

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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A Sawmill Operator

In our last issue of the Peninsula Diary we discussed the life of Captain Thomas G. Lambert, for many years a resident of Monterey and one of the most prominent whalers here in the years when whaling was uppermost in the commercial life of this place as was the sardine fishing in later years. Today we will continue that story and tell an interesting bit about his wife, who was often known as "The Lady Carpenter."

When about 16 years of age, Capt. Lambert embarked upon a long-contemplated career among the fascinations and dangers of the sea. On board the whaler John Cogswell, he set out from Martha's Vineyard, Mass. for Honolulu around the Horn and arrived at the Sandwich islands as a commissioned officer. For two years, thereafter he engaged in whaling in the waters of the islands. He returned to the east coast in 1850 but set out again that same year, going to South America. This trip lasted for 44 months and eight days and during that time the catch comprised 47 sperm whales, which, when rendered, yielded 2,458 barrels of oil, the market price of which was \$126,000. In 1854, Capt. Lambert assumed charge of the ship John Milton, from Boston to San Francisco. After that he sailed along the coast for several years. It was in 1869 that he abandoned the sea for Monterey.

Captain Lambert was one of the foremost promoters of a movement to erect a monument to John Drake Sloat and the meetings for the furtherance of this design were held in his home in the Old Custom House. The monument was built and may be seen on Presidio Hill overlooking the Bay of Monterey.

Mrs. Lambert was born in Ohio and in her girlhood played about her father's sawmill. She never tired of watching the machinery and the logs. As she grew older, she ceased to play in the sawdust and quite often lent a hand in the work her father was doing. In this way Mrs. Lambert acquired a taste for carpentering and for work such as men do. So we have pieced story together about Mrs. Lambert, who was living refutation of the charge that not one of her sex could drive a nail straight.

The girl married the Martha's Vineyard sea captain and sailed with him on many voyages. At last, tired of

roaming around the world, the couple settled in Monterey. Here the captain became a justice of the peace and a notary public. Then Mrs. Lambert's active life began. When her husband was appointed agent for the steamship company she became, the wharfinger on Monterey and her duties were not turned over to a deputy. The family made its home in the Old Custom House and it has been said that each time the captain went away, Mrs. Lambert boarded up another of the porches to make another room and that is the reason so many of the old pictures of the Custom House do not show the balconies as they are now.

After several years, Capt. Lambert bought the lumber and planing mill in Monterey and operated it while Mrs. Lambert ran a shell and curio store in the triangle where Alvarado and Calle Principal meet. When the foreman of the mill did not prove satisfactory, and things were running at sixes and sevens, "Mrs. Lambert sold her shell store, dismissed the foreman and decided to run it herself.

Mrs. Lambert learned how to run every bit of the machinery. She used to start the machinery in the morning, her niece, Mrs. Millie Birks, reports, run the hand saw and all the other saws like a first-class workman and understood the machinery enough to keep it in order. She could turn out ornamental corners for door frames that were perfect.

In an old item we found in a newspaper was written: "Among the visible results of her labor the woman mill hand and carpenter points with pride to a row of large sheds opposite the mill. These she built by herself out of odds and ends. Under these sheds, all the Lambert lumber is stored." These sheds later became the row of tiny houses on north Tyler St.