

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Juan B. Alvarado

Juan B. Alvarado is dead. The grandson of an illustrious grandfather, Juan B. Alvarado, first governor of California under Mexican rule, died in his San Francisco home on Feb 1 at the age of 71. This kindly Spanish gentleman had made frequent visits to Monterey and had many friends here. Throughout his life he had maintained an enthusiastic interest in California history and was a devoted member of the California Historical Society and the California Pioneers.

On display in the Old Custom House are several historical items given by Mr. Alvarado to the Monterey History and Art Association in memory of his grandfather, including a number of books and the beautiful and valuable Belter chair which had belonged to Don Juan Bautista Alvarado.

When Mr. Alvarado gave the collection of books from the library of his grandfather he wrote: "I had originally intended placing this material with the Society of California Pioneers, but finally decided that the History and Art Association in Monterey would be the proper custodians. Sort of 'old home gesture' as it were. The books were formerly the property of my grandfather, Gov. Juan B. Alvarado. Some of the material was found in a group of personal memoranda which went from Monterey to the Alvarado home at San Pablo and thence to a storage warehouse."

Among the other interesting items which the late Mr. Alvarado sent with the books is a large photographic copy of the Alvarado family shield and a translation "This shield above noted is a faithful and legitimate copy of the original, located in folio 375 in the book of Heraldry, and is a copy of what antecedes and follows and corresponds to this place here referred.

"Signed and sealed in Santa Cruz de Tenerife 6th, March 1785."

There are seven books in the Alvarado collection all written in Spanish and bound in leather. A set of three volumes is the story of Rob Roy by Sir Walter Scott, printed in 1828; Dios es El Amor Mas Puro, a religious book printed in 1831; Obras Escogidas de Miguel de Cernates, printed in Madrid in 1829; Memorias papar sevir a La Historia del Jacobinismo, dated 1827; and the

oldest book of all, dated 1821 and entitled Historia del Reinado del Emperador Carlos Quinto.

Each book bears the mark: "From the Library of the Home of Don Juan B. Alvarado, Governor of California." They are now on display in a specially built case in the Old Custom House.

In October of last year the Monterey History and Art Association acquired the priceless historical antique, the Alvarado Belter chair to add to the collection now on exhibit in the Old Custom House. It is appropriate that this beautiful piece of furniture be placed in the Custom House where Alvarado was collector of Customs, appointed in 1845.

At the time that the late Mr. Juan B. Alvarado sent the chair to Monterey he wrote: "I am glad the chair arrived safely. I hope this relic of the past has made its last journey and has found its last resting place within the sheltering walls of the Old Custom House at Monterey."

Mr. Alvarado wrote a short history of the chair which is of carved rosewood with the original cut velvet upholstery. He wrote: "As far as I can recall from a conversation which I had with my father, John C. Alvarado in 1909, the arm chair was part of a set of Belter furniture obtained by Gov. Alvarado and his wife, Senora Martaina Castro de Alvarado, for their home, possibly in the early 1860s." The chair was later obtained through inheritance by Mr. Alvarado's aunt, and shipped to her home in Paris where it remained for 25 years. Upon her death it was inherited by Mrs. John C. Alvarado and delivered to her home in San Rafael. In 1932 it was inherited by her son, Juan B. Alvarado, who had it in his home in Washington street in San Francisco until it made its last journey to Monterey.

In one of Mr. Alvarado's last letters to us he wrote: "There are still in my possession some interesting things which I might part with – for free – if suitable placing or display can be arranged for them at Monterey. I hope soon to make a journey down and take a look at all the projects guided by the great association."