

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

March 21, 1952

A Bonnet for a Bride

A few days ago we wrote a bit about the auctioning of a bride's bonnet on Decatur street by General William R. Sherman, while he was stationed at the Presidio of Monterey in 1847. Since then our research has revealed additions to the romantic story.

Following the death of General Sherman in February of 1891, Jack Swan, the "Pioneer of '43" and builder of California's First Theatre, proudly exhibited to his friends two letters which he had received from the famous general, one in 1876 and another in 1880. These letters are of historical importance and we wonder where they are today.

It was during the period when Sherman was stationed here that he was called upon to play the part of an auctioneer, the article auctioned, it was said, was the first bonnet, trimmed with lace, etc., ever brought to California. The article of headgear was auctioned by General Sherman and purchased by A. G. Lawrie, who presented it to his bride, the daughter of Gallant Duncan Dickinson, the builder of the First Brick House on Decatur Street.

It was also during this period that the general, finding a cask of aguardiente (a Mexican liquor of very high proof) lying on the wharf and his soldiers helping themselves to it quite freely, took the cask and threw it overboard.

The two letters written by the general to Swan, explained these matters and expressed his appreciation of the old capital of California:

Headquarters Army of the U.S.A. St. Louis, Mo. Feb. 19, 1876

John A. Swan,

Monterey, California

My Dear Sir: I have received yours of February 10th, and don't see why you should not favor the world with your experience. Mine was a most rapid sketch of a few things in early days in California, and if I had given loose to my pen I would have left no room for anything else.

I have laughed at your story of the bonnet and of shooting that black sheep for a bear.

I remember well the rolling of the large pipe of Aguardiente into the bay on April 1st, 1847. I came near being fined for it, but General Kearney heard the case and said the negligence of the owner in leaving it out all night to tempt the soldiers was a sufficient justification for its destruction.

Company F. Third Artillery, is now stationed at Fort Ontario, Oswego, New York, but not a single member, officers or soldiers, remain with it; many however are alive, but widely scattered.

I recently received a pamphlet showing that you now have a railroad in Monterey, and that the town has taken a new start. The site is certainly most beautiful, and I recall many a ride and hunt with Tom Cole and a man named Angel in the hills to the south and east of Carmel, beyond the redwoods in a ravine about three miles above the old mission.

Yours truly,

W. T. SHERMAN.

The second letter was dated June 17, 1880, and related to the well being of survival members of the old Company F. Third Artillery, about whom Swan had written him. He wrote of visiting the company quarters at Fort Schuyler, New York harbor, and finding not a single member of the Monterey days (1846) in the company.

Myron Oliver has called our attention to an item of twenty years ago when a number of pieces of glazed china were presented to the Old Custom House Museum. Henry Varnum Poor, instead of William Varnum, was the designer and maker of this china and the gifts were presented to the Monterey History and Art Association.

Henry Varnum Poor was a well known artist in Monterey and later went to Stanford University where he taught for a number of years and had as his pupils, Myron Oliver and Feg Murray. Still later he went to New York where he purchased an old abandoned pottery on the outskirts of the city and revived the industry. There are several examples of his hand-decorated china now on display in the Metropolitan Gallery, according to Myron Oliver.

Feg Murray, noted artist and radio personality, has returned to the Peninsula and purchased the Immelman property in Carmel Valley, where he now resides.