

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Colton as Alcalde**

One hundred and four years ago today the citizens of Monterey elected Walter Colton alcalde, or chief magistrate of the jurisdiction—a situation which he had been filling for two months past, under a military commission. According to Colton's "Three Years in California," the office had been restored to its civil character and functions.

"The election is the highest compliment they could confer," he said, "but this token of confidence brings with it a great deal of labor and responsibility. It devolves upon me duties similar to those of a mayor of one of our cities, without any of those judicial aids which he enjoys. It involves every breach of the peace, every case of crime, every business obligation, and every disputed land title within the space of 300 miles.

"From every other alcalde's court in this jurisdiction there is an appeal to this, and none from this to any higher tribunal. Such an absolute disposal of questions affecting the property and personal liberty, never ought to be confided to one man. There is not a judge on any bench in England or the United States whose power is so absolute as that of the alcalde of Monterey.

It was on Tuesday, July 28, 1846, that Commodore Stockton informed Walter Colton that he had been appointed alcalde of Monterey and its jurisdiction. Colton wrote in his diary that day: "I had dreamed in the course of my life, as most people have, of the thousand things I might become, but it never entered my visions that I should succeed to the dignity of a Spanish alcalde. I much prefer my berth on board the Congress, and that the judicial functions in question should continue to be discharged by the two intelligent gentlemen, Purser R.M. Price and Dr. Edward Gilchrist, upon whom they have been devolved. But the services of these officers were deemed indispensable to the efficiency of the ships to which they were attached. This left me no alternative; my trunks were packed, my books boxed, and in an hour I was on shore, a guest in the house of our consul, T.O. Larkin, Esq., whose munificent hospitalities reach every officer in the squadron and every functionary in the interest of the flag. This is more appreciated from the fact that there is not a public table or hotel in all California."

On Thursday, July 30, Colton entered a paragraph in his diary saying: "Today I entered on the duties of my office as alcalde of Monterey; my jurisdiction extends over an immense territory, and over a most heterogenous population. Almost every nation has, in some emigrant, a representative here—a representative of its peculiar habits, virtues and vices. Here is the reckless Californian, the half-wild Indian, the roving trapper of the West, the lawless Mexican, the licentious Spaniard, the scolding Englishman, the luckless Irishman, the plodding German, the adventurous Russian, and the discontented Mormon. All have come here with the expectation of finding but little work and less law. Through this discordant mass I am to maintain order, punish crime and redress injuries."

Jehanne Bietry-Salinger of San Francisco was a visitor on the Peninsula this past week, in the interest of the French Centennial Committee plans to commemorate 100 years of achievement by French pioneers in California. Elaborate plans are under way for the celebration set for November 11-23.

Highlighting the observance will be the historical exhibition at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor. The period to be covered is from 1850 to 1906.

All phases of French activity will be illustrated. This will include the earliest documents and historical objects concerning history of the French church, the French hospital and the French newspapers. Earliest available items of the gold rush days will be on display, having to do with pioneers in the field of medicine, viticulture, horticulture, industry, commerce, crafts and trades. A special stress will be placed upon the French artists and writers who worked in California between 1850 and 1906. The French who distinguished themselves in the theater and in music in California during those years will also be commemorated.

French ambassador to Washington, Henri Bonnet, is honorary chairman of the committee and will come west for the celebration. President-at-large is the historian Gilbert Chinard, editor of the French-American Review. Acting president is Dr. Raoul H. Blanquie, an active member of the Californian Historical Society, long interested in the part played by the French in the state.

Madame Bietry-Salinger is the author of "Notre Centenaire" a history of the French in California.

From Monterey will be sent several fine examples of the paintings of Jules Tavenier, who painted and taught in Monterey in the early days; and it is hoped, some examples of the pottery of Honore Escolle, who once owned and lived in the Stokes adobe, later the property of the late Mrs. Hattie Gragg. Also the history and pictures of the French consulate, now comfortably located on El Estero.