

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

January 18, 1952

Narrative of a Voyage

On the first day of January in 1827 there arrived at this port of Monterey the frigate H.M.S. Blossom, and the commander, Frederick William Beechey called at once on townspeople and tradesmen. William Hartnell of McCulloch and Hartnell was at that time trading thermometers for hides, and hardware, altar cloths and clothing for tallow. He met Captain Beechey six months previously when the H.M.S. Blossom put in at Monterey for supplies, on her way north to meet Captain Perry and Captain Franklin in Bering Strait. These intrepid explorers were leading Arctic expeditions, one by sea and one by land in search of the Northwest passage.

Hartnell, an Englishman, welcomed the opportunity to be of service to his countryman and entertained him many times in his Monterey home.

Aboard the Blossom, a sloop mounting sixteen guns and carrying a small boat, were one hundred men, including Alexander Collie, a surgeon; George Lay, a naturalist; and William Smith, an artist who busied himself throughout the journey in sketching and painting typical scenes. According to Susanna Bryant Dakin in her "The Lives of William Hartnell," Beechey himself, the son of a famous artist, made his own maps and used Smith's sketches to illustrate his classic "Narrative."

An original print of the "Narrative" is before me. It is the prized possession of Noel Arnold of Pebble Beach and was given to him by a descendant of the author, Commander Frederick William Beechey. The book, published in two volumes, was printed in London in 1831 by Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley of New Burlington Street. It is the "Narrative of a Voyage to the Pacific and Bering's Strait, to cooperate in His Majesty's ship Blossom, under the command of Captain F.W. Beechey, R.N. in the years 1825, 26, 27, 28. Published by the authority of the Lord's Commissioners of the Admiralty."

The second volume starts with the arrival of the Blossom in San Francisco. The officers were disappointed not to find the supplies they requested there and they decided to depend upon what by chance might be in store in Monterey. "A port of more importance than San Francisco, and from being the residence of a branch of a respectable firm in Lima,

better supplied with the means of refitting vessels after a long sea journey (Hartnell's)."

Beechey immediately sent Dr. Collie, the surgeon and Mr. Marsh, the purser, overland to Monterey, with a Mr. Evans as interpreter, with orders to procure for the ship what medicine, provisions, and other stores were to be had and to negotiate government bills on which the exchange was far more favorable, he wrote, than in the Sandwich Islands. The governor also furnished a passport and a guard and the padre at the Mission Dolores provided horses for the travelers free of charge.

The group arrived "in the square at Monterey at five o'clock in the evening, and met a kind reception from Mr. Hartnell," according to the report. He pressed them to accept the use of his house while they remained in town – an offer of which they thankfully availed themselves.

The travelers told Beechey on their return to San Francisco that they had paid their respects to Gonzales, the governor: that he was an officer who had been raised by his own merit from the ranks to be captain of artillery and governor of Monterey. His family were residing with him, and having been educated in Mexico, complained bitterly of their banishment to this outlandish part of the world," where the population, the ladies in particular, were "extremely ignorant, and wretched companions for the Mexicanus instruidas." Besides, they declared there were no balls or bull fights in Monterey; and for all the news they heard from their own country, "they might as well have been in Kamschatka."

To compensate for these dreadful privations, the ladies generally amused themselves in the evening by smoking and playing cards, and relating the perils they encountered in the land journey from Mexico to the shores of the Pacific, the Englishmen related. Politeness and attention, however, were the characteristics of these good people, who offered the party every assistance in their power during their stay in Monterey, according to the notation in the "Narrative."

(More on Monday)