

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Visitor's Viewpoint: 1882

From a visitor's viewpoint of Monterey in 1882, the only step toward a revival and recovery of prestige of the Old Capital days was the Hotel Del Monte and continued growth of the tourist industry. Establishment of the great hotel, he said, was the thing that would make Monterey, instead of Santa Cruz across the bay, the leading seaside resort of the Pacific Coast.

This opinion was expressed in a special article in Harper's Monthly magazine published 76 years ago.

"Though not so grandiose a direction, this is clearly the one for the present in which the peculiar conditions of the old capital are most likely to tell," the visitor writes. "The summer boarder can revel among its historic remains and traditions of greatness when they appear good for nothing else. The Hotel Del Monte is a beautiful edifice, not surpassed in its kind at any American watering-place and not equaled, I think, at any of them in its charming groves of live-oaks and pines, the profusion of cultivated flowers by which it is surrounded, and the air of comfort existing at the same time with its elegant arrangements. That is the way with our friends of the Pacific coast. If they do not always stop in their zeal to follow eastern ideas and patterns, when they really do attempt something in the same line, they are more likely than not to surpass us."

In another paragraph our informant of 1882 writes of the climate, and vegetation in Monterey: "The local climate, according to statistical tables, is remarkably even. The mean temperature is 52 degrees in January and 58 in July. This strikes one as very cool for bathing, but the present mode is to bath in the tanks of a large bathhouse, to which seawater is introduced artificially warmed, instead of in the sea itself. In other respects, the place seems nearly as desirable a resort at one time of the year as another.

"The quaint town is always here; so are the wild rocks with their gossiping families of gulls and pelicans, and the romantic drives through extensive forests of pine and cypress. There are varieties of these two trees - the latter of which is like the Italian stone pine - peculiar to Monterey alone. They are hoary with age and hanging moss. They are contorted into all fantastic shapes imagined in Dore's illustrations to the 'Inferno,' and

they stand by the most savage points of rocks, where the breakers toss up handfuls of white spray on them, 40 feet in the air, as if in amity and greeting."

The Chinese, village has long been gone from the shore line here but it was still here in 1882 when the Harper's Monthly reporter visited Monterey and he wrote of it: "Along the beach at this remote point of the great Pacific Ocean is a lonely Chinese settlement. The veritable Celestials with hardly a word of English among them, paste crimson papers of hieroglyphics on the shanty residences, burn tapers before their gods, and fish for a living in such junks and small boats as are seen at Hong Kong and Canton. They prepare, too, the abalone meat and shells for their home market, we shall find that the Chinese element, which one had thought of as confined to San Francisco, constitutes a feature of exceeding quaintness and picturesqueness throughout all California.