

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Asleep in the Deep**

In 1879 Frank E. Mauk was sent to Monterey as the station agent here for the Southern Pacific Railroad. When he saw the remains of the wreck of a ship within about 40 feet of the beach and was told interesting stories by the natives and whalers, who called the ship the "Natalia" the vessel upon which Napoleon escaped from Elba, he determined to obtain a piece of the wood. When he accomplished this feat, the piece of the rib he had hauled from the wreckage was taken from him by A.C. Bassett, the S.P. superintendent, without explanation.

Mr. Mauk's story continues, "After some weeks, Bassett again came to Monterey. 'Frank' he said, 'You might have thought it strange I was so arbitrary about taking that rib from the Natalia. I had a very good reason for it. I have a French naval officer as my guest at Menlo Park. I wanted that piece of wood for him, and I wanted it just as it was when it came from the water. He was familiar with the history of the vessel, and has sent your piece of wood to a museum in Paris. But I didn't forget you. I had a piece sawed off, and that was what I sent you.'"

Originally the "Constant" a French vessel, she was sold to Mexican owners and was in their possession at the time of the wreck. This occurred on New Year's Eve, December 31, 1834, when the captain and crew left the vessel to celebrate in Monterey. Morning dawned with the "Natalia" on shore near where the Monterey municipal wharf is now located, wrecked beyond possibility of salvage.

A few days after Christmas in 1875, there was much excitement in the old town, An old wreck that had been lying in the bay off the old wharf since 1857 had been uprooted and washed on the beach during a high tide, and the talk was that it was the hulk of the "Natalia."

This was not the case. As Paul Parker, former Salinas newspaper publisher and historian of Monterey County, reconstructed the story from the files of "The Monterey Ledger" at the Bancroft Library in Berkeley, the wrecked ship was not the "Natalia" but the brig "Commodore Rogers," a New Bedford whaler wrecked in 1857 when Monterey was the most important whaling port on the Pacific Coast.

The brig had been washed ashore opposite the new depot of the narrow-gauge Monterey and Salinas Valley railroad. As the "Ledger" told the story, "A large number of men and boys were soon on hand and, as the tide receded, ruthlessly stripped the old vessel of every shred and spike of copper it contained. Quite a large amount was obtained, which will find a ready sale in the San Francisco market."

At the time many persons thought that this wreck might be the "Natalia," which is known to have sunk in Monterey Bay. "This however is not the case," continued Mr. Parker. "For the exact spot where that historical vessel is buried no man knows. That its grave is in our crescent bay is honor enough."

Another supposed authority relates: "A group of colonists left Mexico City in April, in high spirits, arriving at San Blas, July 23, 1833. From here they embarked for California, August 1, sailing in two vessels – one of which had carried Napoleon Bonaparte from the Island of Elba, rechristened the "Natalia," Juan Gomez, master. They arrived in Monterey in time to celebrate the new year (1834), during the celebration the vessel drifted ashore, there to end her days."