

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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An Essay on Drake

Three and three-quarter centuries ago, on June 17, Francis Drake – not yet Sir Francis – sailed into a “convenient and fit harbor” on the coast of California, and there left his now-famous plate of brass.

Much interest in this anniversary is being exhibited in California and in England, the Notes from the California Historical Society tells us in the May issue. An essay contest, sponsored by the Drake Navigators Guild of Marin County, is being conducted among the cadets of the Royal Navy and the Royal Merchant Navy. Author of the winning essay will be flown to California where he will read his paper at the Sir Francis Drake High School. Other events in the Bay Area are in preparation.

England is holding a celebration concurrently, in Plymouth and Devonport, at which the Guild will be represented by its honorary chairman, Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, and Mrs. Nimitz, and the California Historical Society by its managing director, Mrs. Edna Parratt, of San Francisco and the Carmel Highlands.

In Bancroftiana, published occasionally by the Friends of the Bancroft Library we came across an interesting item concerning a noted man who at one time lived in Monterey. Dr. Edward Turner Bale, a commissioned surgeon of the England ship “Harriett” which came to the California coast in the year 1837 and ran aground at Monterey. Bale remained here where he practiced medicine for five years and in 1840 was appointed surgeon in chief of the Mexican army. He married Maria Ignacia Soberanes, a niece of Gen. Vallejo, in 1841. Bale was born in England in 1811, where he was reared and educated for the medical profession.

Recently the Division of Manuscripts at the University of California, received the papers of Dr. Bale which came to the Bancroft Library as a gift from Stephen C. Clark. A bulk of the collection are personal business papers of Mrs. Bale. It was Dr. and Mrs. Bale who gave a piano to the Soberanes children in Monterey. For many years it was enjoyed by them at Casa Soberanes on Pacific street and now occupies an historic spot in the “sala” of the Stevenson House.

The Bale papers number approximately 900 items covering the period from 1841 to 1888. Included are about 550 letters, chiefly to and from Mrs. Bale, but

containing too some from such prominent persons of the day as Salvador and Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, Bishop Alemany, John Bautista Rogers Cooper, Thomas Oliver Larkin, Jacob Primer Leese and Nathan Spear – all names well known in Monterey.

A note in the Bancroftiana also officially announces the acquisition of two extensive collections of historical manuscripts and other documents, those of Thomas Wayne Norris, late noted California collector and resident of Carmel; and of Dr. Herbert E. Bolton who, until his death last year, was the universally admired dean of Western historians.

Apropos of present city plans in Monterey is a letter from H.W. Schmidt of Arcadia, California, seeking information about Monterey's past history and future plans. He writes: “My problem briefly is this: I am doing some research seeking to evaluate, both positively and negatively, the influences of the Spanish period of present day California, which, it is hoped, will eventually crystallize into an article in one of the historical journals.

“I am familiar with your various historical landmarks, but I am anxious to secure certain information not readily apparent. For one thing, I should be very much interested in learning the fate of the erstwhile Monterey Master Plan which, as I recall, made some attempts to hold fast to, or to revive, Monterey's early heritage.

“Also I should be interested in learning whether in your Merienda there is any conscious effort to link the event up with the Spanish period, as well as the Mexican period.”

Needless to say we answered the letter to the best of our ability, sent him a copy of the Master Plan, and reviewed the history of our Merienda, which annually celebrates Monterey's birthday on June 3rd.