

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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A Case of Near-Murder

In 1954 the Monterey History and Art Assn. presented a microfilm reader to the Monterey Public Library as a memorial to Thomas Wayne Norris, president of the association at the time of his death. A few months ago the association purchased from the Bancroft Library at the University of California microfilm of the files of the Monterey Gazette, from 1863 through 1869, and of the Monterey Argus, 1878 through 1889.

We have read these historic records, using the microfilm reader and the Argus of Jan. 8, 1864 and were interested particularly in the fact that the editor of that day did not "play up" the big stories of his time - as we do our modern editors.

In the middle of the frontpage in small headline type we found a story which we were eager to read as first-hand information regarding the father of one of Monterey's leading citizens of the present. Today, that story of the near-murder of John Martin (father of Carmel Martin, Sr.) would have been announced in huge headline type, accompanied by pictures and biographies of the victim and assailant. But in 1864 the news was buried in reports from the Weather Bureau and continued love stories.

This is the big news story of that day, published several days after the actual happening because the Argus was a weekly:

"John Martin, an estimable citizen, residing in Carmel Valley, while on his way to this city last Wednesday with a loaded team, was shot by one Grogerio Oresco. Mr. Martin barely succeeded in getting into town before he fell near the store at John Roth. He was immediately taken to the residence of Mr. Trescocy. On obtaining from him a description of the would-be assassin, pursuit was at once made and the fiend arrested. On being confronted with his victim, Oresco was at once recognized.

"An examination was entered upon before Justice Merritt, during the progress of which the citizens took forceable possession of the assassin and hung him from the porch of the Quartel (Cuartel). Thus, has ended the first tragedy of the new year in our midst The swift vengeance meted out in this instance savored little of law, but was fraught with justice. Courts and calf skin,

competent under ordinary agencies, lack that prompt efficiency demanded in cases like the one under consideration.

"There are incarnate devils who place themselves morally without pale of law, and we are not disposed to question the mode or manner of punishment, provided it be effectual.

"It is thought that Oresco has been figuring recently in the Southern counties, until the vigilance committee in Los Angeles made a change of locality necessary to his safety. Advices from Los Angeles state the recent executions by the people there have been effectual in driving off a horde of miscreants, and we may expect them to be drifting our way.

"Oresco is said to have been connected with the Jack Powers gang years ago and has since borne a very bad reputation. A few nights ago, he wantonly fired into a private residence. On the morning of the attempted murder, he was rioting about town on horseback trying to ride into stores after the most approved style of a desperado. Dashing out of town, thirsting apparently for blood, he wantonly shot down the first man he met; one wholly unknown to him and one whose quiet, inoffensive character was proverbial among us. Mr. Martin is still living but faint hopes are held for his recovery."

Carmel Martin tells us his father lived out his normal life and died in the 1890s - although he never regained his normal physical health because the bullet had entered his side, injured his backbone and was released on the opposite side. The story of this experience was often told by Mr. Martin Sr., to his children until his dying day; but Carmel Martin learned more details of the attempted murder from the Argus story when it was shown to him a few days ago.