

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Visiting Time in Monterey

In 1862 that James W. Bird first saw the light of day in Monterey. About 1870 he was enrolled by his parents as a pupil in the public school which was the held in Colton Hall. This gentleman, native son, returned to Monterey during the past week to visit the old Capitol, as he named it, to sit again in the first window on the northeast corner of the up-stairs room where the State Constitution had been drafted and where he sat about a quarter of a century later as a student.

At that time this historic room had been divided in half and the north end was the school library and the stairs were on the front of the building as they are at the present time.

As Mr. Bird was being taken through the rooms on the second floor of Colton Hall by Mrs. Mae Hare, the City Museum Board curator, he recalled, as he looked out the window onto Dutra Street, that in his childhood there had been a rock or adobe wall around that part of the property. He remembered that the teachers would scold the children when they climbed on this wall. Mr. Little was the teacher upstairs at the time and Miss Farnam, who later married Captain Nichols, was the teacher of the grade downstairs when the classroom was where the police department is now.

Mr. Bird remembers as a very young lad that he, with other school children, witnessed the hanging of a man name Brown, in the yard back of the present jail. He recalled that Thomas Watson was the sheriff of the county at that time but he did not remember the nature of the crime for which the man paid with his life.

Miss Mamie Sloat of St. Louis, Missouri, paid a visit to the Old Custom House during a recent visit to the Peninsula. Miss Sloat is the great-granddaughter of Commodore John Drake Sloat, who raised the American flag over the Custom House at Monterey in 1846. Miss Sloat was attending the Elementary School Principals' conference at Asilomar and during her stay there visited the Old Custom House and viewed with great interest the many historical items concerning her paternal grandparent on display there.

John Drake Sloat was born in 1850 and died in 1928. His grandson, John Drake Sloat III, the father of Miss Mamie Sloat, is living in St. Louis and according to his daughter

has many documents pertaining to the historic event in Monterey in 1846 and part of the U.S. Naval uniform of his grandfather. From 1844 to 1846 he commanded the Pacific squadron. After the outbreak of the Mexican war he took possession of San Francisco until relieved by Robert F. Stockton.

Another visitor, interested in the past history of Monterey, was Mrs. George Edward Cavanagh of San Francisco. Mrs. Cavanagh was Miss Frances K. Slattery, whose mother was Sarah Soberanes, born the daughter of Ezequiel Soberanes, owner of Casa Soberanes, 336 Pacific Street, until his death, when the property was transferred to Ezequiel Jr. and Dolores Soberanes in 1895.

Mrs. Cavanagh was accompanied by her husband, George Edward Cavanagh, and their son and daughter, George Edward Jr and Frances M. Cavanagh. The Cavanaghs visited with Mrs. Cavanagh's cousin, Herbert Slate and his family, during their stay in Monterey, as well as calling at Casa Soberanes. Mr. Slate's mother was also the granddaughter of Ezequiel Soberanes. The Slate home was at the corner of Soberanes and Pacific streets, adjacent to Casa Soberanes.

Mrs. Cavanagh recalled seeing her grandmother and her aunt, Mrs. Dolores Soberanes, grind corn in a stone receptacle for the tortillas and cleaning red peppers preparing them to hang on the rear wall of the house for drying. Later they would be used to flavor the frijoles and meat dishes, which, with the tortillas, were the main dishes at most meals.

The Old Custom House is now open seven days each week, so great has been the influx of summer visitors. Last Sunday more than 1,300 tourists were counted as they entered the Custom House and from 400 to 500 persons have visited the historic building every day since that time.

News items during the past week conveyed word of the tragic death of Dr. George Taise, noted historian, whose plane was shot down over Korea. Dr. Taise leaves a wife and young daughter in Berkeley and a brother, Major Eugene Taise, also the college city. Both Dr. Taise and his brother are well known in Monterey. Dr. Taise was associated with the city officials and the planning commission and with Dr. Aubrey Neasham, of the university staff, and Emerson Knight, advisor, when the master plan for the City of Monterey was developed in 1939. It was Dr. Taise who did the research work on the

historic buildings and discovered the fact that Thomas Oliver Larkin had much to do with the building of the Custom House. Major Taise, U.S. Army retired, was stationed here for several years during World War II.

The Taise brothers had lived in Mexico, with their parents during their young days and it was there that they became the friends of Mrs. Mary Greene, whose parents also made their home south of the border.