

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Old Monterey Tales

A short time after the Monterey History and Art Assn. was organized in 1930, the membership gathered at the San Carlos Hotel for dinner and to hear Paul Parker of Salinas spin some tales of life in Monterey in the earlier days. Mr. Parker was a newspaper man, a long-time resident (we are not sure but that he was a native of the county) and now a resident of Berkeley.

The Herald had a news story of the dinner party and his talk which we have just read with interest and which we are repeating today, now that Monterey's birthday, June 3rd, is so near at hand. Mary Adda Reade, who is remembered by many friends on the Peninsula, was a member of The Herald staff in 1931 when the dinner was held and reported Mr. Parker's entertaining talk that evening.

"We do not realize the charm of the good old days of Monterey" . . . the words of the president Col. Roger S. Fitch, went unfinished because Carmel Martin insisted that Paul Parker tell just once more charming story of the "good" old days. Thus, began the report of the party 27 years ago.

Mrs. Reade wrote: "Before the Monterey History and Art Association, gathered for dinner last evening, Paul Parker of Salinas bared all scandal (we hope it was all) of the early days in Monterey when the only criminals worth noticing were horse thieves and murderers. Sixty-three murders in one year and not a single 'legal killing.'

"Thirteen men were shot, hanged, decapitated or otherwise annoyed, over one woman's money. Since time has placed these bold, bad bandits securely under the sod, Parker's tragedies raised clear ripples of laughter without raising a hair on end. One guesses these conditions were reversed when he first heard some of the tales from his father."

We were present at this dinner and well remember that as astonishing as these stories were in themselves, was the manner in telling them. Yarn after yarn was spun by Parker, authenticated by dates, locations, names and records, without reference to notes. The tales were colored enough to reveal the talents of a true storyteller and so accurate as to prove Parker a real historian. We must repeat this program at some future

membership meeting for the enjoyment of newcomers to the Peninsula.

Stories of early Indians of the coast country and the hills preceded the "exciting thrillers." Their habit of life and relations with neighboring tribes were realistically described with incidents illustrating both. Parker blamed the coming of clothes and shelter for the ravages of consumption among the tribes, but who knows, it might have been their diet since they eagerly ate dead seals and whales washed ashore.

That evening Paul Parker said that should he ever be missed from the county he would probably be found at Fort Savannah, digging for a copper box. He was on the scent of one buried in 1848 by soldiers of the U. S. Army. Laura Bride Powers, now deceased, first curator of the Old Custom House and author of "Old Monterey," spoke briefly. Carmel Martin suggested the association interest itself in a celebration or observance of the 150th anniversary of Father Serra's death; Charlton Fortune, then one of Monterey's most prominent artists and now a resident of Scotland, told of a plan to bring the work of local artists before the pupils of the high school and of Luis Moro's generosity in talking to the young people and inviting them to visit his studio.

The late Luis Slevin, a favorite citizen of Carmel in those days, had a large collection of photos of Monterey adobes taken before and after alterations, the two groups dating about 1902 and 1932.

Col. Fitch had many items, as president, to present to the members, among them an announcement that money has been donated to place permanent markers at more than 20 historical spots around the Peninsula. That number has probably doubled since 1931. Gordon Knowles pleased his audience greatly with two solos, for which Mrs. Knowles accompanied him. He sang "Poor Man's Garden" and "Water Boy."

Mrs. Vera Peck Millis and Col. Gibson, both now deceased, and George Seideneck, one of the Peninsula's favorite artists and photographer, composed the committee in charge of the successful evening and furnished the beautiful wild flowers that decorated the tables.