

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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As a Jail of Solidity It Cannot Be Surpassed

"More on the Jail" was the headline over the editorial in the Sept. 1, 1855, issue of the Monterey Sentinel. This newspaper was published in Monterey from June, 1855 to June of 1856, when it, with all its equipment, was moved across the bay to Santa Cruz, the editor having accepted an invitation for free transportation to that city by schooner.

Through the kindness of the publisher of the Sentinel in Santa Cruz we have been privileged to see and copy from the bound volumes of this newspaper for the year it was published in Monterey – 96 years ago.

In the story on the Monterey jail, which is attached to Colton Hall on the south, the editor reports that the supervisors have paid the contractor, Mr. H. De Graw. The cost was 16 to 18,000 dollars in all, and "as a place of security and a jail of solidity it cannot be surpassed by anything south of San Francisco." The fund had originally been set at about \$20,000, having been the proceeds of a special taxation of 1 per cent on the property in the county. After its collection the "Court of Sessions" took the matter in hand for the erection of the jail.

The jail is built of Monterey granite with the best iron work that San Francisco could furnish. There is no wood used in the construction except the roof, but the cells are ceiled with blocks of stone, arched; there is also a good wall around the jail, with all necessary conveniences inside, such as a well, kitchen, etc. It contains six large cells and a debtors room, besides a good size room for the jailer. The window of each cell is covered on the outside with a heavy plate of iron, firmly leaded in the wall and finely perforated so as to admit plenty of light and air to its inmates, yet prevent any communications whatever even though a person should climb the jail wall with such in view."

The Court of the County is adjourning in Colton Hall, reported the Sentinel in its September issue of 1855. Colton Hall, built by Walter Colton, alcalde of Monterey, was in those days the largest building in California.

The item went on to relate that Colton Hall had been thoroughly repaired and covered on the outside with a good coat of cement, which was supposed to be proof against any kind of weather.

"The upper story was a large room of grand proportions which has been divided and in it the clerk and sheriff of the county will hold their offices," wrote the editor.

"So that now the lugar which has resounded to our national bands and which has witnessed our female native graces keeping time to the melodious sounds of the military band of General Riley, will be the repository of legal documents and the musty archives so the world goes."

There was already newsprint problems for the Sentinel in 1855 for on Oct. 27, the Monterey publication was delivered as a one-page edition, with the following apology: "The paper which we ordered three weeks since from San Francisco, has failed to arrive, we believe through irregularity of the coast trade, we are unavoidably compelled to issue one sheet."

A legal notice was filed in the interest of the estate of W.E.P. Hartnell, giving the value of the inventory at \$31,455. Another notice for the estate of Jose de Amesti valued that inventory at \$60,634.

A letter to the editor from San Benito in southern Monterey County, gave some interesting comments: "Thinking a communication from this place would not be uninteresting to your readers I avail myself of the present opportunity to drop you a line ... The orchards of the Mission (San Antonio) promise an abundance of delicious fruit. An abundance of game abound in this place, such as deer, antelope and grizzlies,

"A couple of Americans passed through here on their way north, with some live bears, two of which were full grown, domesticated to work in double harness,"

The whaling industry was alive in Monterey in 1855 and the Sentinel was pleased to announce that during the week six more whales had been killed in the bay. There were only two boat crews but they had done a good business on their limited means.