

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

January 3, 1952

Veritable Squibob

Mrs. Carrie Bostrom Unmack, a former resident of Monterey and now of San Francisco, spent the Christmas holidays in this, her native city, and while here made an important gift to the Old Custom House. With the presentation of a group of old documents, including leases and deeds dating back to 1850, valuable history has been preserved for posterity.

Ms. Unmack's grandfather was William Hamel who probably came to Monterey about 1846 with the United States artillery. Among the gifts which his granddaughter presented to Monterey is a medal of bronze on which the name of William Hamel is imprinted and a list of the famous battles of the Mexican War in which he had participated, including Tabasco, Vera Cruz, Palo Alto, Vista Gordo, Churubusco, Chapultepec, San Pascual, and Conghoon, the only one fought on California soil.

The Hamel home was near Scott on Larkin. William Hamel had returned to New York from Monterey and married, bringing his bride around the horn about 1850. Their home has long since disappeared as has its neighbor, the chalk rock house which stood on Van Buren street until a few years ago.

The oldest of the several documents is a description of a lot of land belonging to John Smith in the town of Monterey, survey by George H. Derby, February 26th 1850. The land was described as 60 feet from a stake 14 feet from the SW corner of Maria de los Angeles House, the whole containing 100 varas square. The signature of George H. Derby, Lieut. Top. Engineers, on this document is of interest.

Lieutenant Derby, who later evidently became Captain Derby, was once stationed at the Monterey Presidio and was probably one of the first actors to perform at California's First Theater. He was one of the country's earliest humorists and from whom it is said Mark Twain got his first idea of becoming a writer of humor. Derby wrote under the pen name of John Phoenix, Esq. George H. Stewart wrote a book entitled "John Phoenix, Esq., the Veritable Squibob, the Life of Captain George H. Derby - U.S.A." which is on display at the Old Custom House, along with Derby's own "Phoenixiana," a gift from Mrs. Ann Burke of Ben Lomond.

The next oldest document in the recently acquired gift is an application to the municipality for a grant of a building lot in the town of Monterey, which was then vacant, and at the disposal of the municipality. The grant was signed by Philip A. Roach, first alcalde of Monterey and provided that John Smith, the grantee shall within two years from date granted, build a house upon the lot. Ambrosio Gomez, secretary, signed the agreement with Roach, and placed the seal of the alcalde thereon. The date was March 7th, 1850. On March 2nd Smith had paid thirty-one dollars which entitled him to the grant and had also paid Derby \$20 for the survey.

On November 1st, 1875, Maria Malarin of Santa Clara County, signed a lease to Joseph Cramer for property on the east side of Alvarado street, next to the Spence property, for five years at a rental of four dollars in "gold or silver coin of the United States" to be paid quarterly in advance. This lease is also in the collection presented by Mrs. Unmack.

It is interesting here also to note that the legal paper upon which the lease has been written in long hand, had been printed by the firm of A.L. Bancroft & Co., booksellers and stationers, San Francisco. Albert Bancroft with his brother, Hubert, came to California in 1858, where he entered the H.H. Bancroft & Co., as a bookkeeper. Hubert had secured a loan from his sister, the widow of George H. Derby, mentioned early in this Diary, and the H.H. Bancroft company was launched in 1856. Albert saved his money and about 1860 the A.L. Bancroft & Co. was launched in San Francisco.

(More Tomorrow)