

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Old Monterey In the News

In 1951 a very rare first volume of the Monterey Sentinel was presented to the Pioneer Society of California. Paul Parker, a former newspaper publisher of Salinas, told me of this acquisition and of many of the interesting facts it contained about Monterey happenings of 1885, the year of its publication. Herewith we will repeat some of the most important items of that day.

In the June 16 issue we discover that the first planting of alfalfa in California was made by David Spence in the lots alongside his home in 1841. All the agriculture authorities give the date between 1851 and 1854 but no one knew the exact date or place or by whom it was planted. They say the seed came from Chile whereas it came from Peru, Spence's home, before he came to Monterey in 1824. Parker thinks that this first planting warrants a marker at the old Spence home. The final photograph (**paragraph?**) of the article quotes an old Spanish saying that about proves itself: "Alfalfa is considered one of the most profitable crops to raise. It is found to pay even better than silver, gold or copper mines."

Here are a few more interesting items: In the drought of 1834 there was no drinking water in Monterey, it all had to be brought from the Carmel River; there was not a blade of grass and the Estero was so dry one could walk across it, yet the next year it rained so hard that all the adobe bricks being manufactured were melted; the first death, the first marriage and the first baptism in Monterey; the hotel ads carried the line "also good stable accommodations"; on May 17, 1858, the lynching of four Indians for killing a Frenchman named Picart; many ads in Spanish; the sheriff's sale of the Tularcitos Rancho, 28,600 acres for \$4,445.45, the ranch boundaries were given as the Mountains of Tularcitos and Jasshaguam.

The year 1855 was a dry year and 5,000 head of sheep that had been driven from New Mexico headed for the mines reached San Juan and learned that there was no feed remaining, so they were sold for \$9 each; a graphic account of the killing of Wall, Williamson, De la Torre, Beckwith, Layton, and the wounding of others named in the stories of the Roach-Belcher feud, which we have

told in this column and which made history in Monterey in those days

Reporting the first planting of alfalfa has reminded us of Jean Francois Galoup de la Perouse, and his introduction of the potato in California. La Perouse, a Frenchman and the first friendly foreign visitor to Monterey, was in command of the French frigates Boussole and Astrolabe, when they dropped anchor at Monterey on Sept. 14, 1786.

He remained in California ten days and saw only that part of it in the immediate vicinity of Monterey. Through gifts to the missionaries and the military officials, he distributed the plantings of potatoes, it is said. He also provided an interesting and informative account of his observations - highly critical sometimes - in his "Voyages de la Perouse autour du monde" in Paris in 1797, an English translation appearing in London in 1799.