

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

March 3, 1965

Hartnell Gulch Theory

The Monterey Sentinel in January, 1856, carried an item headed: "Aqueous Erosion of the Earth."

It quoted an old settler with the following version of the cause of the ravine (Hartnell Gulch) which we now see at the north end of the school administration building off Pacific street and at the south end of the Cooper adobe:

"Noticing the remarks in the last issue on the formation of the big gulch of the town, I will add that the first notice of the soil being worn away by the water was in the winter of 1823, a season in which fell immense quantities of rain.

"In 1824, and for several years after, the gulch kept on wearing away until it has finally attained its present dimensions. In 1824, a man could easily jump over it – it now has four small bridges over its bed. It empties into the plain by the Washington Hotel where was formerly a lagoon where the women washed their clothes. It runs entirely dry now immediately after the rainy season."

The Washington was torn down many years ago and a chalk rock building built on the site at Washington and Pearl streets, where The Herald was published until a new building at Pacific and Jefferson streets was built.

Evidently, according to the Sentinel item, the plain at Washington and Abrego in 1823 was the first Washerwoman's Bay rather than the later site at Aguajito road and Fremont street.

San Benito County might have had another name. It would have been known as Cabrillo County if the publisher of the Sentinel had had his way. On Feb. 9, 1856, he wrote: "Circulation of a petition to form a new county – Gilroy, San Juan and the Valley of the Pajaro – county seat to be San Juan. Several names for the new county, the territory to be taken from Monterey have been suggested, such as San Juan, Aromas, Las Animas, Pajaro, Aurora and Cabrillo.

"The most sensible seems to us to be the last, as Juan Rodrigues Cabrillo was not only the discoverer of California, but actually the first discoverer of Santa Cruz County and the first who mentioned the country lying along the Pajaro River Valley. This in the month of November, 1542."

San Benito County was created by a legislative enactment from the northern and eastern portions of Monterey County on Jan. 12, 1874. The significance of other names that might have been applied to the county is interesting. Aromas, now a community in Monterey County, is derived from the name of a land grant, Aromitas & Agua Caliente (little odors and warm water).

The aromas referred, apparently, to the odors of sulphur water. Pajaro (bird) was named by Portola's soldiers in October 1769. They had found there an enormous bird which the Indians had stuffed with straw.

The Salinas must have been much more of a river in 1856 than it is in 1965, for this notice appeared in the Sentinel:

"The undersigned intends to apply to the Board of Supervisors of the County of Monterey, at its next session, for a license to establish a ferry across the Salinas River near its mouth, at a place where he resides, on the island near Whitlock's. (signed) John L. Coffman."

A letter to the editor of the Sentinel from San Benito, then in southern Monterey County, gave some interesting comments: "Thinking a communication from this place would not be uninteresting to your readers, I avail myself of the present opportunity to drop you a line. The orchards of the mission (San Antonio) promise an abundance of fruit. An abundance of game abound in this place, such as deer, antelope and grizzlies.

"A couple of Americans passed through here on their way north, with some live bears, two of which were full grown, domesticated to work in double harness."

The whaling industry was alive in Monterey in 1855 and the Sentinel was pleased to announce that during the week six more whales had been killed in the bay. There were only two boat crews, but they had done a good business on their limited means.