

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

April 1, 1959

### **Monterey's First Wharves**

Because of the approach of the annual Salmon Derby and the frequent references we have in our daily lives to the old wharf, the new wharf and the Monterey beach, it might be of interest to repeat some of the history which we have been able to discover in our search for items of historical interest.

Old fisherman's wharf juts out into the Monterey Bay in front of the north end of the Custom House, the oldest federal building west of the Rockies. It is not the only wharf that Monterey has used and enjoyed these many years. There was the Larkin wharf which preceded it, a wharf now gone - directly in front of the Southern Pacific depot, and the new wharf built by the city of Monterey in more modern times.

The first wharf at the Custom House site was built in 1845 by Thomas O. Larkin; the second by David Jacks. The original pier, according to historical records, cost \$8,000, and was constructed of stones quarried by captured military deserters, Indians, and civil prisoners. A Mexican citizen, Esteban de la Torre, furnished 1,500 cartloads of stone at \$1 a load, and an early English settler, W. R. Gamer, sold Larkin the piles at \$4 each.

In 1870, when the growth of commerce made necessary the enlargement of the wharf, the City of Monterey raised funds for the purpose.

After showing the population "how to build better homes," Larkin turned to municipal improvements. He had arrived in Monterey in 1832 when it was still a primitive settlement with only a few dozen houses overlooking the crescent-shaped beach. Still the capital and only port of entry, it had no facilities for deep-water commerce, except for abundant anchorage room. Larkin was familiar with the problems of the ship captains in landing their goods to comply with the California custom codes.'

Larkin proposed to the governor that a wharf should be built, not only to dignify the port but also to provide a place where the officers and men could land without wading from the bows of ships' boats through the waves. According to Larkins Papers and Underhill's "From Cowhides to Golden Fleece," it required suave arguments and much persuasion before the state would agree to pay the bills.

The wharf was finally agreed upon. Larkin undertook to build it. Timber was now abundant, but skilled labor and heavy tools were lacking. Carpenters were lent by ships in port, and in due time California had its first wharf. Incidentally, Underhill reports in his book, Larkin was not paid for the wharf, by California, by Mexico, or by her assigns, the United States of America.

This wharf was located between the first two buildings on the right-hand side as today's wharf is approached from shore, where a group of large rocks may be seen today.

Now for the history of the old steel wharf which jutted out into the bay opposite the depot. Mrs. Millie Birks, one of the old-timers here in Monterey, told a reporter from the Monterey Peninsula Herald back in 1949, that she certainly did remember - the narrow gauge wharf, as it was called, and the Sunday afternoon when it fell down - but she did not know if this little wharf that was being taken out at that time was the remains of that wharf or not.

The late W. E. Parker for many years the fire chief of Monterey and before that era the Wells Fargo agent in Monterey, told reporter Albert Campbell: "Oh, it was in the early 80s just after Hotel Del Monte was built that the wharf fell down. The railroad used to run weekend excursions from San Francisco at some special rate. Of course, all the visitors would go out on the wharf to look at the boats and the water. One Sunday afternoon just as the train was ready to go out, down the wharf went. There was left standing just a little section at the far end."

(To be continued.)