

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

September 19, 1955

Monterey, 1842

Today we will continue with Dr. Richard T. Maxwell's description of Monterey as he saw it in 1842 when he was a member of the medical staff on the United States, a 44-gun frigate in command of Commodore Thomas ap Catesby Jones. The United States had sailed into the harbor, taken Monterey for the United States, raised the American Flag after taking down the Mexican flag, all of which had to be corrected a few days later when it was learned that the United States was not at war with Mexico.

While they were in possession of Monterey the crew was kept busy throwing up defenses of earth and branches of trees, and the doctor recalls that he put together an old wheelbarrow to assist in the work. At that time, he also relates that Thomas O. Larkin, who was a half-brother of Capt. Cooper, kept a little grocery and dry goods store at Monterey about 12 by 18 feet. His wife, an American woman, lived there with him and four or five children, he continues. There was also David Spence, a Scotchman who owned property in the neighborhood. They were the only foreigners.

An exciting experience of Dr. Maxwell is also told in his "Visit to Monterey in 1842," "An American named Tomlinson, a hunter whom we found there, was lying very ill of an injury of the knee. I amputated his leg on Christmas day, 1842. He afterward died of pneumonia in 1844. While we were there the only currency was hides of cattle, which the Mexicans would come dragging behind them with a rope on the ground, to purchase what they needed at Larkin's store. They were all called California bank notes."

A few paragraphs in the statement of Dr. Maxwell concerning his stay in Monterey from October 1842 to January of 1843, is of interest. He writes: "We soon became intimate with many of the families in town and used to spend our time pleasantly there. I bought a young mare for \$9. It was considered very ultra for a man to ride a mare in those days, and the girls used to call out to me. 'Yegua, yegua,' meaning a mare. Another member of the United States staff had also bought a horse, and he and I were the chief sportsmen of the ship. Game was so abundant that you could knock the ducks down with an oar, and they had never had a gun fired at them".

Another man, Gamble by name, who had been sent out by Nuttall, the naturalist, from Philadelphia, to collect specimens, was a companion of Dr. Maxwell. He had lost his money during the trip west by turning it over to the captain of the group of traders he was traveling with, so Mr. W. E. P. Hartnell took care of him. Maxwell met him in Monterey and got the Commodore to take him on board as his clerk. They used to go ashore together, so he relates. and go over to the mission and get an old Indian woman to make tortilla, corn cake, from meal produced by rubbing down between two stones, and she would stew the quail they had shot, with red peppers, and in that way, they got their dinner.

Dr. Maxwell also tells of the ball which the ship's personnel gave for the people of Monterey on Jan. 1, at the Government House. At that time, he writes, the female population of Monterey had never tasted cake, mince pie, or anything of that sort. The stewards of the ship's messes were set to work making all kinds of delicacies in the shape of cakes and pies for the supper at the ball. "These people had the most extraordinary customs," the doctor declared, "they would come on board the ship and dance all day, and we would go on shore and dance all night."

Dr. Maxwell saw Carmel Mission when the church was still in tolerable repair and Father Real was in charge. He writes that there were a number of curious paintings there, and among them was one of the Landing of Vancouver, a picture about seven feet by eleven, painted chiefly with chrome earth found here, and probably done by one of the ship's painters from his vessel. There were 21 other paintings, representing Heaven and Hell.

There were some smaller paintings, he recalls, some of them really beautiful, one of them representing St. John. What became of these pictures, Dr. Maxwell wrote in his narrative, he does not know.

Only 200 copies of the Maxwell Narrative, "Visit to Monterey in 1842" have been published. It was designed and printed by Joseph Simon in Los Angeles.