

May 9, 1951

'This Is My Birthday'

Today is the birthday anniversary of the Reverend Walter Colton, first American Alcalde in Monterey and the builder of Colton Hall. One hundred and three years ago he wrote the following in "Three Years in California:"

"This is my birthday. I am on the shaded side of that hill which swells midway between the extremities of life. The past seems but a dream, and the future will soon be so. To what has been and to what may be, I seem to myself almost indifferent. I know the vanities in the human hopes end; I know that life itself is only a bubble that has caught the hues of some falling star.

And yet this airy phantom is not all such as it would seem; there is something besides shadow in its evanescent form. Our visions of happiness may prove an illusion, but our sorrows are real. It is no fancied knell that shakes the bier; no imaginary pall that wraps the loved and the lost. The grave is invested with the awful majesty of the real."

On Monday, May 10th, Colton wrote in his diary that he had directed the constable to get a pair of iron hinges made for one of the doors of the prison. He gave the order to a blacksmith, a crabbed old fellow, who charged eight dollars for his coarse work. "As the charge was an imposition," he wrote, "I told the constable not to take the hinges; when up came the blacksmith with them to the office, and, in a fit of passion, hurled them at my feet, as I stood in the piazza.

"I handed the constable eight dollars and told him to call on the blacksmith, pay him for the hinges, and take his receipt, and bring him before me. All of which was done, and before me stood the smith, with his choler yet up. I told him that his violence and indignity would not be passed over, that I should fine him ten dollars for the benefit of the town, which he might pay or go to prison. After a few minutes hesitation, he laid the ten dollars on the table, and took his departure without uttering a word.

"When clear of the office he grumbled out to the constable, 'For once in my life I have been outwitted; that Yankee alcalde has not only got my hinges for nothing but two dollars besides. I don't wonder he can

swing his prison doors at that rate; I would have tried the calaboose but for the infernal fleas'."

The constable told him, so Colton reports, that next time he made hinges, he must charge what they were worth, and curb his towering temper.

Evidently the Reverend Walter Colton admired the ladies of Monterey, for we find this notation under date of Wednesday, May 17th: "The ire of a Californian of Hidalgo extraction flashes from his dark eyes like heat-lightning on a July cloud – you can see the blaze, but hear no thunder; while the wit of a California lady glances here and there like the sun-rays through the fluttering leaves of a wind-stirred forest.

"We have several ladies here, celebrated for their brilliant sallies, but Donna Jimeno carries off the palm. A friend showed her this morning a picture of the Israelites gathering manna. 'Ah! they are the Californians,' said the Donna, 'they pick up what heaven rains down.' He showed her Moses smiting the rock. 'And there' said the Donna, 'is a Yankee; he can bring water out of a rock.'

"But humor and wit are not the highest characteristics of this lady. She possesses a refinement and intelligence that might grace any court of Europe; and withall, a benevolence that never wearies in reaching and relieving the sick."

Donna Augustias Jimeno, wife of Manuel Jimeno, Secretary of State during Alvarado's administration, was one of the town's most beloved hostesses. She was the daughter of Don Jose de la Guerra of Santa Barbara, and a sister of Mrs. W.E.P. Hartnell. The Jimeno adobe home was at the corner of Franklin and Calle Principal where the San Carlos Hotel now stands.