

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Americans in Monterey

The first American vessel to touch a California port, the Otter commanded by Capt. Ebenezer Dorr, anchored at Monterey on Oct. 29, 1796. Dorr was a Northwest trader and visited Monterey to replenish his supplies before proceeding to China and the Orient.

The Mexican rule in California lasted 25 years, from 1822 to 1846, all of which time Monterey remained the capital. Twelve men were governors during that period: Argullio, Pio Pica, Zamorano, Castro, Gutierrez, Alvarado, Micheltorena. Alvarado was California's second native governor. He was born in Monterey, Feb. 14, 1809. He became administrator of Monterey's Custom House and received numerous large land grants.

On Oct. 19, 1842, Monterey surrendered to the American fleet under the erroneous impression that the United States and Mexico were at war. Commodore Thomas A. Catesby Jones took possession of Monterey, and hoisted the American flag over the "Castillo." The Californians signed articles of capitulation without a struggle.

Two days later, 'upon discovering that he had been misinformed about the war and the suspended secession of California to England, Jones took down the American flag, restored Monterey to the Californians, fired a salute to the Mexican flag, and sent a message of apology to Gen. Manuel Micheltorena at Santa Barbara, who was then on his way north from Mexico to assume the governorship.

The covetous eyes of England, of Russia, and of France inevitably settled upon the northern coast of California. The expedition of La Perouse of Vancouver, of Kotzebue, conducted in sweet and unselfish cause of science, had carried the tales of fruitful valleys into distant courts, scheming lustfully for the extension of their kingdoms. But the United States was the vigorous nation and California became a part of this nation.

On July 7, 1846 Capt. William Mervine, commander of the USS Cayne and the USS Portsmouth raised the American flag over the Custom House at Monterey, thus formally taking possession, of California for the U.S. The occupation was achieved without a single shot

being fired. Fort Mervine at the Presidio of Monterey is named in honor of Mervine.

Previous to the raising of the Stars and Stripes in Monterey, Thomas Oliver Larkin was appointed U.S. consul for the Port of Monterey in California. Larkin entered upon his duties April 2, 1844 and served until June 23, 1846. He was the only U.S. consul ever to serve in California. He built the Larkin House here and used it as the consulate.

The late Mrs. Alice Larkin Toulmin, granddaughter of Thomas Oliver Larkin, presented the adobe house to the State of California as an historical monument on March 16, 1957. It is now open to the public five days a week from 10 a.m. until 5 p.m.

On Oct. 17, 1845, Secretary of State James Buchanan instructed Consul Larkin to encourage the Spanish-Californians to resist French and English overtures, and intimated that should California decide to declare her independence from Mexico that the United States would render her "Its kind offices."

Aug 15, 1846, The Californian, first newspaper to be published in California, made its initial appearance as a weekly at Monterey. Walter Colton, who came to Monterey as a chaplain on the ship of Commodore John Drake Sloat and was Monterey's first alcalde, and Robert Semple, chairman of the Constitutional Convention, were the owners and publishers.

Alcalde Colton impaneled at Monterey the first jury ever called to try a legal action in California on Sept. 4, 1846.