

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

October 7, 1960

### **The Old Whaling Station**

A history of the Old Whaling Station written by Miss Edith M. March, the granddaughter of David Wight, the builder, was presented to Mrs. Mary Greene, curator of the Custom House, in 1949, by Miss Ruth Magaw and her sister, Miss Winifred Magaw, who were visitors in Monterey during the centennial celebration in that year. The original letter is now on file at the Old Custom House where the sisters visited and became so interested in the old buildings and historical displays that they decided to contribute the old letters and documents given to them by Miss March before her death.

Miss March probably wrote the history of the Whaling Station, as it is now known, to read before a club meeting in, Los Angeles. Other letters and papers sent by Miss Magaw contribute bits of verifying evidence of the important history of the building and the life of the builders.

The paper written by Miss March is entitled: David Wight, owner and Builder of the Old Whaling Station at Monterey, California. It begins:

"My grandfather, David Wight, was born in Doddington, England, in 1818. Doddington is 10 miles south of Berwick-on-Tweed and the Scottish border, 10 miles west of Bamborough and Bambrough Castle, that fortress on the North Sea in Northumberland, built in 1070 A. D.

". . . I will never forget the day I took a motor trip from Berwick-on-Tweed to Bamborough and return. On the way up the east coast of Britain (this was in 1926) to Berwick where I stopped two days at Newcastle-on-Tyne where my mother, Isabel Wight Marsh, was born in 1840."

These two paragraphs, quoted from Miss March's paper, will give a picture of the birthplaces of the young couple who pioneered in Monterey, as she writes:

"It must have been 1845 or '46 that they came up the coast from South America to Monterey and in 1847 grandfather built their new home just around the corner from the Custom House. My mother told me it was the first two-story adobe residence in Monterey. There were two-story hotels and office buildings. It is

next door to the first brick house in California built by Mr. Dickenson.

Mrs. Marsh continues: "I met Mr. Dickenson's daughter, Mrs. Lawrey, then an old lady in her 80's, living in Pacific Grove. She told me her father and husband, then a boy of 15, and supposedly some Indians helped my grandfather build his house. She remembered my grandmother, and said she was so glad to have a home at last. My mother remembered sitting in one of the downstairs windows and learning the letters of her alphabet, taught by her mother."

David Wight was the son of George Wight and a grandson of David Wight. This David Wight, the elder, was said, to be a builder and had built whole streets of homes in Carlisle, England. Miss March's mother was the eldest child of her great-grandfather, George Wight's eldest child, David. When she was one year old, she was taken on a sailing vessel to New Zealand, then the family went to Chili for a time before their arrival in Monterey.

"In August 1929, when in Monterey," Miss March continues, "I was able to see the interior of the old adobe with its two-foot thick walls. I was glad to find it so well preserved and furnished in antique style suitable to the place. In 1926 I had visited the old stone house of the Wight's in Ayton, Scotland, and I found that the plan of the adobe is almost exactly like that of the house in Ayton; the stairway leading straight up from a narrow hall from the front door, and rooms opening into the hall on each side. The ceilings are very low.

"Poor, grandmother!! Her joy in her new home did not last long, for in January 1848, gold was discovered in the California mountains and streams, and of course, grandfather and his family had to go to the goldfields. My mother said so great was the craze and rush for gold that people left their houses standing open. Grandfather likely sold his house to the Whalers of Monterey, as it faced the bay where many whales came, and they could sit in the upstairs windows with spy glasses and when whales were sighted go after them."

Let us, in Monterey, keep that memory and still be able to see the Bay of Monterey from the Whaling Station as we look from there across a green and flower planted plaza belonging to the City of Monterey!