

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Mrs. Milton Little

There was once upon a time a gracious lady living in Monterey who with a coal oil lamp in her window each night guided the fishermen home from the catch. That good lady was Mrs. Milton Little, the wife of the builder of the Kimball Hotel on lower Alvarado street.

Their daughter, Mrs. Mary Elsmore, told in an interview before her death, of the worthwhile service performed by her mother from this zinc house in the very early days.

"Families were larger then. Just think there were twelve of us. One thing I remember well was the coal-oil lamp that mother burned in her room all night. This she did so if any of the children woke, they could easily find their way to light and comfort," Mrs. Elsmore related. She also remembered that they were living near the harbor, and the fishermen used the light from that lamp as a guide to run into port. "Of course, way out, there was a lighthouse which the sailors sighted as they entered the bay. Then they would look for the light from Chinatown, but if there was a fog as they neared shore, they would need directing from our light," she told the reporter of her day.

"Mrs. Elsmore remembered that her mother did not realize that she was providing that special service until one day a captain of one of the ships which came into Monterey inquired for Mrs. Little. When she confessed to being the lady he was looking for, he said, "God bless you, Mrs. Little. You saved our lives last night, for if it had not been for your light in the window, we would have been unable to make the port."

As time went on and the Little children grew up, Mrs. Little still burned the light and when it stormed she placed it in the window with a mirror behind it and the window shade drawn back of that, so it would shine way out to sea. She still felt the responsibility for the boats, in fact she would have a gun fired if a freighter did not arrive when she expected it. If the vessel was safely making the harbor, they would signal with a return shot.

When Milton Little married Mary Eager about 1847, one of the gifts the bride received from her husband was an enormous spool bed. It had come from the east coast by way of the Horn to Monterey and being too large

and too heavy to be transferred from the sailing ship to the small boats available, it was thrown overboard, so the story goes, and floated ashore onto the beach at Monterey.

That bed is now one of the most prized possessions in one of the upper rooms of the Stevenson House on Houston street.

It was in 1848 that Mary Eager Little's mother, Mrs. Mary Eager, also of New York, sailed around the Horn with her five children and came to live in Monterey. She had been told that a sea voyage would be good for her children and that California was a good place to bring up children, thus she saw an opportunity to gratify her love of adventure.

The wedding of Milton Little and Mary, the eldest daughter of Mrs. Eager, took place in what is now known as the Robert Louis Stevenson House and Mather Cotton, then the mayor, or alcalde as he was then known, assisted by the chaplain of the Navy, read the marriage ceremony. That chaplain was Walter Colton, who also became alcalde and was the builder of Colton Hall.

On September 15, 1950 in Oakland, Walter Colton Little died at the age of 89 years. He was the son of Mr. and Mrs. Milton Little, pioneers of Monterey. He was named for Walter Colton who had officiated at his parent's wedding. He had attended school in El Cuartel and later in Colton Hall. Mr. Little became first city engineer in 1883 when the city was incorporated for the second time, remaining at the post for 20 years. He laid out the present system of streets, established the present grade of Alvarado street, surveyed portions of Pacific Grove as it was subdivided by the Pacific improvement company, and subdivided Seaside and Oak Grove. He trained Howard Severance who was city engineer for many years and who became his successor when Little moved to the Bay Area.