

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Whales Leave Monterey**

Jose Pedro, the whaler who succeeded in killing the huge whale which had been a menace to the fishermen around the wharf in Monterey in August, 1889, about which we wrote in the last issue of the Dairy, was born in Lisbon, Portugal. He came to America as a very young man, and settled in Monterey where he made his home until his passing 51 years ago. The Pedro home was on Calle Principal near the Pacific building, a house which had once been Monterey's post office.

In addition to the story about whaling which appeared in the Daily Extra Cypress on August 15, 1889, concerning the activities of Capt. Joseph Pedro, there was another "thrilling" account of an encounter with a whale in Monterey Bay. Nick Davis, one of the genial "saloon men", was out fishing for mackerel in one of the smacks, in company with a friend, when suddenly they felt their boat move skyward at a brisk rate. They reported that their drop was about as sudden, and the boat with its occupants dipped in the ocean and filled with water. At the same moment Nick reported, a large object rose about two feet, from them and looking into it, he saw the jaws of a whale opened to their full extent, while within thousands of sardine were making a desperate effort to extricate themselves from the monster's mouth.

Presently the jaws closed, with a snap so the story goes, water flying in every direction, and particularly covering the terrorized and paralyzed fishermen. After taking a good look at the boat and its content, as though wondering what kind of mouthful that would make, the whale disappeared, leaving the two fishermen to paddle their half-sunken boat to shore as best they could.

Nick told the Cypress reporter that the whale's mouth reminded home of a huge barn door opened to its full extent, into which a two-horse team and a wagon load of hay could have easily entered. He also stated that he loves fishing, but a whale was more than he had bargained for.

We have found an article, "The Monterey Whale Fishery", in the "Handbook of Monterey" as published in 1875, from which we have gleaned some interesting information. The opening paragraph sound very much as though it was written today, if the word "sardine"

could be substituted for the word "whale", and here it is: "The whale fishery, which for the last 25 years has constituted one of the most important our local industries, is likely soon to become a thing of the past. The whales are gradually becoming scarcer, and now that the tide of commerce is turning this way, they will, ere long, give our bay a wide berth."

Of various species of whales which frequented the coast of California, the most valuable are the sperm whale, right whale, humpback, finback, sulphur-bottom and California gray.

The "Handbook" articles relate that many years ago, while California was yet a province of Mexico, the New Bedford whale ships caught large number of sperm and right whales along this coast; but these species had almost disappeared by 1875, and the whalers had to content themselves with the more numerous but less valuable, California greys and humpbacks. Occasionally, however, a sulphur-bottom or right shale was caught, but this was a rare occasion.

It was for the purpose of catching the humpbacks, known to be numerous in this bay, that the Monterey Whaling Company was organized in 1854, and about which we have already written. After the failure of this company, the whales were still not allowed to rest. For in 1855 the company of Portuguese, known as the "Old Company", was organized with 17 men and two boats. Although at first they used no guns, they succeeded in taking about 800 barrels of humpback oil annually for about three years, we have been told.

In the Autumn of 1858, Capt. Avery of the Schooner "Sovereign" noticed a school of California greys playing near the surf, about three miles from Monterey, the Handbook relate. He informed the whalers of his discovery and they at once proceeded to the spot indicated and caught several of the school, besides many others of the same species, before the season closed.

In the winter of the same year Capt. Davenport again started in with two boats well manned and equipped with bomb and harpoon guns. Both companies whaled in the bay with varying success, getting from 600 to 1000 barrels annually per company, for several years, then Capt. Davenport withdrew from the business. His company was known after his withdrawal, as the "New Company" of Portuguese whalers. During the season of

1862-63 each company secured about 1700 barrels of oil. This was one of their most successful years.

(To be continued)