

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **The Last Cask Was Abroach**

The narrative of a voyage to the Pacific and Bering Strait, to cooperate with the polar expeditions, as written by Capt. F.W. Beechey, the commander, describes Carmel Mission church to be at a league distance to the southward of the presidio, a small establishment containing 260 Indians, and situated in the valley near the river of St. Carmelo; a small stream emptying itself into a deep, rocky bay.

Beechey continued in his day by day report of the doings of the expedition, that the shore of Carmel bay, and indeed the whole of the coast near Point Pinos, was armed with rocks of granite upon which the sea broke furiously. He stated that it was dangerous to approach the coast in light or variable winds. But, he wrote, fortunately, there were some immense beds of sea weed (*fucus pyriformis*) lying off the coast, and it was said that because they were so impenetrable they had saved several vessels which had been driven into them by the swell during calm and foggy weather.

The ride between the presidio and San Carlos (Carmel) on a fine day was most agreeable, Beechey told his readers in 1827. "The scenery was just sufficiently picturesque to interest, while the hills were not so abrupt as to inconvenience a bold rider," he wrote. "The road leads principally through fine pasture lands, occasionally wooded with tall pine, oak and birch trees; but without any underwood to give it wildness, or to rob it of its park-like aspect. Before the valley of the San Carmelo opens out, the traveler is apprised of his approach to the mission by three large crosses erected upon Mt. Calvary; and further on by smaller ones placed at the side of the road, to each of which some history is attached."

Beechey was greatly interested in the fact that La Perouse had been a visitor to Monterey and El Carmelo. He wrote that he saw in the church a drawing of the reception of La Perouse at the mission, executed on board the *Astrolabe*, by one of the officers of his squadron. He expressed a wish for this valuable relic but the padre was unwilling to part with the drawing.

La Perouse was in command of the first scientific expedition sent out by any European power. He cast anchor in Monterey Bay, Sept. 14, 1786. He was born in

France, Aug. 22, 1741, and joined the royal navy at an early age. ... In 1785 he was chosen by the French government to make scientific explorations in remote parts of the world.

During Perouse's brief visit to this peninsula he and his staff made careful observations of the geographical, biological and other scientific facts concerning the region. His journal was sent back to France, together with various collections, including seeds, dried plants and shells from Monterey bay. Perouse died during a storm on the coral reef off Vanikora, an island lying north of the New Hebrides, when all on board were lost.

Beechey continued his report of the Blossom's visit to Monterey with a paragraph or so concerning the visit of an American brig which was endeavoring to dispose of a cargo of dry goods, and to procure hides and tallow in return. Beechey had the opportunity to procure from her a "Supply of spirits, as the last cask was abroad." A few days later a Russian brig, named the *Baikal*, belonging to the Russian American Fur company, anchored in the bay. This vessel was employed upon the coast, trading between Sitka, Bodega, and several ports of California, either in carrying or arranging the supplies for the Russian settlements to the north. She was commanded by an officer of the Russian navy, and had on board Mr. Klebnekoff, the agent, according to Captain Beechey.

Beechey further stated that there were several of these vessels upon the coast carrying guns and wearing pendants. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of January, 1827, the English visitors took leave of their hospitable acquaintances in Monterey, and put to sea on their passage to the Sandwich Islands.