

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

September 3, 1956

Wild Indians Here

It is difficult to believe that 100 years ago there were wild Indians on the Monterey Peninsula, but the Rev. Walter Colton tells us in his diary "Three Years in California," there were at least three. He wrote on Sept. 5: "I encountered on my hunting excursion today a wild Indian, with a squaw and a papoose. They were on horses, he carrying a bow, with a large quiver of arrows hung at his side, and she with the child in the bunt of her blanket, at the back. They were dashing ahead in the wake of their dogs, which were in hot chase of a deer.

"The squaw stuck to her fleet animal as firmly as the saddle in which she sat and took but little heed of the bogs and gullies over which she bounded. His glance was directed to a ridge of rocks, over which he seemed to expect the deer to fly from the field of wild oats through which the chase lay. I watched them till they disappeared in their whirlwind speed over the ridge."

Whether the deer fell into their hands or escaped, Colton did not discover, but he wrote that he would not hazard his neck as they did theirs for all the game in the California forests. "But this to them is life; they seek no repose between the cradle and the grave."

Colton's diary entrance for Sept. 7th concerns the whaling industry in California in 1846. He wrote that the inhabitants had been looking for a whaleship, or spouter, as she is called by the sailors, to come into Monterey harbor, and take care of the whales which are blowing around them. A ship belonging to the genuine Nantucket line, came to anchor the evening before. She had been on the northwest coast in pursuit of the black whale; but found them so wild, owing to the havoc that has been made among them, that she captured very few, Colton learned from the crew.

That morning her boats were lowered, and their men put off in pursuit of one of these monsters. The fellow plunged as they approached land was out of sight in some moments, when he hove up at a distance, according to reports of onlookers. "There she blows!" was the cry, and off they darted again; and only a deep foaming eddy remained. The next time he lifted they were more successful and lodged one of their harpoons. The reel was soon out, and away the boat flew, like a

little car attached to a locomotive. But the harpoon at last slipped its hold, and the whale escaped. "The loss seemed proportionate to the bulk of the monster," in the opinion of the Rev. Mr. Colton, the builder of Colton Hall.

We, on the Monterey Peninsula, frequently remark that we are tired of the summer fog. Colton lived through these days also, for he noted this in his diary on Sept. 8, 1846: "We have had for the last five days hardly an hour of sunshine, owing to the dense fogs which prevail here at this season. These murky vapors fill the whole atmosphere; you seem to walk in them alone, like one threading a mighty forest. A transcendentalist might easily conceive himself a ghost, wandering among the cypresses of a dead world. But, being no ghost or transcendentalist, I had a fire kindled, a fire kindled, and found refuge from the fog in its cheerful light and warmth."

Real estate values were the subject of much conversation in California a hundred years ago as they are today. On Sept. 10th, Colton noted: "My alcalde duties required me today to preside at the executive sale of two dwelling houses and a store. I was about as "au fait" at the business as Dr. Johnson at the auction of widow Thrales' brewery, when he informed the bidders, in his towering language, that he offered them, not a few idle vats and worms, but the potentiality of becoming rich."

"The property in question sold well, forty per cent higher than it would have under the Mexican flag. All real estate has risen since our occupation of the territory. This tells what the community expects, in terms which none can mistake," Colton wrote.

A Californian told Colton that he considered his land worth 40,000 dollars more than it was before the United States flag was raised. The old office holders, he said, may perhaps grumble at the change, but they whose interest lies in the soil silently exult. "They desire no ebb in the present tide of political affairs."