

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Whalebone Paving**

One of the unique innovations in landscape treatment in Monterey during the American period, was the use of whalebone for paving and ornamental purposes. An article in the Monterey Gazette, December 23, 1864, seems to have "been the first mention of its use by Juan Girardian, a merchant and one-time owner of the Stevenson House. The editor in commenting upon the innovation wrote:

"Improvements.- We give Mr. Juan Girardian credit for having discovered a use for the large quantity of spines or back bones of the whale which are so plentiful on the beach. He has used them, after cutting and trimming to the proper size and shape, as paving blocks in making a neat and pretty sidewalk in front of his two stores which he is fitting up. We hope others may be induced to follow his example, as it is quite an Improvement."

Girardian's example was followed by others in Monterey; in fact, the use of whalebone for paving blocks, curbing, and ornamental purposes became a Monterey tradition, and is noticeable today. Some of the best examples in existence today are the side-walks in front of the old Whaling Station on Decatur street, the steps at the First Theatre, and for ornament, some in the garden at Casa Soberanes and at the entrance to the Stevenson House.

The walk leading from the gate at the Royal Presidio chapel (San Carlos Church) to the entrance to the church was formerly of whalebone and was a great attraction to tourists and towns people alike. It was removed several years ago, and a modern brick walk laid in its stead.

In a Monterey Daily Cypress, published in 1914, we came across an interesting article telling of an Arbor Day planting at the Portola-Serra Landing Place. The event was under the auspices of the Monterey Civic Club and was reported a success from the standpoint of the number who attended and contributors who brought many species of trees, plants, and shrubs to be planted. The women also were assured of the beautifying of the Presidio tract adjoining, by officers of the Post who attended the planting by their special invitation.

The Serra lot was then state property administered by the Landmarks League of California. It is now under the Division of Beaches and Parks.

Among the contributors were the members of the Junipero Serra Parlor of the Daughters of the Golden West, who brought a fine palm tree which was planted by a committee consisting of Miss Tillie Bergschicker, Mrs. Mamie Wolter, Miss Estella Gonzales and Mrs. William Hubbard. William Bergschicker seems to have been the only man who helped. The article mentions that the ladies of the Civic Club had been out very early in the morning every day the previous week, preparing the lot for planting, and worked hard with hoes, rakes and shovels. The palm tree planted by the Native Daughters was a huge tree which could be seen by all who passed the Presidio gate on their way to Monterey. Other contributors were: the Del Monte Hotel, which sent a quantity of cannas and roses from the famous hotel gardens; Mrs. William Sandholdt, Jr., Mrs. F. A. Zimmerman, Mrs. E. C. Rust, Miss Estella Gonzales, Mrs. William Gibson and the Misses Jacks who sent four boxes of rooted geraniums, more than 100 to the box. Of all the plantings there appears only the palm tree as a remembrance of the planting on that Arbor Day of 1914. We remember a rustic arbor that once stood at the end of Van Buren street Inside the Serra park, but that also has now disappeared. The park is now a spot with two markers, one to Padre Serra and the other to the memory of Don Gaspar de Portola, the latter marked by the Monterey History and Art Association.