

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The First Theatre

"Yes, I can tell you about the First Theatre. I do know about it because I helped to build it. I am a mason by trade and I did all the masonry work. Partitions were on hinges so that they could be raised. They used whale oil in the lamps, did not have anything else in those days. After the building got all smoked up it was used as a whaling station. It was built for a bowling alley. The first theatrical performers belonged to Col. J.D. Stevenson's volunteer regiment from New York". This was the story of Monterey's Historical Monument, known as California's First Theatre, as told by Captain Bralee to Miss Lucy Morse in 1898.

"Yes, Halleck and Sherman were both here. Gen. Sherman was then a lieutenant in Company F of the Third Artillery. They came around the Horn to Monterey. A lady who came with them died here only two years ago," Bralee continued. Then of course his interviewer asked him about the rosebush romance and General Sherman and Senorita Maria Ignacia Bonafacio.

Bralee picked up that famous story with this information: "Oh yes! Sherman knew the family. You see the officers were gay young fellows and must have company. The Bonifacios were a little better than the common run and used to entertain the officers. No. Sherman never had anything to do with the rosebush. That is another of the drivers' stories. I built the first chimney in Monterey on the Bonifacio house."

The captain urged Miss Morse to continue her search for facts on the early history of Monterey. "You should go in and see Mrs. Allen. Yes, she will be glad to talk to you. Her house was brought from Australia. It is built from Sydney oak, a wood resembling ironwood. It was framed while green as nails cannot penetrate it after it is seasoned. The old lady lives there with her son. He would like to repair the house but she will not hear to it. The son has lost one arm but he is the best shot in the country and earns a good living by hunting."

Miss Morse reports in her story of old Monterey that she thanked the captain and wended her way across the street to rap on the door of the oldest lumber house in Monterey. An old lady answered the rap and ushered her into a pretty old fashioned parlor containing blendings of the modern.

When Miss Morse asked her hostess if the house had really been brought from Australia she replied: "I do not rightly know. That is what many ladies have asked me. I lived in Hobartstown. I was quite young when we came. It was somewhere near New Zealand a five or six days sail. Is Australia where they found gold?"

"Well then I did not come from there and I am glad I didn't. Such carrying on as there was there. Robbing, killing, burning and gambling. They were awful wicked people. No. I did not come from there and I am mighty glad I didn't. I did not know much about it then but I have heard since.

"We came on the Elizabeth Starbuck with Capt. Parker in command. I have lived in the house for 50 years. There are not many who can bring their houses with them, live in it 50 years and raise their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. I was 33 and had six children."

Miss Morse asked how Mrs. Allen happened to bring the house with her and she obligingly told this story: "My husband said, 'I am going to California!' 'To California!' I said, 'and what do you think you are going to do with me and the children?' 'I will find a boarding school for two of the girls. You and the other children can stay here. I will be back in two years.' 'No sir,' said I. 'I don't stay here. If you go, the children and I go too.' 'But where will you sleep? They have nothing but barrels to sleep in over there.' 'The barrels must be pretty big if we can sleep in them. Will the children have to sleep in barrels?' 'Yes, the children will have to sleep in barrels. They can put their head in and let their feet hang out'."

Mrs. Allen, who was then Mrs. Timothy Bushton, told how she solved the problem and came to California with her husband and six children. When she refused to sleep in barrels her husband asked 'Then what will you do?' She replied: "We have four or five good little vessels of our own. We will send them to New Zealand, for lumber, have it framed then taken down and take it with us and have it put up there."

"That is a pretty good idea," he said. Then Mrs. Bushton inquired if there was furniture to be brought in California and was told that there probably was not. So she ordered two good slabs, one for a dresser and one for a table. Her husband could not see where such preparation was necessary when they would only stay

two years but she replied, "I don't care, while I stay I will live."

(To be continued)