

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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A Paddle that Worked Both Ways

With the visit a few days ago of Mrs. Fred Bertrand of Arcata to Monterey we were reminded of the James Stokes Family and the past interesting history of the Stokes Adobe, later known as the Gragg home on Hartnell Street. Mrs. Bertrand is the granddaughter of James Stokes and the daughter of William Stokes who was born in the old adobe in Monterey in 1846.

During Mrs. Bertrand's visit to Monterey, after attending a meeting of the directors of the California Federation of Women's Clubs held in Sacramento, she made a tour through the old family home and recalled many of the stories told by her father of his boyhood days in 1850's.

As one of her adventures during her visit to the Peninsula, Mrs. Bertrand was taken to Gonzales to meet her cousin, Mrs. Winifred Wolff, for the first time, by Mrs. Willian Kneass, the curator of the Stevenson House. She also made a tour of Monterey's many historic sites and buildings, and returned to her northern California home happy in the thought that much that her father and grandfather had known and loved was being preserved.

Mrs. Kneass has written for the Diary today the following history of the family as told to her by Mrs. Bertrand during their visit together: "James Stokes was an Englishman who came to Monterey in the 1830's and became a prominent trader, druggist, and consulting physician to Governor Figueroa. He married a widow, Josefa Soto de Cano, who had five children by a previous marriage, James and Josefa raised ten of their own.

"There was Luisa Cano, gentle of soul, who married William S. Johnson. She mothered the large family when Josefa died. There was Nicolas Cano who helped his stepfather in the preparation of the drugs, and also absorbed knowledge from the Indians in the use of herbs." Mrs. Bertrand still treasures the notes on herbs that Tia Nicolas gave her in later years. "There were Catherine and Josephine Stokes whose double wedding at the rancho at Natividad was remembered for years. Catherine married George Winterburn and Josephine became Mrs. Frederick Sherwood of the Salinas Valley.

"There was Domingo Stokes who became the majordomo of the rancho; Henry Stokes who went to the city and for many years worked on the San Francisco Chronicle; Manuel who became an attorney. There was Lucy Stokes with tiny hands and feet who loved art and poetry. She traveled widely in Europe and married Alfredo Gonzales. There was William, born in the old home in 1846 who became Mrs. Bertrand's father. He used to play in the little canyon beside the home with a little French boy. The two boys had a teacher, "Tia Ventura," who taught them their letters from a paddle like board. One side on the board she has printed the alphabet. But she didn't use the alphabet side of the board to give them a lesson when she caught them playing hookey in the canyon!"

Captain Thomas Stokes, father of James, sailed out of English ports to South American and the west coast of Mexico. Perhaps his stories of the vast Pacific and the new lands opening for trade were the inspiration for his son James to come to Monterey. James built his new life during a time of transition, using the best of the old adding to the new. Like the old rancheros he developed his herds of cattle on the ranchos, Los Verjeles and Natividad, and shipped the hides and tallows in the sailing vessels. But unlike the old Californians he believed in developing other commerce.

Every son of his was taught that a man must work for a living, must study good books, learn a trade, and take part in affairs in the community. When the county of Monterey was organized in 1850 he was the first to apply for a merchandizing license to conduct a store under the new government. When Walter Colton had to move the press of the first newspaper out of the old Quartel, James Stokes gave him a little building on one corner of his town property to set up the presses. In 1848 he was one of the early traders who took a stock of goods to the mines to supply tools and provisions for the newly arriving immigrants.

(To Be Continued)