

Peninsula Diary May Hayes O'Donnell

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'The Big Eagle of Monterey'

Lewis F. Belcher, who figured so prominently in the Sanchez buried treasure, about which we have been writing for several days, was in the early 1850s, called "The Big Eagle of Monterey." He was born in New York state and as soon as he could carry a gun, he headed for the wide open spaces.

According to the Weekly Index of December 26th, 1878, Belcher joined an emigrant caravan and arrived in Monterey early in 1847. He was then 22. He soon made friends with Captain of Volunteers Joseph Aram and entered into an agreement to furnish meat to the U.S. Army and Navy. Bancroft mentions Belcher and Aram as doing business in Monterey in 1847. It was while carrying out this contract that he met Sgt. William Roach.

Belcher had never attended school, but he was smart, which coupled with a capacity for hard work, enabled him to get large land grants in the Carmel Valley, and in Santa Clara and Stanislaus counties. His holdings, according to Paul Parker's article in the California Historical Quarterly, included San Carlos and San Francisquito ranchos in Carmel Valley; a portion of Sur Chiquito below Monterey; a fourth interest in 50,000 acres at the junction of the Stanislaus and San Joaquin Rivers; 500 acres of San Jose pueblo lands; town lots in San Francisco and Stockton, all of which are listed in the probate courts of Monterey County.

It was Belcher who persuaded Judge Josiah Merritt to appoint William Roach as guardian of the Sanchez children following the death of their father, Jose Maria Sanchez. Judge Merritt was a native of New York, and had been admitted to the bar there. He arrived in Monterey in January, 1850. He was county judge from 1850-54. His wife was the daughter of Simeon Castro, the large landowner who vigorously opposed the American occupation of California.

Roach resigned as sheriff of Monterey County and accepted the guardianship of the three Sanchez children. Aaron Lyons, sergeant in Company D., replaced him, according to the proceedings of the board of supervisors of 1853.

Belcher and David Jacks acted as Roach's bondsmen. After a few months Belcher accused Roach of stealing

from the estate, and he and Jacks resigned as sureties. In their places were appointed James Meadows, P. Ord and James McKinley. Ord was Roach's attorney.

Paul Parker writes in his "Roach-Belcher Feud" the following concerning David Jacks: "David Jacks, a native of Scotland, came to New York in 1841. He saw a letter written by Alcalde Walter A. Colton in the New York Herald in regard to gold discovery whereupon he brought \$1,500 worth of goods around the Horn, arriving in San Francisco in April 1849. The goods were sold in 48 hours for \$4,000, which started him on his way toward becoming the richest man in Monterey County. His wife was Maria Cristina Romie, who came to Monterey in 1841. They had seven children, two of whom are living, Miss Margaret Jacks of Palo Alto and Mrs. Mary Thomas of San Francisco.

James Meadows was a deserter from an English ship at Monterey in 1837. He was one of Isaac Graham's "riflemen," some dozen of whom were exiled to San Blas in 1840. On his return Meadows married a native woman and took over the fertile Pala Escrito grant in Carmel Valley, according to Bancroft's item in Vol. IV. Many descendants of James Meadows still own property and live in Carmel Valley.

Ord, a brother of General E.O.C. Ord for whom the fort was named, and of Dr. James L. Ord, had arrived in Monterey in 1847 with Company F. Dr. Ord attended Belcher when he was shot in the Washington Hotel bar.

The third surety was James McKinley who had been a mess boy on the British vessel "Royal George." In company with William Garner, James Watson and a Negro name Robinson, they deserted ship on November 16, 1824, in Santa Barbara "because the food was bad." This fact Paul Parker found in the Mexican Archives Monterey County Recorder's office. McKinley owned grants in Monterey, San Luis Obispo and Los Angeles counties. In 1848 he married Carmen, daughter of Jose Amesti, and was the owner of the Amesti adobe on Polk street, now the home of Mrs. Frances Elkins.

(More on Monday)