

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Storms, Whales

Monterey Bay can really stir up a storm that could wreck most any ship.

The winds shriek into the bay at high tide and the piled-up waters perform some strange tricks, as witness the time when roofs of the shed on the old wharf were blown entirely across the railroad tracks.

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

Water began to cut in under the warehouse filled with grain; to relieve this danger, someone suggested that they cut through the track 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 house, as they remain today.

As the sand dunes melted away, three coffins were exposed to view. Old-timers recalled that some 20 years earlier a vessel had put into the harbor to bury in the sand hills the bodies of three sailors who had died of smallpox.

The Montereyan who told me these stories related one concerning the whalers.

"In my first recollections of Monterey, there were big iron cauldrons standing along the shore near the present breakwater, and a runway of broad pine planks ran from the high ground to the water, a 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 under Capt. Pedro in Carmel Bay.

For some time the Monterey crew had had poor luck. 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 by 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 on each side of the whale; 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 tail 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 came a report that the Carmel whalers had brought in a sulphur whale. One of the Monterey men went over to investigate. He found a bit with the Monterey mark on it, and the Monterey whalers put in a claim for the whale.

The whale, whose original value was perhaps \$5000, was finally awarded to the Monterey crew, but by that time it had passed its usefulness and all that was left of it—splendid skeleton—was mounted and stood on the hill above the cove where it was first beached.

How many have looked with wonder and admiration upon the whale skeleton at Point Lobos, mounted upon posts and much lumber and wonder whence it came?

There is not much left of that whale now for the reason that it became too dangerous for children to climb over, and so it was taken down by the Division of Beaches and Parks for the protection of the visitors of the state park.