

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **It Never Rains But It Pours**

Today when our rainfall for the season has been so generous, it might be interesting to many to look back to Saturday, March 8, 1856, when the Monterey Sentinel editor wrote: "No rain has fallen in this area for the last 20 days sufficient to be of use to the farmer or cattle grazer. The ground has become very hard and dry and from the heavy frosts at night, and the cold wind of the day, the grass appears to have no substance and is turning yellow." All this was written almost 100 years ago. It could not have been written in 1952. For when we hear folks say the weather, the climate, etc. has certainly changed in California, we have this and other years to prove that we do occasionally have wet winters.

The writer in the Sentinel had this to say "Very few flowers have made their appearance in the vicinity of our town as yet. We understand from some of our friends on the Salinas plains that hogs and cattle are beginning to die for want of pasture; the cattle of our county are generally in very lean condition and very few are fit for the market. The grains put in the ground at the early rains, came up very bad, the mustard even begins to wilt for want of moisture – the appearance of all growing vegetation is unfavorable."

The reporter for this early day Monterey newspaper goes on to report that the country on the line of road between Monterey and San Francisco, except immediately near Santa Clara and San Jose, looks parched and burnt up, with scarcely any grass for animals. It was the same from hence to San Luis Obispo, according to the news story of 1856.

From the meteorological account of Dr. Henry Gibbons kept from Jan. 1851 to Feb 1856, and published in the San Francisco Herald, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of the latter month, the inhabitants were encouraged to believe that there were yet good grounds left on which to hope for later and heavy rains further in the spring. In March and April of 1853 and 1854 and '55, heavy rains occurred, and also in the spring of 1849 and 1850 during March and April.

The editor admonished the population that it was right that the people of the state should be properly informed and forewarned of the effect of a drought in

the state of California. Water is the pabulum of existence to the progress and prosperity of the commonwealth. Without it we have neither gold nor food," he declared.

The fall of 1855 was so exceedingly dry, that the laguna of the cemetery was passed everywhere on foot, which had not occurred but once before since 1826. This indicated excessive drought in 1856, when the Sentinel was published in Monterey. All of these highly interesting facts, though loosely stated here, are of great importance to the state, the editor declared. Moneys began to be scarcer in the southern coast counties than before the hoisting of the American flag (1846), and it made it very hard to raise money on any kind of property in the southern country.

When these dry years had occurred before in any part of Spanish or Mexican California, for meat of cattle became so tough and insipid, as to be unfit for human food. It was the practice of the old priests to have two years store of beans, dried beef, and farmaceous food on hand for their Indian converts, so as to prevent famines from unexpected droughts.

On Saturday, March 22, 1856, the editorial in the Monterey Sentinel began thusly: "On Friday night last, as we were going to press, our neighborhood was visited with pretty copious showers of rain, which continued to fall until daylight and did great good to the parched up vegetation." All of which coincides with the meteorological account of Dr. Henry Gibbons that heavy rain can fall later in the spring.

The Sentinel reported that partial showers fell during Saturday and that the county had taken on, in consequence, a better look and the pastures had become much benefitted.

The stage driver had also reported to the paper that rain had fallen all day on Friday between Monterey and San Jose.

David Jacks had three advertisements in the Sentinel from Dec. 29, 1855, until March 8, 1856. One was "a lot of seed potatoes for sale"; a second, "Six yoke of American working oxen in good order" and the third "Seed beans for sale. A choice lot of Bayos, the large size and selected particularly for seed." Another and large advertisement read "Farm for sale. 160 acres of land on Salinas plains, Monterey county, with dwelling house on same. The land is excellent little if any in the state is more productive, being part of the same rancho

on which J. Bryant Hill raised 149 bushels to the acre in 1853.