

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The Mission in 1882

As we were reading the article, written by an unknown author in an 1882 issue of Harper's Monthly Magazine, we came across this commentary on the future of Monterey and the Peninsula: "There has been the establishment of a great hotel, which will probably make it, instead of Santa Cruz, across the bay, the leading seaside resort of the Pacific coast. Though not so grandiose a direction, this is really the one for the present in which the peculiar conditions of the old capital are most likely to tell. The summer boater can revel among its historic remains and traditions of greatness, but Hotel Del Monte will bring them here to view them.

"The Hotel Del Monte is a beautiful edifice, not surpassed in its kind at any American watering place, and not equaled, I think, at any of them in its charming groves of live oaks and pines, the profusion of cultivated flowers by which it is surrounded, and the air of comfort existing at the same time with its elegant arrangements. That is the way with our friends of the Pacific coast. If they do not always stop in their zeal to follow Eastern ideas and patterns, when they really do attempt something in the same line, they are more likely than not to surpass us."

After a bit more in praise of California, the writer thinks of the climatic advantages in the Golden State and relates that the climate is remarkably even. The mean temperature, he writes, is 52 degrees in January and 58 in July. "This strikes one as very cool for bathing," he comments, "but the present mode is to bathe in the tanks of a large bathhouse, to which seawater is introduced artificially warmed, instead of in the sea itself. In other respects, the place seems nearly as desirable a resort at one season as another.

We were pleased by this comment: "The quaint town is always here: so are the wild rocks with their gossiping family of gulls and pelicans, and the romantic drives through extensive forests of pine and cypress."

There is in the article a description of the two trees mentioned above. "The Cypress," he relates, "is like the Italian stone pine—peculiar to Monterey alone. They are hoary with age and hanging moss. They are contorted into all the fantastic shapes imagined and

they stand by the most savage points of rocks, where the breakers toss up handfuls of white spray to them, 40 feet in the air, as if in greeting."

We have read with interest a description of the old Chinese village which once survived along Cannery Row near where the Marine Station is now, we have been told. The author writes that it was a "lonely village." "The veritable Celestials, with hardly a word of English among them, paste crimson papers in hieroglyphics on their shanty residences, burn tapers before their gods, and fish for a living in such junks and small boats as are seen at Hong Kong and Canton. They prepare, too, the avallonia meat and avallonia shells for their home market (Abalone).

Another comment, most appropriate at this time, made by our visitor of 1882, is this concerning Carmel Mission: "At Monterey, too, one sees his first old mission of the delightfully ruinous sort. It is in the little Carmel Valley, bare and brown again, after the great woods are passed, and four miles from the town. The mission fathers once had 90,000 head of cattle, and everything else to correspond, on the mission they founded here among the Indians. There are now only some vestiges, resembling earthworks, of their extensive adobe walls, and on a rise overlooking the sea the yellowish, low, Spanish rococo church of San Carlos."

Our writer thinks that the design and proportions of the edifice were good, but the workmanship was decidedly crude, and that the building speaks of the disadvantages under which it was built. He describes the bell tower as a dome of concrete with one-half bulged more than the other, with a star window in the front with points of many sizes.

The interior, he writes, does not yield, as a picture of sentimental ruin, to Muckross Abbey, or any broken temple of the Roman Campagna. The roof, open then to the sky, he observed, with grasses and wild mustard growing against it out of the crevices, had been originally made of stone arches, supplemented with timber-work tied together with rawhides. The whole body of the church, the author reported pilasters, capitals, frieze, and all-forms part of a curve springing from the floor, a peculiarity he had never elsewhere seen.

Finally, the author wrote in 1882: "Once a year, on St. Charles' Day, which comes in early November, a

memorial service is held here, which is attended by all the Spanish-Indian life remaining in the country round about. The place is a unique spectacle, full of incitement to reflection. Nothing is more conducive to a gentle pensiveness of the pleasant sort than to lie within this ruined enclosure, and listen to the splash of the sea on the shore."