

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **A Secure And Solid Jail**

In the minutes of the Court Sessions in the county clerk's office in Salinas dated June 5, 1854, there appeared this item: Orders were given for posting notices for sealed bids for a county jail. This news also related that S. W. Lovell formulated the plans for the jail in Monterey and they were adopted. On Oct. 3, 1854, the bid of C. F. Gilmer was the lowest for the construction of the jail, amounting to \$11,200.00, and he was given the contract. On Dec. 11, 1854, an entry was made regarding the construction of said building—"It appears that the contractor, C. F. Gilmer, has assigned to William Curtis \$1,200.00 of the contract, this assignment to take priority over other warrants for the jail and therefore the warrants were drawn to be paid to Curtis.

Another entry in Vol. A, Agreements, page 45 dated Dec. 20, 1854, states: Caleb Gilmer, who had the contract to build the jail at Monterey, signed an agreement with James McKinley, Gabriel d'Avila, William D. Robinson and C. J. Curtis, whereby he turned the contract over to them for completion, and thereafter the warrants were to be paid to them for the construction of the jail. Evidently C. J. Richards, named in a previous story as the contractor, was another who held the contract.

A few years ago, we found this bit about the Monterey jail in the Sept. 1, 1855, issue of the Monterey Sentinel, headed "More on the Jail." This newspaper was published in Monterey from June 1855 to June 1856, when it, and all its equipment, moved to Santa Cruz, the editor having accepted an invitation for free transportation to that city by schooner.

Through the kindness of the publisher of the Sentinel in Santa Cruz we were privileged to read and copy from the bound volumes of this newspaper for the year it was published in Monterey — 106 years ago.

In the story on the Monterey jail, which is attached to Colton Hall on the south, the editor reported that the supervisors have paid the contractor, Mr. H. DeGraw. The cost was \$16,000 to \$18,000 in all, and "as a place of security and a jail of solidity it cannot be surpassed by anything south of San Francisco." The funds had originally been set at about \$20,000, having been the

proceeds of a special taxation of 1 cent on the property in the county. After its collection, the "Court of Sessions" took the matter in hand for the erection of the jail.

"The jail is built of Monterey granite with the best ironwork that San Francisco could furnish. There is no wood used in the construction except the roof. The cells are sealed with blocks of stone; there is also a good wall around the jail, and all necessary conveniences inside, such as a well, kitchen, etc. It contains six large cells and a debtors' room besides a good-sized room for the jailer. The window in each cell is covered on the outside with a heavy plate of iron, firmly leaded in the wall and finely perforated so as to admit plenty of light and air to its inmates yet prevent any communications whatever, even though the person should climb the prison wall with such in view."

"The Court of the County is adjourning in Colton Hall," reported the Sentinel in its September issue of 1855.

"Colton Hall, built by Walter Colton, alcade of Monterey, was in these days the largest building in all of California."

The item went on to relate that Colton Hall had been thoroughly repaired and covered on the outside with a good coat of cement, which was supposed to be proof against any kind of weather.

"The upper story was a large room of grand proportions which has been divided and in it the cleric and sheriff of the county will hold their offices," wrote the editor.

'So that now the 'lugar' which has resounded to our national bands and which has witnessed our female native graces keeping time to the melodious sounds of the military band of General Riley, will be the repository of legal documents and the musty archives — so the world goes."