

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

June 4, 1954

Guest Columnist

It has been our good fortune to be able to attend the 49th annual meeting of the American Association of Museums in Santa Barbara, May 26 to 28th, so we are welcoming a guest columnist for a few days. Mr. A.S. Koper, an instructor in the Polish language department at the Army Language School in the old Presidio of Monterey, is the guest.

Mr. Koper with his wife and young son are residents of Ord Village. They arrived in the United States from Poland in January of 1951, without a single prospect of employment but within two weeks Mr. A.S. Koper was in Monterey with a position in Language school in the old Presidio. His wife and child followed him here and are happily employed in a position and in school.

Mr. Koper called on us one evening to plead for his native country, saying that we had told of the Spanish, Mexican, English and other foreign countries' navigators and historians who had visited California but had left out Poland. So we asked him to translate from his native tongue into English a description of the California coast line and of Monterey as written by Henryk Sienkiewicz. He consented to do, so for the next several columns of the diary we will learn what this Polish writer discovered in California.

Henryk Sienkiewicz is one of the Polish writers who was not only famous in his native country but was also well known abroad. Many of his books were translated in as many as 30 foreign languages. His famous book, "Quo Vadis" brought him the distinguished Nobel Prize; this book was also filmed several times, most recently by MGM, in Technicolor.

His trilogy "With Fire and Sword," "The Deluge," and "Pan Michael," describing 17th century society in Poland during the war with the Cossacks, Turks and Swedes was translated by the well known American linguist Jeremiah Curtin. These works were reprinted several times in this country alone, according to Mr. Koper's notes.

In 1876 Henryk Sienkiewicz, then a young journalist and writer, came to this country. He spent most of his two years sojourn in the United States in California. As a correspondent for the Warsaw papers he wrote from here many reports and letters, which, collected, formed

two volumes of "Letters from America" ("Listy z Ameryki").

In this book, Mr. Koper tells us, he describes life in the United States at the end of the last century. He describes the freedom of speech, thought and religion; education and the life of women; his trip across the country; hunting for bison; San Francisco and Santa Ana in particular; Yosemite and – what is now known as Sequoia National Park.

While on a trip from San Francisco to Los Angeles by ship (the railroad then did not exist) he passed through Monterey. The chapter to follow is the first translation of this description from Polish into English as far as the translator, Mr. Koper, knows.

"Leaving the huge San Francisco Bay through the so-called Golden Gate onto the ocean, and after sailing along the rocks of the Cliff House, famed for its multitude of sea lions, we sailed to the south, continually along the shore. The weather was beautiful. The Pacific Ocean, it seems to me, never deserved more for its name ('Pacific' means in Polish 'Calm'). It is blue and smooth as a mirrored depth smoothly blended in the distance with the arch of the sky. From time to time, a grey streak of smoke, blackened as a small cloud on those two azures, of the sky and sea: it was a passenger steamship carrying people and goods from the Sandwich Islands to California. It rose slowly as from the abyss on the confine of the horizon; and sometimes whitening the sail of a fisherman's schooner.

(More on Monday)