

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

March 1, 1965

### **A Near-Disaster**

Along about 1890 the city board of trustees began plans to tear down Colton Hall and use the stone and site for a new schoolhouse. The walls around it had been demolished before Monterey woke up to save its historic building.

Just in the nick of time a few patriotic citizens, prominent among them the late Mr. Greene, 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.

The city could not afford to repair the hall. Joseph Knowland had a bill passed in the legislature providing for the building to be leased and kept in repair by the State of California. It later came back into the possession of the city. Mr. Knowland later became chairman of the State Division of Beaches and Parks. February 23, 1890: The Rev. S.H. Willey, who had assisted Grace MacFarland with information for "Monterey, Cradle of California's Romance," told her that he was the first Protestant clergyman in California when he landed at Monterey Feb. 23, 1849. (History books say a few others preceded him.) The following morning he said he went ashore at 11 o'clock to hold public worship for the first time in Monterey and in California. Service was held in the schoolroom of the stone edifice (Colton Hall) used for public purpose.

Mr. Willey wrote: "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".

At last, in May services were held in private homes. They continued holding meetings at irregular intervals until 1851, when Mr. Willey was called to a larger congregation in the sand hills of San Francisco.

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

The story is told by Miss MacFarland that some Indians living on the coast saw her by the light of their fires. Not knowing what to do or what it could be, they ran in great alarm to the interior to Major Hill, their special friend. They reported that there was a ship on fire and,

what was more, did not burn up; but the strangest thing of all was that she was making rapid headway right against the wind, and not a sail was set.

Observant residents and visitors must have wondered about the deep ravine on Hartnell street between the Stokes adobe and the Monterey Hospital and back of the First Federal Court building. They must have been curious about its beginning and just why it is there.

I have been able to solve part of the mystery, for we found two items in the early issues of the Monterey Sentinel when I was privileged to peruse bound copies of Volume I, the issues published from June 1855 to June 1856. They are now the property of the Santa Cruz Sentinel, moved to Santa Cruz in the latter year when free transportation by schooner was offered to the publisher by progressive citizens of the city across the bay.

On Jan. 5, 1856, under the heading "Singular Example of Erosion by Water," an article related that some 15 years before, as the editor had been informed by old settlers of the town, a small field was being plowed on a flat in the hills, some 600 feet up the present gulch from the Hartnell home (now the site of Monterey Hospital), which is or was, about 1,000 yards from the flat. This chasm had worn deeper over the years and at the time the article was written, it measured some 1,600 yards in length. Sometimes in rainy season is measured 25 feet in depth, and 12 feet in breadth and was a rapid torrent.