

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Men of Two Countries

Men of two countries were those American and European traders who came to Monterey during the half-century before 1859, and largely as a matter of convenience for the purpose of complying with strict commercial regulations, became naturalized citizens of California which was then but a remote province of the Republic of Mexico.

In the period before the landing of Commodore Sloat during the war with Mexico, they were to emerge as a dominating group forcing the inevitable adherence of California to a nation marching westward to its destiny.

After 1850, they were to gain in their position among the business and political leaders of the state, and were to provide one of the few links connecting the turbulent boom eras in mining, agriculture and industry with the quieter period of California life.

From a volume entitled "Index to Mexican Archives" in the county recorder's office in Salinas it has been discovered by past researchers that J.B.R. Cooper, was naturalized here in 1829 and was the first "foreigner" to become a Mexican citizen.

According to his declaration, Cooper had at that time been a resident of the county for more than 25 years. The Cooper family has continued to live in Monterey since that time. It was in 1905 that a descendant of the same name purchased the site of the first court house in Salinas.

In the decade following 1829, others who were naturalized included: J.B. Bonifacio, N. Dodero, J. Gilroy, W.E.P. Hartnell, G. Huppert, J.P. Leese, J.R.R. Livermore, F.H. Littlejohn, M.L. McIntosh, J. Mathias, V. Molina, M. delos Pasci, William Smith, J.S. Sparks, James Watson and Marcos West.

Hartnell, who was naturalized in 1830 and was to serve for years as "government translator" was a member of the first county board of supervisors. His son, U. Hartnell, was county treasurer from 1880 to 1890.

Another of the Americans who became "Mexicans" and then Americans again was Jacob Leese, who was also on the first supervisorial board.

Among the very early American residents of the old capital was "Citizen David E. Spence, constitutional

Alcalde," from the preface of Volume A. of Grants, or more properly "Solares de Monterey," the researchers of the W.P.A. historical project, discovered:

"In Monterey on the 7th day of February in the year 1835, at the regular session of this illustrious Ayuntamiento (city council) it was proposed by the Honorable First Alcalde Citizen, David E. Spence, that a book be purchased wherein the Solares may be entered."

Names of Americans granted "solares" or building lots in Monterey in the following years included Thomas O. Larkin, February 7, 1835; George Kinloch, July 14, 1835, and Lieutenant William T. Sherman, U.S. Army, 1849. (We must do some research on the latter and discover what land in Monterey once belonged to Sherman).

Another family prominent in the history of Monterey and later in San Benito County were the Breens, who survived the hardships of the Donner Party in the high Sierras during the winter of 1846 and 1847.

The father, Patrick Breen, on December 18th, 1848, purchased the old adobe home in San Juan, then part of Monterey County, from General Jose Castro. This house is now part of the State Monument in San Juan and under the supervision of the California State Parks Commission.

In 1855, Breen, was elected a Monterey County supervisor, while his sons, John and Edward, were elected to the same board in 1872 and 1874, when San Benito County was organized. James Breen, a son, was district attorney from 1866 to 1874.