

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

May 24, 1951

On Beds of Ease and Roses

There were no bridges over the rivers at the time that the Reverend J.F. McGowan built the three Episcopal churches in Southern Monterey County and he had to ford the San Antonio twice, the Nacimiento once, also the Salinas River, in making the journey between Jolon, San Miguel and King City. A new crossing had to be made after each freshet, he related in his diary.

He had a fine horse called "Bay Dick", true and faithful. On one occasion, he wrote, he had to ford the Salinas River after there had been a heavy rain, and the crossing had been changed, of which he was not aware. It was dusk of the evening when he reached the river and he drove his horse in at the accustomed place, but had not gone very far before he went down in the quicksands, but before the sand packed around him he threw himself upon his side and drew his feet from the engulfing sand so that he had a broader base to rest upon.

"I at once divested myself of clothing and tramped the sands so they might sink and while the water washed over the horses body, I unharnessed him, lifting one wheel of the buggy at a time – pulled it back from the hose, and tramped a solid foundation for him to rise upon. Dick had been quiet all the time, waiting for his master to bring him some aid I said, 'Get up, Dick,' and true to the command, he was soon on his feet."

Then Dr. McGowan writes, "With my clothing tied upon my shoulders by my suspenders, I tramped a path across the river and I and my good horse were safe but very much chilled. Well, we cannot always have our way and go to Heaven on beds of ease and roses."

When it came time for the consecration of the two churches – St. Luke's, Jolon, and St. John's, San Miguel – in October of 1885, Dr. McGowan met Bishop Kip at Soledad, then the terminus of the railroad, and with his own team they drove fifty miles to his ranch at Jolon.

When the new railroad was extended from Soledad to Templeton, new towns sprung up along the line, King City, San Lucas, San Ardo and Bradley.

On one occasion while the priest was visiting in King City, a seven-day rain took place, two spans of the new bridge across the Salinas River were swept away, or rather two spans of the bank of the river. He was forced

therefore to ride in a dry goods box, pulled by a rope a distance of over one hundred yards suspended in midair while the angry torrent rolled below, in order to reach the end of the bridge.

One Sunday, he tells in his diary, he crossed the Salinas just in advance of a newly married couple, whose nuptial knot he had tied. He drove into the stream, but the current had washed out a new channel, and as his horse and buggy struck the water, they found no bottom. The horse swam to a sandbar and while so doing the clergyman sat in the buggy in water up to his shoulders, and as they landed on the bar, the buggy made more spouting than a whale, he declares.

The bride and groom watching the progress from the opposite bank roared with laughter and concluded to turn back and take a dryer course for their marriage tour. Dr. McGowan preached that morning in San Lucas in wet clothing.

Sometime after this, he had another adventure in the San Lorenzo creek near King City. A thunderstorm had occurred in the hills, and in the dusk of the evening he was on his way to King City for evening service. He did not realize that the stream was so badly swollen and urged his horse in.

After hesitating on the brink, she slid down the bank and into the stream, and as the forepart of the buggy struck the bottom, the hind part tipped over the horse's back. And he was caged in and could not prevail upon her to take another forward step. One step she was finally persuaded to take which threw the hind part of the buggy into place and released the clergyman, but the horse would move no more. He had to ford the stream and lead her at the cost of a clerical suit.

Dr. McGowan records that his wife greatly deplored the loss of a box of eggs which she had sent to market and which went floating down the stream.

After the building of the three churches in Jolon, King City and San Miguel, the Reverend Mr. McGowan was called back to St. Paul's Salinas, where he was rector for two more years, before going on to a new field in the Sierras.

On Memorial Day, May 30th, a memorial service will be held at St. Luke's Jolon, in memory of this pioneer priest. The Holy Communion service at 11 o'clock will be sponsored by St. James, Monterey.