

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Storms And Whales

The ship Natalia which I have been mentioning in recent columns, in which Napoleon is credited to have made his escape from the Island Of Elba, now lies in the bottom of Monterey Bay, very far down in the sand by now. But not so many years ago it could be seen very easily at low tide and many souvenirs were made from the teak wood salvaged from its cabins.

Capt. Rush was in command of the ship when it came into Monterey harbor loaded with wheat. No one could understand just, how the ship came to be wrecked. Rush settled down to a peaceful life in Monterey, and was thereafter known as Capt. Trigo – the Spanish word for wheat.

Monterey Bay really can stir up a storm that could wreck better ships than the Natalia. The winds shriek into the bay and with the help of a high tide, the piled-up waters perform some strange tricks, as most of us know, as witness the time when the roofs of the sheds on the old Wharf were blown off and across the railroad tracks.

Back in '76, just such a gale came at the flood tide of the year and blew for three days, so history relates. At that time the high sand dunes that separate the Del Monte grounds from the bay came all the way down to the depot, then the terminus of the narrow gauge to Salinas.

The waters started to whirl around and cut in under the warehouse filled with grain. To relieve this danger, someone made the suggestion that they cut through the tracks so that the waters could flow into the lagoon that came down from Washerwoman's Bay. This was done and the warehouse was saved; but the waves continued to eat away the high sand dunes, until the entire hill was washed away and the sands were left fairly level as far as the bath houses, as they remain today.

As the dunes melted away, three coffins were exposed to view and some old timers of that time recalled that some 20 years before a vessel had put into the harbor to bury in the sand hills the bodies of three sailors who had died of smallpox aboard ship.

The Montereyan who told me these stories also related one concerning whalers. "In my first recollections of

Monterey, there were big iron cauldrons standing along the shore near the present breakwater, and a runaway of broad pine planks ran from the high-ground to the water, reminder of the days when whaling was one of the principal industries of Monterey.

"The whaling industry then was entirely in the hands of the Portuguese, one crew under Capt. Pray at Monterey and another crew under Capt. Pedro in Carmel Bay. For some time the Monterey crew had had poor luck. So to change the auspices, the whalers met and chose another captain, Manuel Lewis. The change seemed to work well, for very soon the outlook, stationed with his glass up on the old gun near the fort, spied a whale and gave the signal.

"Capt. Lewis with his men put out two boats and came upon the whale sleeping upon the surface of the water. Lewis ordered the boats to approach one off each side of the whale, and advancing softly, they planted their harpoons. The whale lashed about in the throes of death, and as one boat, was splintered by his head, his tall finished off the other. Whalers were never swimmers, so the fishing boats returning from the banks rescued the men. All very well, but the whale was lost, and being a sulphur whale, it was a serious loss.

A few days later, the report came in that the Carmel whalers had brought in a sulphur whale and one of the Monterey whalers went over to investigate. He found a bit of bomb with the Monterey mark on it and the Monterey whalers put in a claim for the whale. This claim was hotly contested in Court for several years, costing both sides a great deal of money. The whale, whose original value was perhaps \$5,000, was finally awarded to the Monterey whalers. But by the time it had passed its usefulness and all that was left of it was a splendid skeleton, standing on the hill above the cove where it was first beached.

How many old timers have looked with wonder and admiration upon the whale skeleton mounted upon many posts and much lumber at Point Lobos and wondered whence it came? A few years ago, it was taken down and stored away because the Division of Beaches and Parks felt that it become a hazard with both adults and children climbing around upon it.

Sounds the tale of the whale!