

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

March 12, 1952

Potent Potatoes

Did you know that if your tobacco gets too dry to make a good smoke, that a small piece of potato placed with it will moisten it? This was the information N.J. Little gave to R.H. Willey in June of 1889, when they, with Adulfo Sanchez and C.H. Rodriguez, camped at Tassajara Hot Springs and Willey complained of the tobacco.

Little then added that that magic was not the only good quality of the potato. He told the group that if a person was afflicted with rheumatism all you would have to do was to take a piece of potato, put it in your pocket and that in time it would become petrified and that as long as you "packed the same petrified potato about your person, you would never be troubled with rheumatism". His version of the potato took the camp by storm.

It was on Monday, June 10, 63 years ago, that these four Monterey gentlemen started out on the trip to the Springs which place they reached the next day at five o'clock in the evening. On ascending the Carmel hill, which was much higher and steeper in those days than now, their troubles began. One of the whiffletrees broke. That accident compelled them to send back to Monterey for another wagon. After waiting an hour and a half a fresh wagon was secured and they repacked their blankets, cooking utensils, provisions, rifles, shotguns, munitions of war, fishing rods, etc., and started out again.

The story goes that they camped the first night at the Tularcitos Ranch, turned out their horses in a small field with the permission of the owner, and after partaking of a hearty supper, rolled in their blankets to sleep until five a.m. when they would get an early start on the last lap of the journey.

All the men were up on time but when they went for the horses they were not to be found; they had gone and the disappointment and indignation of the men knew no bounds. After much talk and search, they were told that the horses had been turned out through a mistake, they having been taken for strays. They were soon found and the journey was resumed at 9 o'clock.

At 11 a.m. they reached the "foot of the grade that takes the traveler over the crooked and narrow road for

a distance of 14 miles over rough and rugged mountains until the Springs are reached." Three of the men reported walking up the grade to save the horses who were about petered out."

"From the top of the grade to the Springs, the road is hardly wide enough and the turns are so sharp, and the descent so steep that you have to have a good and gentle pair of horses, besides a good driver and good brakes on your wagon, otherwise the least mis-step will send team and occupants a thousand feet below."

Mose Mitchell, formerly messenger for Wells Fargo & Co. in Monterey, greeted their arrival and gave them use of his cooking stove for their evening meal. When Willey, Little and Rodriguez left the Springs they left Adulfo Sanchez with Mitchell to recover his health. Sanchez was a pioneer of Monterey and had married Nellie van de Grift, the sister of Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson. Isobel Fields, the daughter of Mrs. Stevenson, in her book "This Life I've Loved," wrote: "Adulfo Sanchez was the most popular young man in Monterey. He belonged to one of the oldest families there, his father and grandfather having once owned half the county. He was young, extraordinarily handsome, and was gifted with a glorious baritone voice."

On Sunday, June 16, 1889, the Rev. George McCormick of Salinas, held divine services at the hotel, this being the first time divine service had ever been held at the Springs. The meeting was well attended. Among those present were the four men from Monterey, the James McDougall family from Salinas, Mr. Archer and wife – in all 23 persons were in the congregation.

The popular tunes of 1889 must have been the "Arkansas Traveler," "Yankee Doodle," "Rock Me Bye-Baby," for our informant writes: "McDougall of course, brought his fiddle along with him to Tassajara and kept camp lively discoursing occasionally sweet melodies," such as those above mentioned.

The travelers arrived in Monterey and reported "feeling greatly improved from having taken the sulphur baths at the Springs."