

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Old Monterey Pianos

Pianos dating back to 1846 are listed and pictured in "Old Pianos" by N. E. Michel, published by the author in California in 1954. Mr. Michel is also the author of "Michel's Piano Atlas." The feature of the book which is interesting to Monterey is the reproduction of a number of photographs of antique pianos in Monterey with a caption as to their history and owners.

In the excellent index we found Monterey mentioned four times, on pages 106, 113, 118, 148. A full page was taken for a picture of the Robert Louis Stevenson House on Houston street. On the upper left side of the page was a photograph of the Wilkins and Newhall Square Piano No. 1028, made about 1847. The piano was originally owned by Dr. Edward Turner Bale and his wife, Maria Ignacia Soberanes. During a visit with the Soberanes family and learning of that family's musical interest, they sent the piano to Monterey where it was for many years in Casa Soberanes on Pacific street. Later it was sold but finally was willed to the bishop of the Monterey-Fresno diocese of the Catholic Church, who presented the old piano to the Monterey History and Art Assn. It is now in the large sala at the Stevenson House.

Dr. Bale was an English surgeon, who landed from a vessel at Monterey at the age of 29 years. Here he practiced medicine for five or six years and had a liquor store here in one of Larkin's buildings, according to Bancroft. After becoming naturalized in 1841 he obtained a Mexican land grant in Napa Valley.

A second picture shows a likeness of one of the first three pianos shipped around the horn. They were Brell-Kopf and Haertel small square pianos made in Berlin in 1843. The DeCelis family in Los Angeles received one, Don Jose Abrego of Monterey another, and Gen. Vallejo, the third.

A picture of the Abrego piano in the California Historical Society rooms in San Francisco, is shown. Mrs. Boleda Davis, a granddaughter of Abrego, gave the piano to the society several years before her death. It was in 1841 that Capt. Steven Smith arrived by vessel in Monterey and anchored in the bay, at which time Abrego engaged the captain to bring a piano on his next voyage. In March of 1843. he returned in a brigantine with three

pianos aboard. Abrego bought one for \$600. This piano had six octaves, two brass pedals and two candle holders.

A great Union Square piano made in New York is pictured as it appears in Casa Soberanes. The rosewood case is one of the admirable features of this piano which bears the serial number 20736.

The book "Old Pianos" contains 188 pages with 300 beautiful black and white photographs of pianos, spinets, harpsichords, clavichords and other keyboard instruments. A few of the most famous instruments mentioned are the first piano built in San Francisco, Vice President Nixon's piano, first Chickering square, Steinway square, Chickering grand: Teddy Roosevelt's piano, as well as that of Tom Thumb and Abraham Lincoln's and many others.

The Monterey County Historical Society will meet Sunday afternoon, Feb. 27, at 2 o'clock at the Gonzales Elementary School in Gonzales. Miss Grace Widemann will speak on "Horse and Buggy Days in Gonzales." All members and friends are invited to attend.