

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The Consul At Monterey

The history of the French consulate and the consul who lived in Monterey from 1846 to 1848 in what is now the Girl Scout House on El Estero, is an interesting bit of Monterey's historic past.

After the removal of the consulate to Los Angeles and late in the '70s the economic "pinch" then being suffered by the Third Republic in France led to the suppression of the vice consulate at Los Angeles.

Moerenhaut wrote to his banker in Paris that "this announcement strikes me at a very fatal moment," his property being then very unsalable. He asked for consideration of his age and 40 years of service, and at least to be allowed to live in California where the climate was favorable to his asthma for the short time that is still left to me to live."

The suppression dated from May 20, 1879, but a special salary was allowed him - 8,000 francs (his full salary) to May 1, 1880. However, he died at his home on July 11.

The Sacramento Record - Union contained the following notice of Council Moerenhaut's death: "J. A. Moerenhaut, vice consul of the Republic of France at Los Angeles, died there this afternoon, aged 83 years. The last appearance in public of M. Moerenhaut was on the 4th of July, when he participated in the celebration, wearing his consular uniform. He entered the consular service in France in 1827 and has been in office in various parts of the world almost continuously since that time. In 1859 he was granted permission to retire with the honorary title of vice-consul of France at Los Angeles, where he was held in high esteem for his many virtues.

"Jacob Antoine Moerenhaut was a rather handsome man, honest, upright and active. He was a typical Frenchman, a good observer, but always a bit anti-American and pro-French in attitude. In Monterey he owned a spacious home with a beautiful, rose garden, shrubs, and trees, but of late the old house on Fremont street has suffered from neglect and has fallen into decay." Through the efforts of the Monterey History and Art Assn, the house was moved to its present location on El Estero facing Franklin street.

Better informed and more experienced than his predecessor (Gasquet) Moerenhaut. nevertheless

strove to achieve similar objects and aims during his incumbency in Monterey. His reports were more authoritative and disclosed a letter balance. They were no doubt received with more confidence and respect in Paris than either of those of Gasquet or Lombard, who followed Moerenhaut after his departure for Paris in 1850.

The following notice appeared in The Californian on Saturday, Oct. 3, 1846:

"The French corvette Brilliante, commanded by E. du Bouzet, arrived in our bay (Monterey) Thursday evening. She is at last from San Francisco, at which place she arrived in 48 days from Callao. Her captain whom we met elsewhere, combines the accomplishments of the officer and gentleman."

"The Brilliante has on board M. Moerenhout, Esq., consul from His Majesty of France, for Monterey. He has been recognized in his official capacity by the governor general of California and is to hoist his consulate flag. His good reputation has preceded him, and he will receive from the whole community a cordial reception."

Here follows the account of Gasquet's refusal to go aboard the Brilliante on the ground that the Captain owed him "the first visit," so it was not until the next day that the new consul met the old consul.

Writing of trade in California in 1846 and 1847, Moerenhaut reported to France and the minister of foreign affairs: "Commerce with the Sandwich Islands was greatly increased since the United States took possession. Mexico also sends generally one or two vessels with sugar and some cloth, especially rebozos, a sort of shawl of silk or cotton made in Mexico; mangas, a kind of poncho but very much larger than the Chilean poncho, also either silk or wool, and often selling for from one to two hundred piastres; and serapas (serapes), like in form to the mangas but only in wool and generally ordinary (in quality) for the use of the Indians and of those who tend cattle. The English have tried to imitate the robozos and the mangas, but with little success, as those made in Mexico are the only ones sought after or salable here.

"A single French ship the Lion, which came to California toward the end of the year 1846, to obtain some cattle for the Marquesas islands and Tahiti, introduced some merchandise of foreign manufacture, with the exception of wines and brandy. Our (French) shawls arid

other silk stuffs, silk hose, ribbons in small quantity, laces, merinos, calico, muslins, printed cotton stuffs, ready-made clothing, shorts, shoes for men and women, some glasswear, cutlery, furniture, mirrors, pendulum clocks (of medium quality), already out of style; some perfumery, woolen stuffs, bedclothes, red stuffs of medium and first quality for shirts and petticoats for women, some wines, brandy, liqueurs, dried fruits – these are all articles that can be sold.”