

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

April 3, 1957

### **The Custom House Robbery**

"The first public school was opened in Colton Hall by Rev. Samuel Willey, sent out by the American Home Missionary Society, in the spring of 1849, but the school, was closed six months later for the meeting of the Constitutional-Convention." so wrote Lulu Pyburn in a paper-covered booklet published by the Monterey Public School in 1896.

"In 1853 Angie Little taught for a while in Colton Hall, but when that building was sold to the city for a court-house, she moved her school to a frame house on California street, now belonging to the Escolle estate," little Miss Pyburn wrote in the school publication. From here she went into El Cuartel. The first year she received \$100 a month. The old Cuartel had been built by order of Gov. Alvarado in 1840, to be used as headquarters of the Spanish soldiery. After the Americans took possession of California, American soldiers, with their wives, occupied El Cuartel, but in 1852 they were removed to Benica, and El Cuartel then served as a schoolhouse until the removal of the county seat from Monterey to Salinas in 1873, when the county buildings, including Colton Hall, became the property of Monterey school district, and Colton Hall thereafter was used as a public school.

Our young historian continues: "As the population increased and other facilities were needed, the primary, a two-class building, was added; and later, in 1892, the large new nine-class building was completed. After one year's use the new building was destroyed by fire, July, 1893. This was a severe loss to Monterey, not alone in the destruction of her beautiful school building, but the school library, a collection including old and rare volumes besides the Spanish library, all of which had been donated to the school by the town."

"The following year Colton Hall and the old primary building were reoccupied, and two classes were domiciled at the old Catholic school building. 1895 saw the erection of the present new building and the occupation of three classrooms in it. Financial difficulties came upon the district with the occupation of the first new house, and the year closing in 1893, school lasted but eight months; but in 1894, nine months; in 1895, eight months; but during the year just closed (1896), a 10 month term has been reached."

Another pupil, Hattie Morey, wrote:

"The Old Pacific House, one of the historic buildings of Monterey, was erected about 1847 by Thomas O. Larkin, who traded it to James McKinley for a piece of land in San Francisco, on which a large building has been erected; that property is now worth thousands of dollars."

McKinley rented the building to a Mrs. Ashley for a rooming house. Mrs. Jane Allen, then a resident of Monterey, bought it and used it for the same purpose. The rooms above were used for boarders, and those below rented for various purposes, as court room, jail and store-house. All the windows, above and below, were iron barred, with heavy shutters.

"One of the famous cases tried in this building when court was held there was the case against the thieves, in 1890, who stole the money from the Custom House. On Dec. 8, 1850, at 8 o'clock in the evening, a band of thieves entered the building and took \$30,000, including watches, rings, diamonds, and other valuable articles. They buried the plunder in part of the Old Allen House, (First Wooden House which stood near Munras, Alvarado and Pearl Streets).

"This famous case was tried in the Pacific House when court was held there before Judges Merritt and Estee, but there being no jury, they were unable to decide the case, so it was compromised, and the owners took half and the thieves took the other half. They were then given 12 hours to leave the town. In San Francisco they committed other crimes. They were captured and hung, but before their execution all their crimes were confessed, including the Custom House robbery."