

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Treasures That Tick The Time

It seems appropriate once in a while to relate to local citizens and visitors some of the historic items to be seen in the historical monuments in Old Monterey. For instance, there are several old clocks on display in the Custom House and in the Stevenson House, worth seeing and admiring both for their unusual appearance and for their workmanship. These time pieces have been gifts or loans from families and individuals who wished to share their treasures with others. All the clocks date back to the early 1800s, and are under the custodianship of the Monterey History and Art Assn.

There is a small mantel clock of delicate design and size in the Custom House which has been placed there by Mr. and Mrs. Paul Pioda of Salinas. Pioda's great grandfather, James Watson, was the owner of the clock. Watson came from England about 1830 and settled in Monterey where he was a competitor of Thomas O. Larkin in the mercantile business.

E.L. Williams, Paul Pioda's grandfather, wrote the Santa Cruz paper in October of 1884 the story of the clock. The newspaper gave me the privilege of going through the files to find items which would be of interest to us in Monterey and I found this item about the history of the clock which is now on display in the Custom House.

Williams' wife was Narcisa Watson, the daughter, of James Watson; and their daughter, Helen Williams, married Charles Pioda, who became the mother of Paul Pioda.

In the Monterey Republican, dated April 28, 1870, there appeared a news item as follows: "Mr. Pringle of the Washington Hotel, is repairing a clock the history of which is of more than passing interest. The clock was brought to these shores from the oriental continent over 100 years ago by the Franciscan priests and 30 years ago the clock was brought here from San Gabriel by W.E.P. Hartnell, administrator of the missions, who raffled it at this place for \$250, Mrs. James Watson, now deceased, winning.

In 1847 the clock was sent to the Sandwich Islands for repairs by Watson and after its return and at his death he left it to his son, Thomas, then sheriff and a jolly specimen of corpulence.

"The clock is one of London manufacture and the works are of unusual excellence. Mr. Thomas Watson has been repeatedly offered \$300 for the relic but has as often refused to part with it. It is a good time keeper, calls for repairs but seldom and seems to be but little the worse by the incessant friction of the wheels of time. We dare say it is the oldest clock in California."

In another article written by Pioda's grandfather, E.L. Williams, dated Santa Cruz, October, 1884, there appears this item concerning the clock:

"CLOCK WITH A HISTORY". More than 200 years ago the Spanish government ordered made in London three clocks for the principal missions then existing in South America and Mexico. Afterward, more than 100 years ago, the clocks were brought to California and placed, one each in the Mission San Gabriel, San Juan Capistrano and San Miguel - all being north of San Diego and south of Soledad. About the year 1831, the missions in California were all secularized, which means that the property belonging to them was seized by the then government and sold. Among the possessions thus confiscated by the government were the three clocks. They were sold at Monterey for \$500 each.