

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

April 27, 1955

### **Early Steamer Trade**

An interesting and historic story of coastal steamer trade between San Francisco and San Diego in the years between 1865 and 1870, is told by John Haskell Kemble in his tale of "Orizaba on the California Coast," as written for the Book Club of California. Because Monterey was one of the vessel's calls we were anxious that our readers should know that once upon a time Monterey really was an anchorage for both steamers and sailing vessels and that a lively business here made stops worthwhile.

The Orizaba was not new to the coastal trade in 1876 when the painting by Joseph Lee, a copy of which is included in this seventh folder of the Keepsake series, was made. In the painting, the ship is plowing along driven by her side paddle wheels and walking beam engine, and since she is heading into the wind with no sails set it is a safe guess that she is northbound. But as the writer points out, the ladies are in billowy skirts and the gentlemen wearing stove-pipe hats, are seen strolling on the weather decks, apparently suffering no inconvenience from the moderate sea which is running. At her mainmast she flies the "G.N.P." house-flag of the Goodall, Nelson, and Perkins Steamship Co.

The Orizaba was launched in 1854 and came to the Pacific two years later. She spent the next eight years running between San Francisco and Nicaragua and Panama. Purchased by the California Steam Navigation Co. from the Pacific Mail Steamship Co. in 1865, she began 20 years of voyages from San Francisco to San Diego. She could carry 75 cabin and 200 steerage passengers as well as 600 tons cargo. She remained one of the larger vessels in the coastal trade until after 1880.

The ship became the property of the Holladay & Brenham Co. in 1867, returned to the Pacific Mail in 1872 and then the property of Goodall, Nelson & Perkins in 1875. The latter firm became the Pacific Coast Steamship Co. in 1876, and the Orizaba sailed under its Maltese cross house-flag until she was retired from service in 1886. By that year she was the last one of the side-wheelers in coastal service and had been far outclassed by such iron, propeller-driven steamers as Queen of the Pacific, Santa Ana, and State of California.

Orizaba, together with the Ancon and Senator, maintained an "express service" from San Francisco south to Port Hartford (now Port San Luis Obispo), Santa Barbara, San Buenaventura, Santa Monica, San Pedro, Anaheim Landing and San Diego. Other vessels of the company, as well as these two, looked in regularly at the landings: Half Moon Bay, Pigeon Point, Santa Cruz, Soquel, Aptos, Salinas River, Pajaro Landing, Moss Landing, Monterey, San Simeon, Cayucos, Point Sal, Gaviota, More's Landing, Hueneme, and Newport. The company's public schedule ended with this warning: "Hours of sailing are not entirely reliable; steamers liable to be later, not earlier."

Coastal traffic was varied. In 1875 nearly 12,000 passengers landed at San Pedro and over 8,000 departed. Some 85,000 tons of cargo consisting of lumber, merchandise, and supplies for the then-building Southern Pacific were landed there. Exports totaled only 14,800 tons made up of grain, bran, brea, bullion, borax, fruit, honey, hides, hops, ore, vegetables, wool, wine, and livestock.

The first break in the reign of ships as the chief coastal carriers came when the Southern Pacific opened its line to Los Angeles via Tehachapi Pass in 1876. The railroad's coastline was not completed until 1904, however, and ships remained essential to local transportation down to the advent of large scale automobile and truck transportation in the 1920's.

John Haskell Kemble writes in conclusion: "Joseph Lee, painter of the portrait of Orizaba, worked in San Francisco between 1858 and 1880. Directories listed him as a sign painter at first, but in 1870 he appeared as 'artist' and 'marine painter.' A number of his pictures of ships and marine scenes have survived. The original of the painting of Orizaba was destroyed in the San Francisco fire of 1906. A photographic copy is owned by J. Porter Shaw of Oakland, and that is reproduced by the Book Club with his kind permission and through the cooperation of the San Francisco Marine Museum."