

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Crisis Averted**

Along about 1890 the Monterey City Board of Trustees began plans to tear down Colton Hall and use the stone and site for a new schoolhouse. The wall around it had been demolished before Monterey woke up to save its historic buildings.

In the nick of time a few patriotic citizens, prominent among them the late Harry A. Green, Mr. Sargent Sr., and Capt. Lambert, according to "Monterey, Cradle of California's Romance," called a mass meeting, annulled the board's action and raised money enough for another school site.

They could not afford to repair the hall, so Joseph Knowland, recently chairman of the State Park Commission, had a bill passed in the legislature providing that the building be leased and kept in repair by the State of California.

It later returned into the possession of the city and is now a museum on the upper floor, furnished much as it was for the first Constitution Convention in 1849. It is under the care of a city museum board.

Life in Monterey in Gen. Sherman's time was not all a round of gaiety. Early in February, 1847, the war in Baja California came to an end, and the specter of war that had threatened Alta California vanished before the actual force of the American fleet.

Meanwhile, far more weight problems were being solved in Monterey. Walter Colton was working night and day to suppress gambling and vice. By March he had the foundation for the new Colton Hall School laid.

"The building," Colton said, "is to be 30 by 60 feet, two stories, suitably proportioned, with a handsome portico. The labor of the convicts, the tax on liquor, and the banks of the gambling must put it up."

Two months later the first monte (gambling bank) ever run in California was opened in a little shack called the Astor House. It would rank in this day as a sixth class boarding house.

After a great deal of scheming, Colton gathered 50 of the gamblers into the hotel parlor without in the least arousing their suspicions. He addressed them: "I have only a few words to say, gentlemen; you are each fined \$20."

The alcalde of San Francisco was the first to come through. "Come on my good fellows," he said, "Pay up and no gambling; this money goes to build a schoolhouse where I hope, our children will be taught better principles than they gather from the examples of their fathers."

So to help the school the fines were paid without another comment.

The Rev. S.H. Willey, who had assisted Grace McFarland with information for "Monterey, Cradle of California Romance," told her that he was the first Protestant clergyman in California when he landed at Monterey Feb. 23, 1840.

The following morning, he said, he went ashore at 11 o'clock to hold public worship held in the school room of the stone edifice (Colton Hall) used for public purposes.

"Although on account of the unpropitious state of the weather, our meeting was not numerously attended. I have not yet presided under more interesting circumstances. The text was First Corinthians 1:23-4."

Just before daybreak on Tuesday, Feb. 25, 1849, the first steamship on the Pacific puffed into Monterey Bay.

The story is told that some Indians living on the coast saw her by the light of her fires. Not knowing what to do or what it could be, they ran in great alarm to the interior and their special friend, Maj. Hill.

They reported that there was a ship on fire, and what was more, she did not burn up. Strangest of all was that she was making rapid headway against the wind, though not a sail was set.