

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Whalebone As Decoration**

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 of Dec. 23, 1864, seems to have been the first mention of its use by Juan Girardine, a merchant and one - time owner of the Stevenson House, now a state historical monument. The editor in commenting upon the innovation wrote:

“Improvements: We give Mr. Girardine credit for having discovered a use for the large quantity of pieces, of 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.”

Girardine's example was followed by others in Monterey; in fact, the use of whalebone for paving blocks, paving and ornamental purposes became a Monterey tradition, and is noticeable today. Some of the best examples in existence today are the sidewalks in front of the Old Whaling Station on Decatur street, the steps at the First Theatre, and for ornaments, 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 formerly was of whalebone and was a great attraction to tourists and towns people alike for a great many years. It was removed several years ago and a modern brick walk laid in its stead. The whale bone was stored at the rear of the church along with the remains of the Serra Oak which stood near the entrance to the Monterey Presidio under which father Serra recited the first mass here and Don Gaspar de Portola claimed California for Spain.

Now that the annual Old Adobe House Tour for 1963 has become history, we may say that it was a grand success and was enjoyed by more than 1,000 persons - local persons, folks from the valley towns and the S.F. Bay area as well as from Southern California. All were enthusiastic in the praise of the homes, the gardens and

table settings and of the generous owners of the various adobes opened on the tour.

This gracious letter has been received from Mr. and Mrs. John Coates of Carmel who took the tour again this year. “Under emotional pride and appreciation of feelings of the beauty and historical evidence left to us as native Californians, and other Americans, by those who first settled California as Spanish and then Mexican citizens and then those of our own nationality. I am prompted to write you to tell you of the enthusiasm and happiness that came to Mrs. Coates and myself in again being privileged to make the adobe tour. To all the kind ladies in the Monterey History and Art Assn. we express our delight and thanks to the individuals and organizations that so generously permitted the public to enjoy their possessions and buildings. This is truly a grand event.

“We were fortunate also in meeting many interested and interesting people. One lady told us that she came again - the seventh year - from San Luis Obispo. We met others from many other points within the state and from other states as well. We talked and explained some points we felt well enough posted on to make comments. We lost no opportunity to build a case for the saving as it is of the Whaling Station and the First Brick House in California. We even had the mayor's ear for some time on this subject.

“So, as the memories of the Adobe Tour are still strong and brilliant in our minds and with the urge to express our appreciation for being able to participate in all the pleasures and bask in the glow of beautiful surroundings and pleasant people, we want to send you - all of you - our thanks. I am, and we are, very sincerely yours, John and Sue Coates.”