

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **An Old Spanish Custom**

Christmas on board the "California" in 1849 was far from gay, according to the notation made in E.F. Williams' diary. As the schooner, historic because it carried the first mails to California and later brought the first postmaster to Monterey, left San Diego and proceeded up the coast it was soon December 24th. The passengers appointed Mr. Williams a committee of one to ask the captain to let them have a box of raisins from the store, to put in the next day's rice for a Christmas pudding. He smilingly assented reports Mr. Williams, and called the steward aft and gave him the necessary order. He had told the captain that the passengers would carefully take all the weevil out of the rice but he replied that he thought more weevil than raisins would be found and so it was.

"On the 26th we were steaming along near the shore of Pinos (Pine Point) after leaving behind us Point Cypress," writes Mr. Williams. "As we went along I thought; 'never have I seen such a beautiful view' as the land sloped down to the sea, covered with bright green, inter-spread with trees, a most lovely sight all being lighted by the early sun. Soon we were in front of the old town of Monterey, the anchor was dropped and my voyage ended. December 26, 1849, I and my baggage, consisting of my blankets that had done me such good service, and my hammock, were put in to a boat with the mail bags and I, the only passenger for Monterey, was landed at a point of rocks opposite the Custom House. From there I made my way to Joseph Boston's (my cousin who had sent for me) store. Our meeting was a most pleasurable one. He had left New York three years before and I could tell him all about relative and friends."

After being in Monterey some months boarding with a native family Mr. Williams found the Spanish customs were greatly different from those of New York. A young woman was not permitted to be alone with the other sex, he wrote, nor to appear in the street alone unless accompanied by some much older person of her own sex.

A young lady might be seen going to church, or at church, or returning from church; but to address, or walk with one, was not permitted.

He observed that if you went to the home of one young lady, your visit was presume to be to the older folks only, and you were received by them with great politeness and formality. If you asked after the young lady you would be informed that she was well but busy and would not see you. "The old folks did not retire on your appearance and leave you with the young lady as they do nowadays, I am informed," wrote Mr. Williams in 1903.

You ask how under these conditions was courtship carried on in 1849 and Mr. Williams write thusly: "I answer, at the dances. There was always dancing at one house or another; then the swain would softly press the hand of the fair one, it perhaps would be returned, thus emboldened he would whisper in her ear during a waltz, and finally offer himself and receive in reply a low and modest 'yes'. The next day he would go to the old folks and they would assent or dissent as the case might be.

"I boarded in the house mentioned more than a year. There were four girls who served the table but they never appeared alone, they always came in pairs, like shoes or gloves. Fifty years later I dined at the same house at the same table in the same room and was waited upon by one of the same girls, then a buxom, rosy cheeked lass, now a gray haired woman yet unmarried.

"And now my story is told, I put out the light and say to all, 'Good night'." So ends Mr. E. L. Williams diary of his journey from New York to Monterey in 1849.