

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Get Out If You Can

While we were on the tour of the San Antonio Mission and the Jolon Valley country last week, we were willing listeners to all the stories of that part of Monterey County and of the people who have made their homes there for many years, as told by our friend and guide, Victor Mossop.

The tale of one old timer and his reason for settling there in the back country, as told by Mr. Mossop, will be of interest here:

"Vicente Avila first lived on a ranch down the coast from Monterey which in later years was known as the Soberanes ranch and is now owned by the Doud family.

"A story is told about Avila, but I cannot swear to the truthfulness of it. One day Senor Avila came to Monterey and getting into a sociable little game of cards, lost his ranch and home. This was about the time that the Americans started to settle in his country, and as he hated the gringos with all his heart, he and his wife and little family gathered up their possessions, including what cattle and horses they had, and started off down the old coast trail looking for a new home – and swearing that he never wanted to see another gringo as long as he lived.

"After traveling down the coast for about 60 miles he crossed over to the Santa Lucia range by the old Indian trail. As he was going down a long ridge on the eastern slope of the mountains he spied a pretty little valley away down below, hemmed in on all four sides by steep mountains, and with a little stream of water running through it." Here is where the Avila family settled, built their adobe home that is still in use. As there was only one entrance to get into or out of this hidden valley, they names their ranch Salsipuedes, meaning, 'Get out if you can' – perhaps to discourage any wandering gringo that might pass that way.

"Of course the old people have died a long time ago, but their son, Cypriano Avila, who is 83 years old, still owns the old ranch and he lived there and raised his family there, and turned it over to his son, Sam Avila. Sam lived there and raised his family there, but now lives in King City. He, in turn, turned the ranch over to his son, Sam Avila Jr., and wife, thus making the fourth generation of Avilas to live in the same old adobe home.

They have the largest grape vine there that I have ever seen, running along the full front of the house, and still bearing big black grapes.

"A funny little story is told about the old Vicente Avila – that in early days they always used carretas or ox carts on the ranch. One day he sent his son, Bautista, up to Monterey to buy a new wagon, and Bautista, not knowing that a wagon needed grease, failed to grease it, burning out all four axles on the long trip home. When the old man heard of this he hauled the wagon off the road and left it there, saying he didn't want anything more to do with these new gringo machines, and went back to using the ox carts again."

During the first years of the 1800s there was a silversmith in the Presidio of Monterey by the name of Avila and it has been suggested that possibly there may have been some family connection between this pioneer and the Avila family who settled in the hidden valley.

Within a couple of miles of Jolon and about 25 feet off the road at the top of a hill, is a tiny cemetery, surrounded by a weather-beaten picket fence. A strong barbed wire fence, built by the United States Army, encircles the old enclosure.

Two gates were opened and we walked in to look upon three aged wooden crosses and a small white metal marker upon the fourth grave. We had made the visit to look upon the last resting place of Mrs. Martha Bolton, formerly of Monterey and Pacific Groove; her son, who passed away many years ago; her mother, Escolastica Rodriguez de Dye and an Indian who had worked for many years upon the Bolton ranch. The marker is upon the grave of Mrs. Bolton, who died Dec 3, 1948, at the age of 94 years, 11 months and 28 days.

On display in the Old Custom House is a full case of the personal possessions of Mrs. Dye – a handsome red velvet dress, a manteau, her fan and several pictures of this early-day belle of Monterey. The History and Art Association also owns her library of 100 small, leatherbound books, printed in Spanish, and her prized cameo brooch, on the reverse side of which is a portrait of Thomas O. Larkin.