

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Yesterday's Clocks

Clocks have always been a fascinating subject in history. The several historical monuments in Monterey have some very old and very interesting timepieces in them. There is a grandfather's clock in the Custom House which once belonged to Gov. Alvarado and another whose former owner was James Watson, a pioneer of Monterey county. The latter is a mantel clock and was brought to Monterey by W.E.P. Hartnell, administrator of the missions, who raffled it here for \$250. Mrs. James Watson won the raffle.

The Alvarado clock was purchased by the Monterey History and Art Assn. in 1944. It has been known through the years as "The Governor's Clock," it having been in the possession of Gov. Juan Bautista Alvarado for many years. It stands in the fireplace corner of the old Custom House and when wound up with a crude iron handle on one side, it plays a tune, much to the amusement of all who are privileged to hear it.

This clock was made in Germany about the year 1789 and purchased by a Britisher who "installed it in his London home where it remained until brought to Monterey by Hartnell in 1829. The early Montereyans, with their faculty for apt names promptly nicked it "El Monitor de Tiempo" and it has continued to be known by that name to this day.

When Alvarado became governor in 1843, he purchased the clock from Hartnell for 500 "cueros" (hides). It remained in the Alvarado family until purchased by David Spence who gave it to Anastacia, a domestic in the Spence home.

The clock finally found a home for a time in the reading room of Jules Simoneau's restaurant on Pearl street, torn down several years to open a street from Tyler to Munras.

The second clock at the Custom House is on loan to the History and Art Assn. for an indefinite period, through the kindness of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Pioda of Salinas. Mr. Pioda's great grandfather, James Watson, was the former owner of the clock. He came from England about 1830 and settled in Monterey where he was a competitor of Thomas Oliver Larkin in the mercantile business.

When Mr. Watson died, he bequeathed the clock to his daughter, Narcisa; because, as his will recites, 'I know it will be taken care of.' Narcisa was Mr. Pioda's grandmother, Mrs. E. L. Williams.

An old Dutch clock at the Stevenson House was a gift to the History and Art Assn. from Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Hill Gilbert.

Now that we have written first about clocks in the State Monuments in Monterey, we will write about the one just received in the old capitol building in Benicia. This clock was purchased in Benicia in 1854 and still keeps good time. It was just what was needed for the wall of the Assembly room in the Benicia State Capitol. The clock was given to the Historical Society there by a descendant of the original buyer. In addition to keeping good time it even has chimes to strike the hour and they work also.

News and Views, the official publication of the Division of Beaches and Parks, reports: "Besides being approximately the same age as the capitol building, the clock is unique in that its history is hand written on the wooden back of the clock. According to the account, the clock was bought in Benicia in 1854 for \$8 by William H. Turner who had crossed the plains with ox team in 1851. He carried the clock on horseback to his first home four miles northeast of Fairfield, for which he had paid the first money in the Solano County Land Office.