

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Birks Collection

Before the death of Mrs. Millie Birks, that gracious lady presented the Monterey History and Art Assn. with 24 valuable documents so that future generations might appreciate Monterey's historical contribution to these United States.

Before listing them, a resume of the story of the finding of the letters, papers, books and magazines may prove most interesting to the reader.

When Mrs. Birks was a young woman, she saw a group of boys tearing up old papers in a vacant area on Calle Principal, where a house was being demolished and cases of old things were being thrown out.

Mrs. Birks thought that maybe someday these should be preserved for Monterey, so she sent her husband with a wheelbarrow to bring a load home.

They were stored in her aunt's home, and not again disturbed for many years, until the opening of her son's key shop necessitated changes in the old building at Tyler and Scott streets. Mrs. Birks' aunt and uncle were Capt. and Mrs. Thomas Lambert. Capt. Lambert was in charge of the Custom House, and it was there that Mrs. Birks lived as a young girl.

Mrs. Lambert, who had a little wooden building at the point of Calle Principal and Alvarado streets, where she sold sea shells and sea wood to the tourist trade, had collected a group of old, heavy books in which she pressed seaweed. These books are also in the collection.

There are two volumes of store records, one record book of the city recorder of Monterey dated 1851, and four stamp dies for embroidery work made by Capt. Lambert, one old match holder from the Washington Hotel, seven old copies of Harper's, Overland Monthly and Popular Monthly from the 1870's and 1880's and four books of rules and regulations in the 1840's.

The cash book covers records of June 3, 1851, to Oct. 30, 1852. From it we learn that from June 3, 1851, to April 1, 1852, William Curtis and Milton Little were partners, but in April 1852, they dissolved partnership. It was probably then that Milton Little established his own store and Curtis continued alone.

Mr. Curtis evidently reopened in May, 1853. Then in June, 1853, Simpson Conover is credited with \$2,021 and in July with \$2,074.22, both accounts in cash. From then on the store was known as Curtis and Conover.

Ledger A is almost as good as a census of Monterey, except that the customers were mainly citizens of American extraction, while the names of older Spanish and Mexican families are not as prevalent for the first year.

On the opening day, May 17, 1853, to the spring of '54, the first charge accounts were: W.R. Post, John Foster, J.W. Bates, David Jacks and the firm of Sweet and Keating. One of the last entries in his account is dated Nov. 20, 1859: "To cash for digging a grave, \$6.00."

There are accounts opened for ships that sailed into Monterey from coast ports, from Santa Cruz and San Francisco. These were the Logwood, the bark Libertad, the schooner Vaquero in 1853, and the steamer Southerner in 1854.

Their accounts include amounts paid in cash for launch hire, for wood delivered, for cash to officers, and credit for freight charges paid by residents who received shipments or who shipped pears, beans etc., to San Francisco.