

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The City by the Slough

Moss Landing is at the mouth of the Salinas River. The point was established in 1866 by Charles Moss, but its history dates back to 1860 when an endeavor was made to found a city, St. Paul, at the mouth of the river. It became a good shipping point, however, and a wharf was built and warehouses erected, and it is now a narrow gauge railroad station between Salinas and Watsonville.

The above information was all acquired from the History and Biographical Record of Monterey and San Benito counties, written by J.M. Guinn, A.M.

Of course during the intervention years since the Guinn history was written Moss Landing has changed. There are several canneries there, a great many fishing boats and the mouth of the river has been deeply dredged to make a better harbor for the boats which seek shelter there.

In the recent centennial issue of the Watsonville Register-Pajaronian we found an interesting item dealing with the history of the first school house in Moss Landing. It seems that one of the features of early day shipping on the Elkhorn Slough was the flat-bottomed steamers, with a paddle wheel on the side that carried goods between the wharf at Moss Landing and the Goodall-Perkins landing at the end of the slough.

On Sundays and holidays, the little steamers were kept busy hauling passengers, at 50 cents a head, down the slough to the beach for outings.

Sometimes they made trips to Port Watsonville at the end of the beach road, and frequently puffed up the Salinas River to take on cargo near Salinas for transportation to San Francisco and Monterey.

The names of the "Salinas" the "Santa Cruz" and the "San Vicente" quickly faded from memory after the railroad came, in 1874, and the steamers vanished from the inland waters.

It took a little longer for the "Brocero" to be forgotten. When she tied up for the last time at Moss Landing, there wasn't much in the area but a collection of warehouses and a saloon.

The few residents of the area were sending their children to the Springfield school house which had been built in 1872. By 1876 there were enough people around to want a school of their own. Their eyes fell on the "Brocero," rotting slowly at the pier.

They bought the cabin of the steamer, which was removed bodily and set up on the crest of the sand dunes on the "island" of Moss Landing. The "Brocero's" cabin, now forever earthbound, was used as the Moss Landing Schoolhouse until 1891, when the residents bought a better building from Castroville, and moved it to the landing.

The cabin was left to the elements, and was eventually razed to make room for a home built by the late William Sandholdt.

Capt. Charles Moss came to Santa Cruz as early as 1853, for a while, it has been said, he tried ranching, buying 2,000 acres of Calabazas rancho from Ventura Hernandez in 1859. The growth of the valley turned Moss's mind to commercial ventures. In 1865 he took a 10-year lease on the land at the mouth of the Elkhorn slough, and put up warehouses with the object of setting up a port to ship the large quantities of grain then being produced in the valley. He became an agent for one of the largest grain shippers, who shipped from Hudson's Landing, at an island in the Elkhorn slough.

In those days, so the Pajaronian relates, the slough and the Salinas River were open to small boats of shallow draft, and small craft could reach Hudson's Landing at high tide. When the island waterways silted up, owing to cultivation, it became necessary to build piers at Moss Landing, unload cargo there and then transfer it to barges which brought lumber and other manufactured articles from San Francisco, and took grain and the potato crops back.

A Frenchman names Paul Lazere, a man apparently with more imagination than business sense, bought from the state a 300 acre tract on the "island," between the river and the sea, where the Vierra salt works is now. Lazere, who could not write his own name, did not get clear title for 10 years, but then he began to sell lots in the "City of St. Paul," with prices ranging \$40 to \$600. No one saw fit to build on the lots.

Lazere also put in a ferry across the slough, at a point where the bridge now carries the Watsonville-Castroville highway over the water.

In 1871 Lazere sold his city, lots and ferry to Cato Vierra, who replaced the ferry with a toll bridge and added a wharf at Moss Landing. Moss evidently saw what was coming and in 1875 he left his lease lapse and moved his interest to San Francisco, taking about a quarter of a million dollars profit with him.

In 1917 a whaling station was set up on the island. In 1930 came the fish-processing canneries. Within the last few years the Henry Kaiser Permanente Co. build its hugh magnesium plant, and in 1948 the Pacific Gas and Electric Company chose Moss Landing as its site for the \$90,000.000 steam generating plant.