

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

December 10, 1962

A Light In The Window

There was once upon a time a gracious lady living in Monterey who with a coal oil lamp in her window each night guided the fishermen home from the catch. That good lady was Mrs. Milton Little, the wife of the builder of the Kimball Hotel on lower Alvarado street.

From various members of the family we have gathered together a great deal of information regarding this building, now bearing a padlock on the front door and all the former guests scattered here and there in the community to make ready for the urban redevelopment program and the ultimate destruction of the old building.

Their daughter, Mrs. Mary Elsnore, told in an interview before her death, of the worthwhile services performed by her mother from the zinc house of the early days. Seven years after arriving in Monterey from New York, Milton Little decided to erect a number of residences and as a consequence he imported a quantity of lumber and zinc, the latter being cut to the measurements. The shipments arrived by sailing ships. He had ordered enough of the zinc to cover the outside walls of six houses, but in the end only had enough for four buildings. Today the only house still standing in Monterey built from the zinc by Mr. Little, is enclosed in the walls of the Kimball Hotel on lower Alvarado street.

Two houses built about the same time by Mr. Little were situated in New Monterey, one of which was located where the Lighthouse Furniture Store now stands.

The late Mrs. Mary Elsnore said in an interview before her death: "Families were much larger then. Just think, there were 12 of us. One thing that I remember well was the coal-oil lamp that mother burned in her room all night. This she did so if any of the children woke, he could easily find his way to light and comfort.

"By that time were living near the harbor, and fishermen would use our light as a guide to run into port. Of course, way out, there was a little lighthouse which the ' sailors sighted as they entered the bay. Then they would look for the light of Chinatown, but if there was a fog, as they neared, shore, they would need directing from our light.

"The first mother knew about this service she was performing was when a captain inquired for Mrs. Little. When mother told him she was the person he was looking for, he said, 'God Bless You, Mrs. Little. You saved our lives last night, for if it had not been for your light, we would have been unable to make port.'

"Then it frequently happened that pit night-light guided the sailors. After that, even when we were all grown, my mother kept the lamp burning and when it stormed she placed it in the window with a looking glass in the back of it, the window shade drawn in back of that, so it would shine way out to sea. Mother felt the responsibility of these boats, so when a freighter did not arrive when she was expected, she would have a gun fired. If the vessel was safely making the harbor, they would signal with a return shot. Now it is not much like it was when I was a girl."

Another story which should go down in history as told by Mrs. Elsnore concerned early-day social gatherings in Monterey, Part of the story follows in her own words:

"When I was a little girl huge forests surrounded Monterey and made the climate warmer than it is now, so we often had picnics. One of the matrons would send word in the morning by one of her servants and she would definitely state what each guest was to bring.

"There were no telephones of course and as distances were great, no one could change the plans since they were made. In the afternoon the women and children would ride in ox-carts; to the appointed beach or woods. With the aid of the man servant, supper would be quickly ready when the men arrived. Four or five families would be represented."