

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

January 21, 1952

Flora, Fauna and Fish

Captain Beechey spent most of November and December of 1826 at Yerba Buena (San Francisco) living aboard the Blossom, the English ship on her way north to meet Captain Perry and Captain Franklin in Bering Strait. He occupied himself and members of his party in surveying the shores of San Francisco Bay, making soundings and scientific observations of fauna, fish, and flora.

On December 28th, the H.M.S. Blossom sailed for Monterey. Here she remained for five days, her crew cutting spars and obtaining provisions and naval stores through the "reputable Lima firm of McCullough and Hartnell."

During three visits to Monterey, within a year and a half, Captain Beechey and his companions each time made their headquarters with the Hartnell family in the home, an adobe dwelling built on the site of the present Monterey hospital. As friends of the Hartnells, they were honored by bailes in the most exclusive "casas" of the capital. Informally, they also attended meriendas to favorite spots in the woods and alongside neighboring "lagunas." At the time of their visit, the many little lakes near Monterey were "crowded with ducks, whilst the green plains were literally covered with geese". Beechey also tells in his "Narrative" that he and his officers enjoyed expeditions to places of interest out of town, such as the Mission, San Juan Bautista where Padre Arroyo greeted them and showed them his invention, a most remarkable "water clock which communicated with a bell by his bedside, and which by being arranged at night could be made to give an alarm at any stated hour."

Beechey describes Monterey bay: "This is a spacious sandy bay about twenty miles across, and according to La Perouse with anchorage near the shore in almost every part; but it is not advisable to enter it in any other place than that which is frequented as an anchorage, in consequence of a heavy swell which almost always rolls into it from the westward. The Mission of Santa Cruz is situated at the north extremity of the bay near Punto and Nuevo, and vessels occasionally anchor off there for fresh water and supplies of vegetables, neither of which are to be had in any quantity at Monterey. Care should be taken on landing at Santa Cruz, as the surf is very

heavy, and the river of San Lorenzo has a bar off it, which is necessary to pass."

The Blossom dropped anchor in Monterey Bay on the first of January, and with the permission of the governor, D. Miguel Gonzales, immediately commenced cutting the spars they required, for each of which they paid a small sum. Through the assistance of Hartnell (the founder of the first college in California), they procured several things from the missions without which they should have otherwise sailed north.

Beechey wrote in his Narrative in 1827, "The anchorage of Monterey is about two miles south-east of Point Pinos, in the south angle of the great bay just described. It is necessary to lie close to the shore, both on account of the depth of water, and in order to receive the protection of Point Pinos, without which ships could not remain in the bay. It presents to the eye a very exposed anchorage, but no accidents have ever occurred to any vessel properly found in cables and anchors; in which respect it very much resembles the bay of Valparaiso, nearly in the same parallel in the southern hemisphere."

He further described the village and presidio of Monterey as situated upon a plain between the anchorage and a range of hills covered with woods of pine and oak. The presidio, he declared in his notes, was in better condition than that at San Francisco but still, as a place of defense, it was quite useless. He also reported that the fort was not much better, and that its strength might judged by the fact that it was taken by a small party of seamen who landed from a Buenos Ayrean pirate in 1819, when they destroyed the greater part of the guns, and pillaged and burnt the town.

(Continued Tomorrow)