

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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'When I Was a Little Girl'

"When I was a little girl, Monterey was the first city in California, because it was then the capital, and also gold was discovered within 200 miles of it." So begins the story of life in Monterey as told by the late Mrs. Mary Elmore, whose parents, Mr. and Mrs. Milton Little, were true pioneers of the Peninsula. Mrs. Frank Massie of Monterey is a granddaughter of the Littles and a niece of Mrs. Elmore.

Before her death a good many years ago, Mrs. Elmore was interviewed by a correspondent of a national circulated newspaper. Through the years a clipping of that interview has been saved by Mrs. J.C. Anthony. Today we are privileged to review that article for the pleasure of our readers, for it contains much of interest in the history of the Old Town.

Milton Little settled here in the first day, for he left New York, in 1844. Two years later, Mrs. Elmore's maternal grandmother, Mrs. Mary Eager, also of New York, sailed around the Horn with her five children and came here too. Little came to seek his fortune, but grandmother, according to Mrs. Elmore's story, came for another reason. She had been told that a sea voyage would be good for her children and that California was a good place to bring up children, and thus she saw an opportunity to gratify her love of adventure.

Romance began a year or two later, when Little married the eldest daughter, Mary. The ceremony took place in what is now known as the Robert Louis Stevenson House and Mather Cotton, then the mayor, or alcalde as he was then known, assisted by the chaplain of the Navy, read the marriage rites. That chaplain, Walter Colton, later became alcalde and the builder of Colton Hall.

Milton Little became a partner of Thomas Oliver Larkin soon after his arrival in Monterey, with the place of business in the Larkin House at the corner of Calle Principal and Jefferson Street. When that partnership was dissolved Mr. Little opened a general merchandise store on the lower floor of what is now the Kimball Hotel.

"On Calle Principal there is a little adobe house, with iron bars before the windows. That is where my parents first lived. The walls of that little home are all three feet

thick and the oaken doors are unusually heavy and long ago had brass hinges eight inches long. Then at night, stout shutters of oak protected the windows, because, you see, after gold was discovered in '48, that building was used as the banking house – the first, I think, in California." Mrs. Elmore recalled.

That little adobe was probably the house known as the Jose Maria Carasco place, for among the old Larkin accounts there is recorded a lease by Thomas Oliver Larkin to Milton Little on Dec. 31, 1845 for that property for three years, describing it as between the homes of Larkin and Watson. Another notation in the same record reads: "Rented same on Main street (Calle Principal) by contract to Milton Little for \$12.50 per month.

Continuing with her story Mrs. Elmore related an interesting bit of history concerning a camphor wood chest which occupied a place of honor in her home. The wood was covered in pigskin and gayly painted in an oriental design, much like those which may be seen today in the Old Custom House Museum and at the Stevenson House.

"That was the safe," she related, "it was all most primitive. Father at that time was deputy alcalde under Mather Cotton and had charge of the public money which had to be cared for. Then the miners began coming to Monterey with their sacks of gold dust and could find no safe place to leave them so they would bring them to my mother, who labeled them with the owner's name and then simply dumped them in the chest. You see that it is a big chest and sometimes it would be two-thirds full of pure gold. The men never took a receipt and mother kept no records but when the minters returned, their gold would be waiting for them and there never was any trouble."

(To be continued)