

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **A Mixed Set of Americans**

Early in 1847 General W.T. Sherman was in California and later wrote in his "Memoirs" his impression of Monterey and this part of the far west. The extract is from the fourth edition published in 1891 and was submitted by Father A.R. Bandini of Carmel to the Academy Scrapbook.

Sherman wrote: "We found the people of Monterey a mixed set of Americans, native Mexicans, and Indians, about one thousand all told. They were kind and pleasant, and seemed to have nothing to do, except such as owned ranches in the country for the rearing of horses and cattle. Horses could be bought at any price from four dollars up to sixteen, but no horse was ever valued above a doubloon or Mexican ounce (sixteen dollars). Cattle cost eight dollars fifty cents for the best, and this made beef net about 2 cents a pound but at that time nobody bought beef by the pound, but by the carcass.

"Game of all kinds – elk, deer, wild geese, and ducks – was abundant; but coffee, sugar, and small stores, were rare and costly.

"There were some half dozen shops or stores, but their shelves were empty. The people were very fond of riding, dancing, and of shows of any kind. The young fellows took great delight in showing off their horsemanship, and would dash along, picking up a half-dollar from the ground, stop their horses in full career and turn about on the space of a bullock's hide, and their skill with the lasso was certainly wonderful. At full speed they could cast their lasso about the horns of a bull or so throw it as to catch any particular foot. These fellows would work all day on horseback in driving cattle or catching wild horses for a mere nothing, but all the money offered would not have hired one of them to walk a mile. The girls were very fond of dancing, and they did dance gracefully and well. Every Sunday, regularly, we had a baile, or dance.

"I remember very well, soon after our arrival, that we were all invited to witness a play called "Adam and Eve." Eve was personated by a pretty young girl known as Dolores Gomez, who however, was dressed very unlike Eve, for she was covered with a petticoat and spangles. Adam was personated by her brother, the

same which has since become somewhat famous as the person on whom is founded the McGarrahan claim

"God Almighty was personated, and heaven's occupants seemed quite human. Yet the play was pretty, interesting, and elicited universal applause. All the month of February we were preparing by day for our long stay in the country, and at night making the most of the balls and parties of the most primitive kind, picking up a smattering of Spanish, and extending our acquaintance with the people and the *costumbres del pais* (customs of the country).

"I... well recall that Ord and I... got permission and started for ... San Juan Bautista. Mounted on horses, and with our carbines, we took the road by El Toro... a prominent hill which passes the road to the south, following the Salinas or Monterey River... It was quite dark when... we reached a small adobe house on the banks of the Salinas, where we spent the night. In the house was a single room, without floor or glass; only a rude door, and window with bars. Not a particle of food but meat, yet the man and woman entertained us with the language of lords, put themselves, their house, and everything at our 'disposition' and made little barefoot children dance for our entertainment. We made our supper of beef, and slept on a bullock's hid on the dirt floor."

The Gomez of McGarrahan fame is Vincent. "He was the author of a thick folio volume under the title *Lo que Sabe*, contributed a large stock of information upon almost all subjects connected with California history and social life. His vein of anecdotes seemed inexhaustible, and many were these stories he told while working in my library and in the various archives," according to Bancroft in his *California Pastoral*.

Ord, who rode with Sherman of San Juan Bautista, was Lieutenant, later General Ord, who distinguished himself in the Civil War and for whom Fort Ord was named in 1933.

(More Monday)