

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

April 20, 1953

The Early Whalers

The old whalers of Monterey and the Peninsula have had little honor paid to them when history of this area has been recorded although these fishermen played an important role in the economic life along this part of the California coast during the early days.

Attesting in this statement is the presence here of the Old Whaling Station—now a charming home, built of adobe brick about 1855, situated at 391 Decatur St. In front of the house which borders the street, there is a whalebone sidewalk further adding to the historic interest of the place, which now bears a "For Rent" sign on the gate. In Monterey there are also many old gardens which have further remnants of long deceased whales, the bleached bones being used as borders for the flower beds or stands for plants.

To further intrigue us at this time is the gift which Paul Anistratenko of 172 Olivier St. has presented to the Monterey History and Art Association—a set of four old iron harpoons used by the whalers to capture the whales which frequented the Monterey Bay. The date of the manufacturer of the harpoons, or of their use here is not known. But we do know that "The Monterey Whaling Company" was organized in 1854 by Capt. J.P. Davenport, an old and experienced whaler, who got together a company of 12 men and two boats. They met with good success until the price of oil fell to 25 cents a gallon, and the company disbanded, according to the report in "The Handbook of Monterey and Vicinity" published in 1875.

Among the most prominent of the early whalers was Capt. Joseph Pedro, the father of Mrs. Adeline Meharry of 350 Casa Verda Ave.; Mrs. Annie Tomasini, Encina Avenue, Monterey; Fernando Pedro of Menlo Park, and the late Joe Pedro of Monterey. Capt. Pedro's daughter, Mrs. Mcharry, has loaned to the Peninsula Dairy a copy of the "Daily Extra Monterey Cypress" issued Aug. 15, 1889, in which a story appears relating to the capture of a monster whale in Monterey Bay, a few days before the publication of the Cypress.

Today we will allow the reported to tell the story as he told it on Aug. 15, 1889.

"For several days past, Monterey Bay has been the rendezvous of two or three families of whales, who

have roamed about doing considerable damage to fishermen and occasionally showing up in such close proximity to individuals as to frighten two or three of them almost out of their wits. The most daring of these giants of the deep seemed to be a cow-whale, who with her calf, made the neighborhood of the steamship wharf her field of action. She loafed about the fisherman's shacks, tossing a boat here and there and threatening destruction to the whole fleet, until the fishermen decided to either drive away the monsters or capture at least one of them.

"Capt. Pedro, an old whaler, was consulted and proceeded at once to effect a capture. He endeavored to obtain bombs and other whaling paraphernalia from the old whalers here in town, but for some reason or other failed to get anything. The Captain then learned of some one who had a whaling gun and a bomb, and proceeding to the man's house succeeded in finding an old gun that had not been used for 20 years. He also secured a bomb about as old and rusted with age. With these instruments the Captain and his crew boarded a fishing smack and started after one of the troublesome monsters.

"The Captain had doubts as to either the gun or the bomb doing the work, but he approximated the prey however, and taking deliberate aim sent the bomb into it with the desired effect. The whale immediately sank, but rising again spouted forth a large quantity of blood, showing the effectiveness, and then settled in about six fathoms of water near the wharf.

"The Captain says the whale is good for about 200 gallons of oil, or more, and will bring him several hundred dollars. The killing have occurred. Tuesday morning, the Captain watched until late that night expecting to see the whale rise.

"Later—the whale rose to the surface yesterday morning and was towed in and now awaits the gaze of the curious. Capt. Pedro has received the necessary implements for whaling purposes from San Francisco, and will make it warm for the large ones if they show up again."

(To be continued)