

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

August 3, 1956

### **Wharves Collapse**

Today we submit a bit of waterfront history for our readers' interest. Previous to 1940 there was an iron pier in front of the Southern Pacific depot in Monterey. At one time it had been used by the Yacht club and the P. G. & E. had used it before natural gas came into being in Monterey. But these folks no longer needed its facilities, so it was finally disposed of, much to the displeasure of the train crowd, the photographers and the various gulls, pelicans and other sea birds who rested there.

The wharf in question had once carried a pipeline through which the gas plant got sea water to use in the "scrubber." When gas was manufactured here, there was an idea that the P. G. & E. owned the wharf. But that proved to be false history when a reporter went investigating this theory.

This reporter, who was Albert Campbell, now a teacher in the high school at Oroville, California, interviewed a number of early residents including George Harper, Mrs. Mike Noon, Allen Knight, Mrs. Millie Birks, W. E. Parker, the fire chief and others, about this historic wharf which was being torn down just 16 years ago this month. His story proved most interesting and is part of Monterey's historic heritage.

George Harper told Campbell that he thought that very likely the wharf was the last remnant of a 1300-foot wharf which was built by the narrow gauge railroad company many years before he came to Monterey to make his home in 1886.

Mrs. Noon, the widow of a former wharfinger of the Pacific Coast Steamship company which built the present Fishermen's wharf (at least it used to be the fishermen's wharf), came forward with a good story. Mrs. Noon died a few years ago in her Monterey home.

Mrs. Noon remembered a lot of things about wharves in Monterey. Her husband had been wharfinger for 30 years, beginning about 1878 and resigning in 1898 to run for the office of city marshal, a job which he succeeded in winning. She said that the little wharf had always been known as the "Depot Wharf."

Mrs. Noon was more interested in telling the reporter about her husband, Mike. He had been a whaler, "one of the very best" she said and then remembered how

he had killed the last whale to be killed off Monterey in about 1914 and how in 1900 he had killed three whales inside of two weeks for the whaling company at Point Lobos.

It was also interesting to have Mrs. Noon tell that the building now known as the First Theatre was at one time a rooming house for whalers as was the building officially called the Whaling Station. Earlier it was a dwelling house arranged on the general style of "flats" and in one of these Mrs. Noon was born— "back when a chap named Lincoln was President of the United States."

Mrs. Birks welcomed Mr. Campbell with this statement —"I should say I do remember the narrow-gauge wharf and the Sunday afternoon when it fell down—but I don't know if this little wharf that is being taken out now is the remains of the wharf or not.

"Oh, it was in the early '80's just after the Del Monte Hotel was built that the wharf fell down. The railroad used to run week-end excursions from San Francisco at some special rate. Of course, all the visitors would go out on the wharf to take a look at the boats and the water. One Sunday afternoon, just as the train was getting ready to pull out, down the wharf went. There was left standing just a little section at the far end and a little at the shore. There were no people on it at the time—or at least only one or two out on the end which did not fall."

But falling down of wharves seems to have been one of the best-established traditions of Monterey. There was a little wharf once upon a time which touched the shore at that rocky point across the tracks from the one-time Presidio storehouse by the Southern Pacific tracks.

It, too, was a popular center of interest for Sunday afternoon strollers. One such Sunday a little schooner which had either brought or was taking on cargo was lying there and —"I don't know whether it was the pulling of the little schooner or the weight of things on the wharf, but it fell down," Mrs. Noon said. The incident had made considerable impression upon her as a young girl.

There are scores of local people who remember the collapse of the wharf located where Fishermen's Wharf is now, when there was a steam schooner alongside on the wharf was overloaded with cases of canned sardines. That was in the early 1920's.