

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Falling Down Wharves

Today we continue our story of the several wharfs which have been used and enjoyed by homefolk and visitors to Monterey since Larkin built the first wharf in 1845.

Falling-down wharves seems to be one of the best-established traditions of Monterey. The late Mrs. Mike Noon told the story of a small wharf which existed when she was a very young girl. It touched the shore at the rocky point across the track from the Presidio storage barn by the Southern Pacific track.

It too was a popular center of interest for Sunday afternoon strollers. One such afternoon a little schooner which either had brought in or was taking on cargo was lying there and all of a sudden the wharf collapsed - maybe it was the weight of the things on the wharf or the pulling of the little schooner that caused the fall, but it made a deep impression upon the little girl.

The little pier opposite the depot which was demolished in 1940 was the remains of the old Monterey and Salinas Valley Railroad company's pier. There had been considerable repair and rebuilding, to be sure, but the pier had been on the one site since the narrow-gauge firm put it there in 1874. The other part of the pier had been destroyed by the elements and the shore end of it had been rebuilt using railroad iron (rails) for piling. It had been used by everyone in town who had any use for a pier and there had been no wharfage charges. It was known to all as "the depot wharf."

Chief Parker, the "grand old man" of the fire department, said that his first acquaintance with the local waterfront began in 1887, the year the Hotel Del Monte burned down for the first time, when he was sent here by the Wells Fargo Express Co. to handle the firm's local business. His office had been in a little building about 100 yards east of "the depot wharf."

There are scores of people here who remember the collapse of the new Fishermen's Wharf when there was a steam schooner alongside and the warehouse on the wharf was overloaded with cases of canned sardines. That was in the early '20s.

Marketing of fish in those days was absurdly simple. The general idea was that a fisherman shipped his daily

catch to some firm of his choice in San Francisco. On Monday checks came by mail. If a fisherman was dissatisfied with his return from one company, he would ship to another firm the next week.

One old-time fisherman told this story: "The system amounted virtually, to making the dealers bid for the fish " Others said it virtually made peons out of the fishermen, so there was probably as much discussion about the price of fish in those days as there has been in later years.

There must have been some picturesque scenes on the wharf in those days as everything was done by hand. Fish were hoisted from the boats in baskets on hand lines. Then they were wheeled to the express office in boxes on hand trucks.

Boats were handled by sail power till the early days of this century when small, powered gas boats began to be used. And then, probably around 1914 or 15, the city decided to move the whole fish business over to the present Fishermen's Wharf - fishermen's wharf now in name only.