

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Whale of an Age

"Except for some additional equipment, and a few details of rig, the vessels employed in the whale fisheries were identical with the others of the same period. Barks were preferred because they were handier and lay-to better. So, a good many ships were changed over to that rig, but at the same time a good many ships were used. There was no hull that was typical; some were deep, flat transoms and some had shallow ones that were curved. In most there was a straight run of deck from stern to stern, but in some there was a raised quarter deck. . . ."

This information which should be of interest in Monterey where whaling was once an important industry as was the sardine fishing and canning. We gleaned it from quotations from "The Whale Ship Book," by Joseph T. Higgins, —copyright, 1927, by The Rudder Publishing Co., New York.

The crews were islanders for the most part, because rowing was the most important thing they had to do, and boys and girls brought up on the islands learn at an early age how to handle rowboats. They are obliged to because, small boats are about the only island vehicle, about the only means, and by far the most convenient, of island transportation. The crew's natural ability as oarsmen, their training by the mates, together with the build of their craft, made the New England whale boat a thing without an equal. . . .

The whale boats on their great wooden cranes establish the identity of these ships at once, even at a distance of several miles. The common size was 28 feet for the length, six feet for the width, and one foot ten inches deep in the middle, increasing to three feet one inch at the bow and an inch or two more at the stern. They were built of light wood, usually white cedar. . . .

The ideal way to examine the differences between a whaler and any other ship would be to compare them as they lay at their wharves; to look over a clipper, a Liverpool packet, or a ship that brought hides from California, and then look over a whaler at a nearby wharf. But those days are gone, such ships no longer sail and few even exist. The "Charles W. 'Morgan,'" at South Dartmouth, Mass., is the only one left on the New England coast. Every man who has an interest in sailing

ships at sea or the history of the United States, ought to and will, it is hoped, give thanks to Col. E. H. R. Green for preserving it, and to the group of New Bedford men who made its presentation possible.

In San Francisco there is a very fine example of a sailing ship preserved along the Marina by the Maritime Museum at the foot of Van Ness Ave. We recommend a visit to both the museum, and to the ship. We hope someday that the Monterey History and Art Association may collect some very fine ship models of some of the famous sailing ships that came into Monterey Bay in the early days. Models of Commodore Sloat's ships would be thankfully received and shown in the Old Custom House Museum.

We have just received one of the best reference books we know of: "Historic Spots in California" by Mildred Brooks Hoover, Hero Eugene Rensch, and Ethel Grace Rensch, as revised by Ruth Teiser with introduction by Dr. Robert Glass Cleland of the Huntington Library. The book is not new, it was published by the Stanford University Press first in 1932 and again in 1937. A revised edition was published in 1948 and a second printing in 1953.

According to the publisher's foreword the original edition of the "Historic Spots in California" sponsored by the California State Conference of the Daughters of the American Revolution, was issued by Stanford University Press in three volumes. Within a few years the edition was exhausted. The publishers express grateful acknowledgment to county librarians and many other individuals throughout the state who responded to requests for information on their counties and to specialists in California history who made suggestions. Dr. J. N. Bowman of Berkley loaned his manuscript material on California land grants and other data assembled by him and the late Dr. G. W. Hendry on the adobe buildings of the nine bay counties. It is too bad that an error was not corrected in the latest edition concerning the Old Custom House in Monterey.

The article read: "The Custom House now belongs to the United States Government and is well conditioned, having been restored by the State of California. It was marked by the Native Sons and Native Daughters of California, who have their local headquarters in the old building. A museum of local relics is also housed in it."

In the late 1800s, the Custom House was declared surplus property by the U.S. Government and was

offered for sale. The property had been appraised for \$40 000. Ten citizens of Monterey raised \$10,000 and the State of California matched this amount to complete the purchase. It is now administered by the California Division of Beaches and Parks and is State Historical Monument No. 1.