

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Famous Guest

On March 31, 1887, the splendid Hotel Del Monte that had cost \$350,000 was destroyed by fire. It had first been opened in June in 1880. Undaunted, the newspaper of that day reported, the handsome edifice was immediately rebuilt and among its first distinguished visitors was President Harrison and party, April 3, 1891.

In honor of the President Monterey was handsomely decorated with flags, evergreens and flowers and the schoolhouse was literally covered with the national colors, and beautiful floral arches crowned the principal entrance.

Enjoying a good night's rest in the hotel, early the following morning President Harrison with his party rode over the 17-Mile Drive, and later was escorted to Monterey by a large delegation of citizens from Monterey, Pacific Grove and Salinas. On arrival at the "city's gates" he was greeted by the pioneers, the Mexican war veterans and the school children, the latter strewing the pathway with flowers as the President walked to the schoolhouse where the exercises were held.

Mayor Hill of Salinas delivered the address of welcome in behalf of the three cities, and presented the President with a solid silver card, having upon one side an engraving of the Old Custom House "Where the First American Flag was raised, 1846," and on the reverse side, "Greetings to Our President, April 30th, 1891." The President, Secretary Rusk and the Postmaster-General John Wanamaker, then made short addresses, and soon afterward the entire party were driven to Cypress Point, where they were served lunch and remained for the afternoon.

That evening the citizens tendered the President and his party a banquet in the Del Monte Hotel, after which he held a reception in Monterey and was serenaded by the Monterey band, according to J.M. Guinn's report of the event.

While at Cypress Point President Harrison visited the lighthouse, one of the most interesting attractions on the Peninsula in those days. Built of solid cut stone (granite) quarried within 100 yards of the building, it was completed in February, 1853, and Charles Layton, a

member of Company F, Stevenson's regiment, was appointed lighthouse keeper at a salary of \$1,000 per year. He was killed in 1855 as he attempted to assist the county sheriff in arresting a murderer. For over 30 years following her husband's death, Mrs. Charlotte A. Layton, kept the lighthouse.

It was said in 1891 as the papers reported the visit of the President, that the lantern tower stood 50 feet above sea level and the light which shone from sunset to sunrise, could be seen 14 miles at sea by a lookout standing 15 feet above water.

Benjamin Harrison returned to Del Monte as an ex-President of the United States and enjoyed himself as a private citizen. It is said that he wore rough tweeds, an old cap and his trousers tucked into heavy fishing boots and that he went fishing almost every day during his visit. He was the guest of Leland Stanford, then U.S. Senator, who had invited the former President to deliver two lectures at Stanford University.

The late Benjamin F. Wright wrote in his memoirs that upon Harrison's first visit to the Peninsula, when he was President of the United States, he and his party stopped at the Chinese village on 17 Mile Drive where the distinguished visitor purchased some choice shells as souvenirs. In payment he offered the Chinese merchant a ten-dollar bill, which was rejected as "No good. You pay me money."

In those day, gold and silver were the mediums of exchange almost exclusive in California and the Chinese knew nothing else but "hard" money.