

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Mystery Woman

In an old faded clipping without a date, or any hint of the name of the newspaper from whence it came is an interesting item which intrigued me to go on a hunt for further information about the personality it concerned. The item follows:

"In a small inland town below Monterey lives another early Californian. She is more than 90 years old, was born on one of the big ranches of the early days, is Spanish – and married Alexander Forbes, who was the Hudson's Bay Fur Company's factor in the fur bartering and buying around Monterey Bay.

"Married at 15, she still has the large portrait of herself done at the time in oils. She is still beautiful, slender, dark, gently bred and quietly resigned to the almost complete loss of all their property. Unfortunately she has never learned to speak English. She is unable to impart, except to one who speaks Spanish, the impressions of what must have been a life full of interest and romance."

Research on this item has proven that the small inland town was King City and the personality was Mrs. Alexander Forbes.

In the December 1950 issue of Bancroftiana of the Bancroft Library at the University of California there is this statement: "During the final days of Spanish rule in California there was an English consular official in Northern Mexico, Alexander Forbes, who wrote the first book in English relating wholly to California. Other Englishmen played their part in the development of the West's resources."

Listed in Bancroft's Pioneer Register is Alexander Forbes, a Scotch merchant of Tepic, author of the standard work, "California." In '46-48, he came to California in connection with the New Almaden affairs. He has often been confounded by writers with James Alexander Forbes, a carpenter of Monterey.

About the same time that Alexander Forbes was exploring in California, another prominent Monterey and California man was interested in Monterey and California at large. It is recorded that in 1836 Nathan Spear ran a little vessel called the Nicholas on Monterey Bay, carrying produce between Santa Cruz and

Monterey, but transferred her to San Francisco when Governor Arguello demanded a foreign license.

William Hardy, a boat builder who had deserted from a whaler, built a small schooner called the Santa Cruz, which was later lost at sea. Judge Blackman of Santa Cruz built the schooner Zach Taylor. Commanded by Capt. Vincent, she was used as a government boat.

When the government post at Monterey was abandoned, she was run on the Sacramento River. About 1860 the Pacific Coast Steamship Co. was organized; the first boat, writes Capt. Marcus Harloe, was the steamer Salinas. Material for the steamer was brought from the East Coast on the Wild Pigeon by Capt. Harloe and the steamer ran between Monterey, Moss Landing and San Francisco. The Salinas was running as late as January 1875, and a companion steamer, the Monterey, was running about the same time.

Nathan Spear, according to William Heath Davis in his "Sixty Years in California," was one of the most prominent foreigners in California. Davis arrived in Yerba Buena and went into the employ of Spear as his managing active business manager. He was a native of Boston and the brother of Paul Spear, a prominent apothecary of Boston. He visited Monterey as early as 1823, in the American schooner "Rover," together with Capt. J.B.R. Cooper.

Spear was one of the first merchants in Monterey. He owned two schooners at that time to carry goods to Monterey and San Francisco. They were named "Isabel" and "Nicholas".