

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

November 24, 1965

Port of Collection

In the early days of California when Monterey was the port of collections for duty at the Old Custom House. In those days also each ship had a supercargo or agent who set up a store on board ship, with shelves, showcases, drawers and scales, selling from one pound of tea, shot, etc., to a box or bag, and again from a yard of silk or calico to a bale. Others brought their goods into the Custom House to show.

In 1844-5, Micheltorena levied a tax of \$50 per month on foreign vessels which paid their duty at Monterey, for the privilege of coasting; \$5,000 was collected March 28, 1846, according to Bancroft. Gov. Pico later annulled this law.

The imports from San Blas, Mazatlan, and Acapulco consisted of rice, sugar, pancho, nux vomica, saddlery, silk and cotton rebozos, cotton and woolen serapes, shoes and some English, American and German goods.

Imports from the United States to California were shoes, hats, furniture and farming utensils, chiefly of New England manufacture, groceries, china goods, iron, materials and crockery, which were sold to the merchants and farmers along the coast on a credit of from one to two years, payable in hides, tallow, dried beef, lumber, soap, etc. – according to Bancroft's entry in "California Pastoral". And there might have been a cheese.

It was usual for the Boston vessels to return to that port with from 20,000 to 40,000 bullock hides, the owner expecting about one hide for each dollar invested in cargo and expenses of all kinds.

Shingles, lumber, spars and horses were shipped to the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii), beef, fat, wheat and beans to the Russian settlements.

In 1845, the assembly decreed that traders who bought hides should register in the books kept for that purpose the name of seller, marks and value. For even in those early days there were cattle thieves. A commission appointed by the alcaldes should meet at the market every Saturday, and collect hides brought in during the previous week. They took a list of the sellers and marks, and qualified them, whether legal or not, in accordance with the books of the judge.

Hides with false salemarks were applied to the municipal fund and the sellers held as thieves, to be judged by the alcalde, the price to be returned to the purchaser, and the value of the animal to the owner.

W.E.P. Hartnell, in a letter to R.C. Wyllie in 1844, told him that articles of English manufacture best adapted to California market would be brown and white cotton, coarse and fine, for shirting, sheeting, etc., prints of good quality and fast handsome colors, cotton, silk handkerchiefs, good, stout velveteen, blue and black; fustian, principally brown, muslin, cambric muslin, bishop's lawn, cotton lace, cloth of all kinds, principally blue and black, cassimier, flannel principally red and white.

The list also included a very small assortment of linen goods among which some of the very finest Irish linen and cambric, cotton, woolen and silk stockings, handsome gown patterns, cashmere shawls. All kinds of earthenware and glassware, needles, mostly very fine; cotton and linen thread, sewing silk, boots and shoes; ready-made clothes of all descriptions, including plenty of white and checked shirts, Scotch griddles, silver and brass thimbles, all kinds of knick-knacks for women's work basket; furniture of all kinds – a small assortment of very elegant, the rest middling quality; tea trays of all sizes, carpeting, a small quantity of artificial flowers, false pearls, the finest and smallest beads that can be procured in all colors, and needles to work them with; gold and silver lace from one-fourth to two inches wide; perfumery ; iron pots and kettles; candle sticks, and a few good common silver hunting-case watches.

Most of the business of unloading, shipping and money exchange of collections, was made through the Old Custom House in Monterey – the oldest federal building west of the Rockies.