

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Monterey in Harpers**

In an old Harper's Monthly published in October 1882, we came across a delightful description of a journey from San Francisco to Monterey made by a writer who arrives in California from Mexico, in the months of the dry season.

As our informant travels along his thoughts and impressions are presented in these lines: "One had been inclined to expect a good deal of novelty and picturesqueness from these towns of romantic Sans and Santas and Loses and Dels, and feels rather aggrieved not to get it. The absence of Spanish picturesqueness is explained by the fact that there are rarely any original settlements corresponding to the present names, which were taken from ranches, springs, or mines in the neighborhood. On the arrival of the Americans there were but 13,000 Spanish or Mexicans in all California - a territory as large as New York, Pennsylvania, and the six New England states put together."

We like this reference to California names: "Let us believe, however, that their pleasing designations will act as a subtle stimulus, and that all these communities will live up to their names with an artistic development which they never could have attained had they been simple Smithvilles and Jonesvilles."

This description, which we are sure we have all too often noticed, is well expressed by the writer, who is not named: "In the strong, warm sunshine of California any chance object on the bare rolling slopes casts an intense shadow. The spot under a distant tree is as purplish dark as if a pit were dug there. The shadow of a large bird flying low is followed as distinctly along the ground as the bird itself. One becomes reconciled at last to the brown tone."

Hence our author of 1882 comes down finally to the old Spanish capital of Monterey with this comment: "Here at last is something to commend from the point of view of the picturesque, without mental reservation. Monterey has a population which still, in considerable part, speaks Spanish only, and retains the impress of the Spanish domination, and little else. When one is told in his own country that anybody with whom he is about to have dealings 'does not speak English,' he infers naturally that it is spoken brokenly, or only a little. But

at Monterey it means absolutely not a word. There are Spanish signs on the shops, and Spanish advertisements as the Wheeler & Wilson Maquinas a Coser, on the fences.

"Las rosas son muy secas (the roses are very dry), says Senorita Cualquirea, apologetically, as we enter her little garden, laid out in numerous equal parallelograms, behind an adobe wall topped with red tile."

(The writer must have meant Senorita Maria Ignacio Bonifacio.) We have come to call, and to admire, though they are falling to pieces in the wind, and the large yellow and red roses, and her long, low white adobe house.

"The senorita is a little thin old lady of 50 years now (1886) who had a romance with an American officer, so it is said, 30 years ago. The roses are indeed very dry at Monterey," the traveler notes.

"As seen from a distance, scattered loose and white on the forest-crested slope of the fine crescent-shaped bay of Monterey, the little city, which now perhaps has 2,000 inhabitants, hardly shows at once its real dissimilarity to other places. But when it is entered it is found to consist almost exclusively of whitewashed adobe houses, and straggling mud-colored adobe walls, forming enclosures, known as 'corrals,' for animals and the like. Plenty of them are abandoned; and at frequent intervals is encountered some abandoned old adobe barracks, or government house, or military prison of historic fame, with its whitewash gone, holes in its walls, and some bits of broken grating and balcony hanging aimlessly from it, only waiting the first opportunity to let go."