

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

January 15, 1960

Ambition At The Consulate

France was an important factor in the history of California prior to its acquisition by the United States and she was as anxious to get a foothold here as either Great Britain or the United States. After, the capture of Monterey in 1842 by Commodore Jones, France took immediate steps to place a consul in California.

The exact date of the first French consul is not known but as early a Nov. 3, 1842, Francis Guisot minister of foreign affairs, wrote to one Boserons, whom he addressed as Consul at Monterey. Later, however, on Oct. 28, 1843, the fiery Louis Gasquet was appointed and on his arrival some time later he established his headquarters in the adobe building at Fremont and Abrego streets. The adobe is now the Girl Scout House in El Estero Park.

A complete story of the French Consulate in California from 1843-1846 ran serially in the Quarterly of the California Historical Society. The author was Abraham P. Nasatir, who was accorded the privilege of translating the documents in the archives of the ministry of foreign affairs in Paris. These archives were taken from "a box dedicated to the consulate at Monterey" and consist of letters written from the French Consulate here in Monterey.

From the number of letters sent out of this now historic building, it evidently was one of Monterey's busiest places during the roaring forties."

That this building was also the scene of much entertaining is seen from one of the letters written by Gasquet while en route to Monterey. He was asking for funds for the consulate and says:

"He will only be able to install himself there after having made costly repairs and changes. He will be obliged to furnish it and as the agent who will represent France and will be called upon to receive the authorities and influential men of the country, as well as officers of the royal marines who will come into these quarters, he cannot content himself with the more than simple furniture of the Californians. He will have to bring complete furnishing from Paris, for if he wished to buy them here, the same furniture would cost him four or five times as much. And moreover, must we not take into consideration the position of this agent? Relegated

to the end of the earth in a paltry town which offers no resources against boredom, deprived of the joys of family, what would remain to him if he did not have pleasant quarters where he might find in his comfort a compensation for his isolation? He will be obliged to hire at least two house servants and even then will be badly served and robbed in the bargain. The Indians are not adaptable to different tasks. They believe in the division of labor: that is why I say it will require at least two servants."

With the French Consulate in Monterey, France became a real menace, as her people were the only foreigners liked by the natives and Consul Gasquet was continually writing of the fertile country and fine opportunity for a French colony. He asked for a gunboat to be held in Monterey Bay for its "moral effect," and for his government to establish a protectorate in California. He complains of the number of American immigrants and the foothold they were making. France was having internal troubles at home, however, and could not listen to her ambitious consul at Monterey.

His picture of the Mexican rule was illuminating. He wrote: "everyone here wants to command and none obey." He reports the swaggering drunken Micheltoreno's "cholos" robbing and killing and it was through his efforts that Mexico made amends for the assaulting and robbing of sailors from the French whaler 'Angelina," an incident that caused international complications.