

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Food Shortage In Monterey**

Because of the war that was raging around Monterey in 1847 food was very scarce, and Walter Colton had this to say about the conditions in his diary "Three Years in California."

"The scarcity of provisions in Monterey continues. Flour is \$25 the barrel and there is hardly a barrel in the place at that. We have here in our garrison about 150 men and are all on a short allowance of bread. There is wheat on the Salinas plains but the mules which should be there to grind it have gone to the wars. Even the sorry animal seems here not to be wholly insensible to military glory - the trumpet of fame finds an echo in his long ears.

"On account of this scarcity of food, there was difficulty of subsisting and Commodore Shubrick issued a circular, throwing open the port for six months to all articles of food. This step was characterized by sound policy as well as humanity. It will have the effect of lowering the exorbitant prices for these articles and go far to secure the good will of the citizens."

The first "foreigner", it is believed, to locate in Monterey was John Cameron, alias Juan Gilroy who arrived in 1814. Next came Robert Livermore in 1818, W. E. P. Hartnell and David Spence in 1822, William Gale in 1824, J. B. R. Cooper in 1823, and Alfred Robertson. They had landed for various purposes, some as deserters from merchant or whaling vessels, others to engage in business, while many came to obtain land and stock expecting that the United States would soon take the territory.

John Bidwell who arrived in Monterey in 1844 said that the leading foreigners at that time were Thomas O. Larkin, David Spence, W. E. P. Hartnell, James Watson, R. H. Thomas, Talbot H. Green, William Dickey, James McKinley, Milton Little and Dr. James Stokes. The principal natives were Gov. Micheltorena, Manuel Jimeno, Jose Castro, Juan Malarin, Francisco Arce and Don Jose Abrego.

To those who believe that absence makes the heart grow fonder, the following written by Walter Colton will appeal:

"Friday, January 29, 1849. The U.S. Ship Dale sailed today for Panama. She takes the mail, which will cross

the isthmus and reach the United States by way of the West Indies steamers. As soon as her destination was known, a hundred pens were at work, transferring to paper affections, fond remembrances, kind wishes and a thousand tender, anxious inquiries. How absence melts the heart. The cold is kindled, the indifferent clothed with interest, antipathies melt away, and endearments revive under undying power - I love the very stones over which my truant footsteps ran, and could kiss the birch rod that chastised my youthful follies. What language, then, to one who throws sunlight through the shadows of this dark world or paint the cherished hope that buds into being with childhood."

"During the rains which prevail at this season of the year," (1847) Walter Colton wrote, "a multitude of small streams rush from the hills which encircle Monterey into a lagoon which lies in the vicinity of the town. This natural basin, replenished by these foaming rivulets, presented this week quite a deep and spacious lake, and began to threaten with inundation the buildings upon its margin. As it lay several feet above the level of the sea, with only an intervening ridge of sand, it occurred to me that it would be a good scheme to cut a channel between the two. The work was easily accomplished; but my channel of two feet widened to forty, and the whole lake came rushing down in a tremendous torrent. It swept everything before it, and carried two boats which lay on the beach, so far out to sea that they have not been seen or heard from since. Even the seabirds, that have dashed about here among the breakers ever since they got out of their eggs, seemed frightened, and took wing. The lake disappeared; its waters, where the stars had mirrored themselves in tranquil beauty, went off to join the roaring ocean, and left on its sandy bottom only a few floundering fish. How tame is a lake when its bottom is laid bare! It is like the heart of a coquette when the illusions of love have fled.

Under date of April 12, 1847, Colton noted: "The old prison being too confined and frail for the safe custody of convicts, I have given orders for the erection of a new one. The prisoners themselves; they render the prison necessary, and it is but right they should put it up. Every bird builds its own nest."