

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

February 15, 1956

Camels in Monterey

The picture shown today with the Diary is not of the historic camels which were brought to California in 1857 by Lt. Edward Fitzgerald Beale, and stationed for a time at Fort Tejon as part of the U.S. Camel Corps under the direction of Secretary of War Jefferson Davis. **(Photo not reproduced here.)**

Although these camels, it is said, did march through Monterey en route to San Francisco after they were declared unsuitable by the Army for use in this country, the camels we are showing today were part of a small circus which came to Monterey in the early 1900s. The three camels were pastured out in the lot where the San Carlos hotel now stands, surrounded by the old adobe wall of the Jimeno home and the site of the first convent in California. Across the street, Calle Estrada, now Pacific, is St. James Episcopal church. The two houses on either side of the little church are still standing and to the extreme right in the picture is Casa Soberanes. The photograph was probably taken before Soberanes street was cut through from Pacific to Van Buren.

Myron Oliver, whose father, J. K. Oliver, took the picture, reports that the carnival also showed a few bears and a number of snakes, all of which his father delighted in talking about. One of the bears took sick in Monterey and had to be killed here. Mr. Oliver obtained the skin and for years a bear rug reposed in front of the Oliver fireplace until moths and old age took their toll. Mr. Oliver also told about Esau, the snake eater, a very tall thin man who would entertain the carnival attendants with a display of courage as he entered the snake pit on the carnival grounds on Calle Principal and there sit among the reptiles and eat what had been pridefully announced as snake meat.

One day a snake which had not been dispensed of his poisonous fangs was slipped into the pit by a prankster, Esau was bitten by the strange snake and died from the bite in San Francisco. Oliver described this circus character as a pin-head man with a tuft of red hair on the point, all of which was a fascination for the young and old of Monterey about 1900.