

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

October 4, 1957

The Naming of Tassajara

There is a delightful story concerning the Carmel Indians and the origin of the name of the hot springs of Tassajara. It goes something like this according to legend.

There was once an Indian chief who was all powerful. He was the favorite of the Sun God that ruled the universe and from this deity received his powers. So supernatural was he that he could hear the grass grow and see his enemies and game a day's travel away. The chief had a young sister who was very dear to his heart and when she became stricken with a strange malady, the hills and dales were ransacked for herbs by the medicine man for a cure. Everything failing the brother started her on a trip to the big water hoping that the ocean air would benefit her. By the time the stream now known as Tassajara Creek was reached the sister had failed so much that it was not possible to proceed further. All the powers of the chief had failed, and her life was ebbing slowly.

Finally, in desperation he supplicated his Sun God offering his own body as a sacrifice. He fell prone on the ground. Although it was mid-day the sun was soon obscured and the each became dark. The body of the chief stiffened, and he grew ridged and was turned to stone. As he dissolved into a mass of rock, hot tears poured forth. The sister fell prostrate over the place where he made the sacrifice, and was soon covered with the hot tears of her sorrowing brother. When she rose she was completely cured.

The news of the miracle spread among the Indian tribes of California, and, it is said, that after that every year the lame, the halt and the blind wend their weary way to bathe in the hot waters which poured from the rock where the chief had died.

Another supposedly true story concerning Tassajara Springs of later years is that the grizzly and the cinnamon bears that lived in the vicinity of the springs were much lighter in color than those found elsewhere. It has been said that W. E. P. Hartnell sent a pelt of what he thought was a silver bear to the museum in London, but it turned out to be only a cinnamon bear of extreme size and with a much lighter coat than that type of bear usually would have.

It was exactly 188 years ago yesterday, Oct. 3, 1769 that Portola, seeking the port of Monterey reached Point of Pines, thus standing on the very rim of Monterey Bay without recognizing it. Five days later, he and his companions camped on the present Pajaro River, which the soldiers so named because they found a bird there which the Indians had stuffed. On Oct. 18, Portola crossed an arroyo at the site of the present city of Santa Cruz which he so named.

Another date that Monterey should remember was Oct. 19, 1842, when, under the erroneous impression that the United States and Mexico were at war, Com. Thomas ap Catesby Jones commander of the United States Pacific Squadron, took possession of Monterey, hoisting the American flag over the "Castillo". The Californians signed the articles of capitulation without a struggle. Two days later, however, upon discovering that he had been misinformed about the war and the suspected secession of California to England Com. Jones took down the American flag, restored the town to the Californians, fired a salute to the Mexican flag and sent a message of apology to Gen. Manuel Micheltoarena at Santa Barbara who was then on his way north from Mexico to assume the governorship.

It was in 1845, Oct 17th, that Secretary of State James Buchanan secretly instructed U. S. Consul Thomas Oliver Larkin at Monterey to encourage Spanish Californians to resist English and French overtures, and intimated that the United States would render her its " kind offices."