

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Our Maritime History

Someday when the Custom House has become a maritime museum and the treasure house of interesting objects pertaining to the seafaring life of Monterey, there will be ship models, more of the whaler's equipment, and logs of famous ship captains of the early days.

For this reason, a letter which has just come to my desk is important for it displays interest in a fascinating hobby and an unbounded amount of research and knowledge of maritime and naval history. It is from Charles B. Richmond of the Department of Industrial Relations, Division of Apprenticeship Standards, and a resident of Monterey.

Mr. Richmond hopes that there are persons here who may have sources of information pertaining to maritime and naval history. Perhaps some of the descendants of the old Monterey families have knowledge of events and ships applicable to their family histories; and perhaps some data can be obtained from those in authority connected from other historical societies or libraries, writes Mr. Richmond.

Very little is actually known of the Spanish ships, either as to names, or details of construction, our writer relates. He does, however, have some construction details on the later ships, the American frigate Savannah commanded by Commodore John Drake Sloat, the Congress commanded by Commodore Stockton, and the great frigate Collingswood, commanded by Sir George Seymore of the British Navy, all of which sailed into Monterey Bay in 1846. Prior to that the USS Yorktown came into Monterey Bay in 1841. Mr. Richmond is also most certain that a sloop of war similar to the Yorktown, the Peacock, while surveying the Pacific Coast, may have come into Monterey Bay. This ship was later lost in 1841 when it struck a bar on the Columbia River.

Many packet type ships carried settlers to the Pacific Coast. The Whaling Ship Museum at New Bedford, Mass., contains many models of whaling ships which sailed in the Pacific, and again, Mr. Richmond is sure some of these entered Monterey Bay during that period for replenishments. He believes that there are records of the ships that sunk off the Monterey Coast during

that period including the Natalie which is reported to have once had Napoleon as a prisoner passenger. A hundred or so ships were abandoned in San Francisco Bay after the Gold Rush and it is probably a fact that many of these called at Monterey on their way to San Francisco.

No doubt also there are records of the coastal trade land lumber schooners which plied the Pacific after the Civil War until these ships disappeared. It is also interesting to know that the first steel tanker in the Pacific was the SS George Loomis, built for the Standard Oil Co. in 1888. We are more familiar with the Monterey fishing fleet which was responsible for the livelihood of so many Monterey residents for so many years, until the disappearance of the sardines.

Mr. Richmond further declared that it is so easy for us to forget the role these ships played in the settlement and development of any particular area, for the men, as well as the ships, have disappeared into history.

"However, as far as history and relics are concerned, I believe it is of equal importance for us to give equal recognition to them along with the buildings and landmarks of the area," Mr. Richmond states.

A model of the California should certainly be one of the first ship models to go into the Custom House, for that Pacific Mail steamer entered Monterey Bay Feb. 24, 1849, bringing the first direct mail. On the morning of the 28th that now historic vessel passed through the Golden Gate, ending the first steamer voyage between the two coasts.

The mail was delivered and received in Monterey by an anxious and excited population. When the passengers were recalled to the steamer after strolling about the streets and being entertained for three days, while the crew members went into the hills to forage for fuel to keep the steam in the boilers during the next 100 miles of the journey, they learned that the delay had been unnecessary. When the huge, stack of wood, which had been assembled on the Monterey beach and some of it carried on board, a reserve supply of coal was found in bags under the storeroom floor.