

January 4, 1951

Imports of 1846

To continue with our discussion of a few days ago regarding shipping and the collections for duty at the Old Custom House in Monterey, we have accomplished some research on this bit of Monterey history, which we will give to our readers today.

In 1844-5 Micheltorena levied a tax of \$50 per month on foreign vessels which paid their duty at Monterey, for the privilege of coasting; \$5,000 was collected March 28, 1846, according to Bancroft. Governor Pico later annulled this law.

The payments of duties were made in 90, 130 and 180 days. The supercargoes in general agreed upon the second payment, making it in cash, and hides at \$2 apiece; cash, should the vessels pay less than \$6,000; from \$6,000 to \$12,000, two-thirds cash and one-third hides; from \$12,000 to \$18,000, one-third cash and two-thirds hides.

On the collector's arranging the amount, mode of payment, and taking two securities, he would retain sufficient for the salaries of his officers, and pass the rest to the treasurer. They would then both draw the sums of from \$4,000 to \$5,000 on the supercargo or agent, payable at a specified time; some orders for cash, some for hides. In those early days each ship had a supercargo or agent who had a store fitted up on board ship, with shelves, showcases, drawers and scales, selling from one pound of tea, shot, etc. to a box or bag, and again from a yard of silk or calico to a bale.

The imports from San Blas, Mazatlan, and Acapulco consisted of rice, sugar, panocho, nux vomica, saddlery, silk and cotton rebozos, cotton and woolen serapes, shoes and some English, American and German goods.

Imports from the United States to California were shoes, hats, furniture and farming utensils, chiefly of New England manufacture; groceries, china goods, iron, hardware and crockery, which were sold to the merchants and farmers along the coast on a credit of from one to two years, payable in hides, tallow, dried beef, lumber, soap, etc. – according to Bancroft's entry in "California Pastoral." And there might even have been cheese.

It was usual for the Boston vessels to return to that port with from 20,000 to 40,000 bullock-hides, the owner

expecting about one hide for each dollar invested in cargo and expenses of all kinds.

Shingles, lumber, spars and horses were shipped to the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii); beef, fat, wheat and beans to the Russian settlements.

In 1845, the Assembly decreed that traders who brought hides should register in the books kept for that purpose the name of sellers, marks and value. For even in those early days there were cattle thieves. A commission appointed by the alcaldes should meet at the market every Saturday, and collect the hides brought in during the previous week. They took a list of the sellers and marks, and qualified them, whether legal or not, in accordance with the books of the judge

Hides with false sale-marks were applied to the municipal fund and the sellers held as thieves, to be judged by the alcalde, the price to be returned to the purchaser, and the value of the animal to its owner.

W.E.P. Hartnell, in a letter to R.C. Wyllie in 1844, told him that articles of English manufacture best adapted to California market would be brown and white cotton, coarse and fine, for shirting, sheeting, etc.; prints of good quality and fast handsome colors, cotton and silk handkerchiefs, good stout velveteens, blue and black; fustian, principally brown; muslin, cambric muslin, bishop's lawn, cotton lace, cloth of all kinds, principally blue and black; cassimere, flannel, principally red and white; a very small assortment of linen goods, among which some of the very finest Irish linen and cambric; cotton, woolen and silk stockings; handsome gown patterns, cashmere shawls, all kinds of hardware, tinware, earthenware and glassware; needles, mostly very fine; cotton and linen thread, sewing silk, boots and shoes, ready-made clothes of all descriptions, including plenty of white and checked shirts, Scotch griddles; silver and brass thimbles; all kinds of knick-knacks for women's work boxes; furniture, of all kinds – a small assortment of very elegant, the rest middling quality; tea-trays of all sizes; carpeting, a small quantity; artificial flowers, false pearls, the finest and smallest beads that can be procured, of all colors, and needles to work them with; gold and silver lace from one-fourth to two inches wide; perfumery; iron pots and kettles; candle-sticks, and a few good common silver hunting-case watches.

Most of this business, unloading, shipping and money exchange or collections, was made through the Old

Custom House in Monterey – the oldest federal building west of the Rockies.