

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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'18 Years Alone

A fascinating story was printed in Scribner's Monthly in the year 1880, entitled "Eighteen Years Alone—A Tale of the Pacific." The author of the tale is not given, but its authenticity is declared several times as the story proceeds. The unfolding of the life of a woman alone in the Santa Barbara Islands and of her rescue in 1853, is thrilling that we will repeat some of it in the Diary for the next few days.

In the year that this story was written the author declares that the islands were uninhabited—but the islands nearer the coast were used for sheep grazing. A sailboat carried the sheep shearers over and brought back the wool. The more distant islands in 1880 were known to trappers as find beds of otters and seals. In those days boats visited the islands for abalones, the meat of which was dried and shipped to China for food, while the shells sold at an average price of \$50 per ton at the San Francisco wharf, where they were bought by dealers in marine shells, cut into jewelry, or shipped to Europe, to be manufactured into buttons.

Yet, wild and desolate as they were, Cabrillo says that in the Fifteenth Century they were densely populated by a superior race, and that the mainland was dotted by villages. The children of the islanders were described by him as being "White, with light hair and ruddy cheeks," and the women as having fine forms, beautiful eyes and a modest demeanor. "The men wore loose cloaks, the women dressed in petticoats and cape of sealskin, heavily fringed and handsomely ornamented. They cook their food in soapstone vessels, or in water-tight baskets."

Fletcher also wrote of the coast when he visited it with Sir Francis Drake in 1579. In the year 1542, Cabrillo landed on what is now known as San Miguel Island, and christened it Ysal de Posesion. He died on the island in 1543, and is buried in its sands.

San Nicholas, on which the scene of the wild romance written in 1880 is laid, is the outermost of the group, distant 70 miles from the coast, and 30 miles from the nearest neighbor. M. De Cessac, a Frenchman engaged in collecting archaeological specimens for his government, says that the relics found by him on San

Nicholas are stamped as true every detail of the remarkable incident.

Now on with the story.

In the year 1835, Isaac Sparks and Lewis L. Burton, Americans, chartered a schooner of 20 more elaborate in form and finish, and show superiority of workmanship, many of which resembled those collected on the borders of Alaska. Hence he infers that the place was at one time the dwelling of north country tribes.

In this deserted spot, for 18 years, a human being lived alone. Here she was found at last by a fisherman who was living in 1880, and whose affidavit, properly witnessed, tons burden, for other-hunting on the lower California coast. The vessel was owned by a rich Spaniard of Monterey, and was commanded by Captain Charlie Hubbard. (The name of the Spaniard is not given.) The schooner bore the name Peor 'es Nada, and she started from Santa Barbara harbor, on an April morning. In those days the sight of a sailing vessel was not an everyday occurrence.

After a successful cruise, the Peor 'es Nada unloaded pelts, and under the direction of Captain Williams, collector of the port, set sail for San Nicolas Island to bring the islanders to the mainland, in accordance with the will of the church fathers. Before they reached their destination a sudden gale came up, rising almost to the severity of a tempest. The winds struck with such force upon the upper end of San Nicholas, lashing the shoal waters into fury, according to the report, and shooting the spray in volley through the low cliffs. The landing was effected with difficulty. The wind increased in violence. The weather became so boisterous as to endanger the safety of the vessel. No time was wasted. The islanders, some 20 in number, were hurried into the boats and all speed was made to reach the schooner.

In the excitement and confusion of the final abandonment of their home it was not known until they were on the ship that a child had been left behind. The mother supposed it had been carried aboard in the arms of an old sailor. She frantically implored the man to return. The captain replied that they must get to a place of safety; after the storm, tomorrow, perhaps they would come back for the baby.

Finding that they were going out to sea, the young mother, desperate, and despite all efforts to detain her, jumped overboard and struck out through the kelpy waters for the shore. She was a widow, between 20 and

30 years of age, as recorded in the article, of medium height and fine form; her complexion was light and her hair a dark rich brown. No attempt was made to rescue her, and in a moment she was lost in the seething waves. The ship already under headway, staggering through the storm, "the affrighted islanders huddled together on the deck, and fear shut every other emotion for the time from their hearts."

After an adventurous voyage, the Peor 'es Nada eventually reached San Pedro, where the exiles were landed. Some of them were sent to Los Angeles, some were put to work in the neighboring missions and two of the women were soon married to wealthy men in Southern California.

(More Tomorrow)