

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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It Was to Laugh

In pursuance of the law creating boards of supervisors, there was an election held in this county on the first Monday of May 1855 and P. Breen, representing San Juan; Samuel P. Hall, representing Alisal and San Antonio and Milton Little from Monterey, were elected supervisors.

We have learned from the minutes of the board as published in The Monterey Sentinel after the first meeting of the three supervisors, that they convened on the seventh of May, 1855 and elected Milton Little, chairman of the board. After the organization several days were occupied in examining the bonds of the county officers and from various orders that appeared it is presumed that the bonds were sold.

On the nineteenth of the month the supervisors passed upon claims amounting to \$8,486 37 ½, the bulk of which were confirmed to county officials, and the guard who assisted the sheriff in taking care of Hudson, Welsh, Beckett and the four Chilenos, who were sent to state prison for horse stealing. The remark was made by the reporter: "had the jail in Monterey been finished according to contract, the debt might have been saved the county as the guards were on duty night and day at \$10 per diem."

The supervisors confirmed the purchase made by the Court of Sessions of Colton Hall, some three years before June 2, 1855. They reduced the jailer's salary from \$75 per month, as allowed by the Court of Sessions, to \$25 per month and for boarding prisoners 30 cents per day each.

An item in The Sentinel on June, 1855, headed "Trees," discussed the forest surrounding Monterey almost 100 years ago. "The trees upon the hills are fast fading before the woodman's axe. Quite a spirited business of wood cutting is being carried on, and large quantities are shipped away. This fine old forest (Monte, forest: and rey, king – King forest) gave its name in Monterey, and we hope it may be long long years before it shall be shorn of its fair proportions and imposing beauty."

Another amusing item published May 25, 1856 told a story of a happening in which Lt. George H. Derby was concerned. Derby was one of the early day humorists one of the first actors to play in California's First

Theater, and an engineer who surveyed much of the land in the City of Monterey. He wrote under the name of Squibbob or John Phoenix.

The item follows: "A couple of weeks ago we happened to meet Squibbob, John Phoenix, Amos Butterfield, et al. or more properly Lieut. Derby, and by the way, a very fine, manly looking fellow he is. He seems all the time on the lookout for fun, and we verily believe he could not resist perpetrating a hoax at the expense of some poor devil, even if the author had but one more week to live.

"Phoenix was on his way to a printing office with a scrap of paper on which it was said that Madame Cassins, who explains the past and predicts the future, was about to prosecute Judge Crane, author of the Past, Present, and Future of the Pacific, for interfering with her business.

"A friend tells the story of this fun-loving wit: One evening at the theater, Phoenix observed a man sitting three seats in front of him whom he thought he knew; he requested a stranger sitting next to him to punch the other individual with his cane. The polite stranger did so, and the disturbed person turning his head a little, Derby discovered his mistake – that he was not the person he took him for. Fixing his attention steadfastly on the play and affecting unconsciousness of the whole affair, he left the man with the cane to settle with the other for the disturbance, who had been wholly without an excuse. There was of course a ludicrous and embarrassing scene – during all of which Phoenix was profoundly interested in the play. At last the man with the cane asked rather indignantly, "Didn't you tell me to punch that man with my stick?" Phoenix answered 'Yes.' 'And what did you want?' Phoenix answered 'Wanted to see if you would punch him'."

That was humor in 1856!