

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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A Theatrical Performance

Sixty-eight years ago, E. L. Williams wrote of the early theatrical performance at the First Theater in California. Mr. Williams was the grandfather of Raul Pioda of Salinas, who made the article available to us for use in the Diary. Mr. Williams was the Second Carrier in "The Story of Barolph" which was presented at the theater on Monday evening, Feb. 11, 1850, three years after the first performance, "The Lyon Son of '76," given in the fall of 1847.

Lt. George H. Derby took the part of Gadshill in the performance in the theater, which had originally been a sailors' rooming house built by Jack Swan. Lt. Alfred Sully, also one of the actors, was the artist who designed the seal of the City of Monterey and directed the first Fourth of July celebration after the adoption of the State Constitution.

E. D. Williams wrote: "Situated in Monterey, at the bottom of the hill on the street going up to David Jacks' house, there is a one-story adobe house, a long, low building of which Jack Swan, a pioneer of 1843, was owner, and from which he drew a goodly rent at the time, it was partly used as a theater in February, 1850.

The building stood north and south, the north end of which was divided into rooms with entrances from the west. These rooms at that time rented for \$40 per month. The south end of this building was converted into a theater, with a stage and appropriate scenery, with opening toward the east. The scenery was painted by Sully, he having inherited the genius of his father, famous artist in Philadelphia.

"The program here given is identical and an exact copy, excepting the third column of names, of the original in possession of the writer. There were no presses or printers in those days, and the programs were written for distribution by Lt. Hamilton, now on the retired list of the Army as colonel.

"Of all who participated in the amateur performances on that night, as depicted in the program, Col. Hamilton and the writer are the only ones alive, at least the former was, when writing to the latter from Brooklyn, N.Y., about a year ago (1893). He had then surrendered his command at Fort Hamilton in New York harbor. His letter recalled many a forgotten theme in Monterey,

and among them the theatrical performance of "Gadshill Robbery" and "Box and Cox" on Monday evening, Feb. 11, 1850.

"It is needless to say that the performers all acted well their parts. The orchestra was composed of a military band, whose playing of the national airs and other pieces, added much to the enjoyment. The assemblage was all the English-speaking residents of Monterey, and a very large number of the Spanish and their descendants. The latter, although not understanding the language of the performers, were delighted with the acting, and particularly with the farce, "Box and Cox,"

"To use the vernacular of the present day, the house was 'filled to overflowing, there not being standing room,' and many were compelled to listen from the outside of the building.

"The building, scenery, and dresses were afterward given over to noncommissioned officers and privates of the military companies then stationed in Monterey. The privates continued to have performances for their amusement for some time afterward; the officers did not perform again.

"It is to be remarked that even as far back as 45 years ago there were among the military officers an uncertain and very uneasy feeling as to the future of the American government. They called the theater 'Union Theater as indicative of their wishes and patriotic hopes.

"Of the officers mentioned then holding the rank of lieutenant, all were alive at the time of the firing on Fort Sumter, remained firm for the Union, and five of them gallantly met their deaths, with sword in hand, on the field of battle."