

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

April 27, 1961

Off The Coast Of Monterey

Captains Alejandro Malaspina and Jose Bustamante y Guerra made Monterey a port of call of scientific investigation in September 1791. This visit by an expedition which was probably Spain's greatest exploratory contribution to the age of enlightenment, placed California under the scrutiny of men of science, and left, the most extensive compiled record of data from the Hispanic periods, we learn from the introduction to "Malaspina in California," written by Donald C. Cutter and published by John Howell Books San Francisco.

While attempting to enter Monterey Bay and anchoring in the Port of Monterey, three anchors were lost not to be retrieved gain by this Spanish expedition, so we presume that they are still resting in the depths off Cypress or Point Pinos.

The Monterey History & Art Assn. recently sponsored a showing of the artwork of the artists who traveled with the Malaspina expedition of 1791-2. The exhibition was held in Casa Serrano in July, 1960, during which many of the books were purchased by local residents. We hope they have read their copies for we have found ours more than satisfying.

The history of the old anchor admired at the north end of the Old Custom House has created so much interest since it was placed there a number of ago and because it was also lost here by some galleon visiting Monterey, we became doubly interesting in the three anchors reported lost by the Spanish scientific expedition.

The Malaspina expedition sailed down the coast in the fog and had great difficulty in reaching port, according to the written record of the trip as contained in documents now in the Royal Naval Museum in Madrid, Spain. But they sailed into Monterey on September 13th and found a fogbound anchorage.

The "Descubierta" and the "Atrevida" officers found on the morning of the 11th at 1:30 a.m. near Point of Pines, at which time they heard a response to their signals coming from Monterey. Visibility was reduced to a half a mile and the position they had was such as to necessitate anchoring for they now found themselves in the Ensenada of Carmel. The Descubierta anchored first, assured by the pilot that their position was good.

The boatswain by mistake lowered an anchor with an old cable, rather than with a new one as ordered. As a result, the cable broke, and an anchor was lost. It was necessary to lower another anchor, and their final position was about a mile from the rocks, and little favorable for getting under way. Malaspina issued orders to his consort vessel to act independently.

Malaspina's Descubierta found itself at daybreak anchored in fifty fathoms of water about a mile and a half from shore between Points Pinos and Cypress, and with a heavy, windswept sea. As they lay at anchor the wind subsided and the sea increased, just increasing the danger of their situation, and reducing their ability to avoid accident. After one false start the Descubierta finally got under way in a dense fog, but in doing so had to cut another anchor cable "leaving an anchor conf signed to the deep."

Meanwhile the Atrevida noted the Descubierta getting under way, and after it passed the Atrevida's bow, the consort vessel prepared to depart. Her precarious anchorage made it necessary to cut cable on the anchor that she had down, adding still another anchor to the two already lying on the bottom. Once under sail the vessels acted together, but due to the limited visibility it became necessary to do so using their own cannon-shot signals to ascertain and maintain their respective positions.

Even after all that trouble and worry Malaspina wrote romantically expressing his first opinions of Monterey.

"We cannot abandon the description of the pleasant coasts of Monterey without a slight sketch of the beautiful appearance that nature gave it upon our first view of the port when the fog dispersed between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. and when the sun's brilliance and the leafy foliage of the surrounding country joined with the soft zephyrs of the sea breezes from the northwest."