

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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All About Bears In Old Town

A "bear story" as told by Margaret Elizabeth Dickinson Lawrey, daughter of Gallant Duncan Dickinson, builder of the First Brick House in Monterey, is amusing as well as historical for the Old Town.

"On the Peninsula in 1847 the present forest was mostly young growth, only a small percentage of them old trees left standing there after many fierce fires. The woods were full of cougars, panthers, bears and other wild animals. A man captured a bear in the woods back of Monterey. He kept a meat market across the street from the Dickinson house, and had his bear chained to a strong post a short distance from the shop. One night the bear broke his moorings, went over to the Dickinson house and with a blow of his paw broke in the door."

"The two girls, Margaret and Lucy, who were sleeping in the room were awakened by the noise of the burglar and leaped out of bed. They screamed and when their father arrived on the scene a moment later, they were still screaming with all their might and dancing a jig for the edification of the bruin, who seemed to be enjoying the performance.

"Mr. Dickinson was armed with a heavy cane with which he dealt the bear a terrific blow across the snout. With an angry growl the animal darted out of the door and went back to the butcher shop, where he broke in the door and pulled down every piece of meat from the hooks, ate what he could and disappeared. The next day he was found snoozing in a sunny spot in the brush on the hillside and recaptured by his owner. The cane with which Mr. Dickinson struck the bear still is an heirloom among his descendants."

The above story and that of the auction of the bonnet previously told were copied from a typescript now in the possession of Henry O. Williard, Sacramento, Calif., a cousin of Mrs. Hal C. Statler of Los Gatos, and the same relation of Gallant Duncan Dickenson.

We will now go back to more historical data on the First Brick House on Decatur street in Monterey.

Quote from "Reminiscences of the Trip across the Plains in 1846 and Early Days in California" by Luella Dickinson, wife of William Le Grand Dickinson (1904) : "The bricks for the Monterey house were burned by Gallant Duncan Dickinson's two sons, Samuel and William, a man

named Marion, Richard Lytton, and Lawrey; the last mentioned being employed to lay the bricks. This was the first brick house built in California, and still stands near the old Custom House."

At the time Jack Swan, builder of the First Theater, told the story of the 1847 auction of a bonnet in Monterey in a issue of the Salinas Index, the paper was owned by W. J. Hill, who married Isabella Peck, and granddaughter of Gallant Duncan Dickinson. They had one son, William C., and lived out their lives in Salinas.

One of the clippings in the possession of Mrs. Statler located the brickyard as being the street from the Sargent house."

Clyde Arbuckle, the historian for the City of San Jose, told Mrs. Statler, that his grandfather, Ben Gordon, who traveled part of the time across the plains with the Dickinsons, was a carpenter and did the woodwork on the First Brick House.

Margaret Duncan Dickinson and Amos Giles Lawrey were married in Stockton Oct. 29, 1849, the first marriage ever performed in that city. Much later, Margaret, widowed, returned to the Peninsula, living in Pacific Grove with her daughter, Lola, from 1887 until her death on Dec. 19, 1918.

Gallant Duncan Dickinson died in 1870 and was buried in the Odd Fellows Cemetery in Hopeland, Calif. In 1877, his wife died in San Jose, and Gallant Duncan was brought to San Jose and buried beside her in Oak Hill Cemetery. His obituary was printed in the San Jose Pioneer, April 7, 1877, and, among other things, made the following statement interesting to those of us presently concerned with the brick house and its history:

"This house is still standing near the site of the Old Custom House. It should be purchased by the Pioneer Societies and retained as a landmark."

With all this valuable information Mrs. Statler sent two pictures. One is a copy of Gallant Duncan Dickinson, taken about 1858, and a copy of one of the Centennial Vignettes which appeared in the Sacramento Bee on Dec. 23, 1949. Printed thereon is Gallant Dickinson and his sons, William, a doctor and a great agriculturist; and Samuel, a leading cattleman and farmer of the Fresno area.