

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Early Monterey Schools**

While searching for information on one subject, the interesting history of another came to our attention—the early schools of Monterey and Monterey County. We learned that in 1856 Monterey was credited with a public English school of 15 children, and two private schools which taught in the Spanish language. The early school was probably taught in the old Custom House but in 1872, after the county seat was moved to Salinas, the supervisors rented Colton Hall to the town trustees for a schoolhouse at a yearly rental of \$5.00.

Regarding the number of school children in the county and those attending school, Supt. J. H. Gleason, in 1854, reported 506 boys and girls, and only 70 were attending school. The number of children in 1864 was increased to 1,599, only one in four in school. Many of these children were born to Mexican and foreign-born parents and they would not send their children to a public school. Later in 1874, Supt. Job Wood Jr. clearly shows in his report what effect the railroad had upon school progress, for he said: "The school conditions are rapidly improving due to the migration of Eastern people. The schools have been greatly benefited and are rapidly filling with intelligent, hard-working children who appreciate the benefits to be derived from a public schools system."

When Monterey County was divided and San Benito County was formed, the number of children in the territory in 1884 was decreased to 3,353, but the school attendance was much improved, as 2,504 were on the school rolls and only 904 out of school.

There were 85 school districts in the territory in 1890, 90 school buildings, one of brick, and 78 primary and 31 grammar schools. During that year Pacific Grove, Salinas, and Santa Rita each engaged one teacher, making a total of 115, an increase of 33 teachers in four years.

In 1884 the county schools kept the "even tenor of their way" as Superintendent Smetzler expressed it, "as we now have first-grade and normal teachers." As the number of schools increased only normal teachers were employed, and in 1904, of the 140 teachers nearly the entire number were normal school graduates, over 60 of them coming from the San Jose normal School.

According to Guinn's history the corps of teachers in 1904 numbered 150; the least salary was \$600 a year, and the average salary for ungraded schools was \$70 a month for an average term of 10 months.

When Mrs. J. B. Chope became county superintendent, she endeavored to remedy the unpainted, cold, cheerless conditions. Thirty of the schools for the first time employed janitors, the children previously being compelled to sweep out the schoolhouse in turn. In 50 school buildings window shades were bought, nine of the districts were provided with cabinet organs and 101 districts purchased pictures of an educational value and hung them upon the school room walls. This all took place in 1900.

Early in the history of the state, the legislature gave its attention to the subject of education, and in 1852 passed a law providing for a public-school revenue, but each school organized must have been maintained three months before it could qualify for state aid.

Monterey County could not take advantage of this law because of its limited population, 2,724, nearly one-half Indians, and its large land surface of 4,370 square miles. In 1852, two years later, the only school in Monterey County was a girl's high school taught by the sisters of the convent.

In 1847, three of Monterey's most prominent citizens, Thomas Oliver Larkin, Milton Little and Talbott H. Green engaged Mrs. I. C. Isabell at a salary of \$200 a month to open a public school. A school room was fitted up with desk and benches in the second story of the Custom House, and assisted by Walter Cotton, Mrs. Isabell taught a school of 56 scholars for a term of three months. Thomas Oliver Larkin provided stationery from his store and books were obtained from whaling vessels which touched at Monterey. The Abrego boys were the only pupils who could speak English which they had been taught by W. E. P. Hartnell.