

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **The First Lumber House**

In spite of many disturbances, Monterey prospered under Gringo rule. The Alcalde's accounts show that from December, 1846, to June, 1848, there were 12 dry goods stores each paying a license fee of \$1 per month.

The sale of building lots was phenomenal. Prices ranged from \$10 to \$400 each. Only a few were cash sales. "No poor man," runs a note in the Alcalde's account book for January, 1848, "has been denied a lot of land who was willing to work for it – many have paid for their land in that way. The town is credited as if paid in cash, and their bills for work are charged to the town as if discharged in cash – this is done to prevent complexity."

March 31, 1848, a brick kiln lot, 90 yards long, was sold to George D. Dickerson for \$29. Assisted by his son-in-law, A.G. Lawrie, a brickmason who molded and fired the bricks as well as laid them, he immediately began preparation of brick to build a mansion. Only one wing was ever completed, for the builders hastened away to the gold fields, leaving the first brick house in California unfinished.

This house is now the home of Mr. and Mrs. Juan Garcia. Originally the house had six rooms – three on each floor, the lower three dirt floored. Of red brick, unpainted, it stands in a small yard enclosed with a fence on Decatur street in Monterey.

While Lawrie was baking bricks, two Australian ships came into Monterey harbor. There was no good dock, so the captain ordered one of the boats to be beached and sunk for a wharf. Before night a great pile of Australian ironwood lay on the sand.

Within a week, so the story goes, six tiny houses of sawn lumber – the first in California – were ready for occupancy. Their owner, Timothy Bushton, had brought with him his wife and invalid daughter, hoping that the climate of Monterey might be beneficial and restore her to health.

In planning the trip with his wife, Bushton had warned her that there were no houses in this new land. Undaunted, she had devised a scheme of having a house made in section by his skilled Australian workman. Each section was to be numbered and fit, so that even an English sailor could put it together.

Seeing in her suggestion a good business proposition, Bushton had six made instead of one. Four he sold; two he put side by side for their own use. The two, known as the "First Lumber House in California," were situated on Alvarado street where now there is a service station.

In 1923, nearly a century after their construction, the houses were torn down by the late J.C. Anthony and parts of the ironwood were made up into souvenirs.

The journey of the Bushton family from Australia to Monterey had taken nine months, and out of the cattle and sheep they had brought with them for food, only one cow remained, about the first milk cow in Monterey.

A few months after their arrival in their new home Bushton died. The mother of the family, suddenly confronted with the necessity of earning her own living, took advantage of the scarcity of good boarding houses in Monterey and converted the ironwood cottage into one. She later married Thomas E. Allen and the house was from then on known as the Allen House.

Two of her boarders were rather mysterious. One evening, hearing a queer noise in their room, she slipped softly down the stairs to watch them. They were taking gold from sacks very like Custom House sacks and putting it in a box. The box when filled was hid beneath the steps one of which was loose. Then under pretext of card playing, they made a fire in the yard and burned the sacks.

Next morning Mrs. Allen was gathering chips and on the sly looking for bits of sacks. The men grew suspicious that she had seen something and tried to bribe her for her silence. They failed.

That day, a young friend, fiancée of one of the custom officers, called. Mrs. Allen told the story as she had seen it enacted. The girl confirmed her fears – the Custom House had been robbed of \$30,800. Together they went to the girl's lover and told their story.

A band of soldiers raided the house. They found a woman companion of the Mexicans sitting on the steps. "Get up," they ordered. "I'll sit still," she replied. The officers dragged her away, found the gold and began a search for the thieves. They were caught but not convicted until years later when they confessed, as one of the biggest "hauls" the Custom House robbery in 1848.