

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Monterey in 1879

"The ride from Salinas to Monterey is pleasant one for its novelty. They (Monterey-Salinas Valley Railroad) makes no stops, except to rest the locomotive or drive nails in the tires to keep them on the wheels. Sometimes a herd of sheep or cows monopolizes the track, and dispute the right-of way. The bushes rattle against the car windows, and sometimes a grade is so steep the front of the car is at a far different angle than the rear. After a few miles it winds in and out around sand beds of the coast. Occasionally you can catch glimpse of the dark blue ocean."

The above is the amazing description of a railroad journey from Salinas to Monterey in 1879 as enjoyed by C.C. Flagg and written in a letter dated July 5 of that year.

"These sand heaps and beds are covered with sand cactus crowned with rich purple blossom that is perfectly lovely. Then there are myriads of gold, white and other blossoming flowers that set off the various shades of green with a lovely effect, so that the entire panorama of the journey is one of nature's eccentric exhibitions."

Flagg's description of Monterey in 1879 as he saw is worth repeating in all its detail. "Monterey, dear delightful Monterey; I spent five charming days there. Each one was filled with a program of varied interest. It is a quaint old town, reminding me in shape, of an abalone shell. At least it could demonstrate by that article, as well as by map, this ancient capital of our state. The bay is a fine one and might easily hold the world's navy. From the foam-kissed shores, the land rises with graceful sweep, until it suddenly meets the high range of hills covered with a thick growth of trees. The town seems a relic of by-gone times. The hotel and houses are all adobe. There is no regularity of streets.

"The houses are as long as rope walks, only one or two rooms deep, and the walls are from two to three feet thick of solid 'mud.' You enter rooms right from the ground, each window has a deep recess. One lady told me she used them for cupboards. The second stories have a large veranda running around them, making delightful promenades.

"There is one church, several saloons and stores. At noon they remind me of the barnacles that open and close with the tides. At 12'oclock everybody goes to dinner. The telegrapher, the printer, in fact the whole town, save the dining rooms, are suddenly locked up. People have a slow lazy motion all the time. It is a town of idleness and dreams."

"But it would be a pity to change it one atom. As it is, it's a perfect place to rest, or have a visit of quiet enjoyment. The 4th and 5th of July were simply perfect days. On the afternoon of the Fourth, the steamer, State of California, put into the harbor, having on board about 400 people; 600 people had left her at Santa Cruz. She did not lay up to the wharf but anchored out, landing passengers by boat. She is a fine looking steamer, and, covered with bunting and flags was a great addition to the day's pleasure of the inhabitants of Monterey.

"I had the pleasure of going aboard the State of California. She is a good substantial boat but hardly suited for excursions. She has a magnificent dining room lighted by electric lights, and furnished royally--- while I was there the Ancon, Orizaba, Senator, California, Constantine, and our staunch old Monterey herself came to port. It was just two years before that I had dined with Captain Von Heims in Little River Harbor. There are two piers wharfs here running out into the harbor but both are considered no especially safe."

Now for Flagg's observances in Pacific Grove in 1879. "Two miles away from this town is the 'Christian Seaside Resort' of Pacific Grove. It is a pleasant drive through grand old trees, close to the Pacific Sea, save that the road is sandy and hard pulling for the horses. There are numerous teams running up and back--fare two-bits each way. The grove lies right on the water's edge. It is fashioned after the old camp ground style. The same rows of seats, and outer circle of tents and houses. Some have very pretty cottages the arrangements are perfect and strict. Over 1,500 people are camped here under the guidance of Dr. Davis of San Francisco.

"A mile beyond is the Monterey light. On the evening of the Fourth the State of California was ablaze with lights and fireworks, presenting a grand sight. The little old town was patriotic to a man. The band gave a ball which took the tone of the town. Monterey has nice beach for both riding and bathing. There are two good hotels but

no physician. The residents are mostly Spanish. I visited two or three. They are the soul of hospitality.”