

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **The Wreck of the Natalie**

During a search of the old publications in Monterey we came upon this story which will bear repeating here because of the interest in California's First Theater.

"After being undisturbed for many years a finely constructed well has been discovered in a small room in the rear of the stage in the old theater," a reporter wrote for the Monterey Cypress of Sept. 23, 1914. "Well lined with chalk rock, it was probably used by the first inhabitants for the water supply previous to the installation of the city water system.

"Frank Smith, custodian of the old place, has spent several weeks improving the property and a few merchants of Monterey were there with the intention of inspecting the place, among whom were Sol Charmak and Grant Towle.

"What is there back here, Smithy?" Charmak inquired. Smith replied that he had not been backstage, so the group went on tour. Upon entering through a narrow declivity, they found the well in a fair state of preservation considering the amount of dirt that had accumulated since it was last in use.

"Smith has expressed the hope that the well may be redug and a pump installed thus doing away with the expense of city water.

"The presence of the well in the building was attributed to the fact that in accordance with an English custom which decrees that wells be located in the kitchen of dwellings and that the old theater was built by Jack Swan, who was an Englishman."

Mrs. Isabel Hartigan, the curator of California's First Theater reports that the well location is now the furnace room located on the west side of the building between the green room and the ladies' dressing room for the Troupers of the Gold Coast

The well hole has been partly covered over with cement to protect the visitors to the theater from falling into it, but can still be located by those who are interested.

An addition to valuable gifts which are received from time to time by the Monterey History and Art Assn. is a handsome tilt-top table of inlaid wood given by Mrs.

Emil C. Rickets of Pacific Grove. The table was purchased by her aunt, Mrs. W.D. Cornish, an early resident of Pacific Grove, when she and Mrs. Rickets visited Sorrento, Italy, in 1929. For many years it was an admired piece in the furnishings of Mrs. Cornish's home on Upper Lighthouse avenue in the Grove.

There appeared an item in The Monterey Herald of Sept. 2, 1924, which of course is controversial, but nevertheless is one of Monterey's traditions – the story of the remains of the wreckage of the Natalie on the beach at Monterey. The story is as follows:

"The ever-shifting sands on the shores of Monterey Bay this morning swept aside to disclose for the third time in 25 years the ancient hull of the French sloop-of-War Natalie, upon which Napoleon is said to have escaped from Elba in 1815.

"The historic ship was blown ashore in a storm and floundered here in 1833. The old-timers say that all her crew, a gang of smugglers from Mexico, had left the ship to come ashore at Monterey to attend a Cascarone Ball. While the crew danced in the old Spanish fiesta, the ship came ashore, about 200 feet from the present site of the Southern Pacific depot.

"In 1887 the hull was first seen. Now nothing remains but a few ribs and a section of the keel on planks.

"In 1901 it was seen by A.E. Coffers. Coffers was the one who again discovered its appearance this morning.

"One year after the vessel was blown ashore, Don Jose Abrego dismantled the ship, which was made of teakwood, using the material to build Casa Abrego. The bow of the Natalie is preserved in the Golden Gate Park Museum in San Francisco."

The Abrego adobe is on the corner of Webster and Abrego streets in Monterey and is on the Monterey History and Art Association's Historic Route. We shall inquire of the De Young Museum in San Francisco as to the location of the bow of the Natalie. Maybe it could be given back to Monterey if it is still preserved.