“A single French ship, the Lion, which came to California toward the end of the year 1846, to obtain some cattle for the Marquesas Islands and Tahiti, introduced some merchandise of foreign manufacture, with the exception of wines and brandy. Our (French) shawls and other silk stuffs, silk hose, ribbons in small quantity, laces, merinos, calicos, muslins printed cotton stuffs, ready-made clothing, shirts, shoes for men and women, some glassware, cutlery, furniture, mirrors, pendulum clocks (of medium quality), already a little out of style; some perfumery, woolen stuffs, bed clothes, red stuffs of medium and first quality for shirts and petticoats for women, some wines, brandy, liqueurs, dried fruits – these are all articles that can be sold.”