

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The History of Clocks

The history of clocks and clock making has been a fascinating subject for more than 250 years of clock making in this country and of interest to nearly 6,000 American clock and watch makers. As early as 1650, tower clocks are mentioned in American annals and all during the 18th Century a clock in a home was considered a symbol of prosperity.

In the Custom House there is on display a clock once in the possession of the late Gov. Juan Bautista Alvarado, governor of California from 1836 to 1842. "The Governor's Clock," a simple tall clock with a music box, was purchased by the Monterey History and Art Association in 1944 from S.T. Butler of San Francisco. It has been known through the years as the "Governor's Clock", it having been in the governor's possession for many years. When wound up with a most crude handle on one side, it plays a tune, much to the amusement of all who have been privileged to hear it.

The clock was made in Germany about the year 1789, and purchased by a Britisher who installed it in his London home, where it remained until brought to Monterey by W.E.P. Hartnell in 1829. The early Montereyans, with their faculty for apt names, promptly nicknamed it "El Monitor de Tiempo" and it was known by that name for many years.

When Juan Bautista Alvarado became governor in 1836, he purchased the clock from Hartnell for 500 "cueros" (hides). It remained in the possession of the Alvarado family until David Spence acquired it and he gave it to Anastacia, a domestic in the Spence home. Anastacia was married to a Spaniard, Juan Alvarez. According to the late Fred Feliz of Camp Steffani in the Carmel Valley, Alvarez died when Feliz was 10 years old. Anastacia was fond of the boy and gave him the clock. Feliz's mother from Baja California, married Jules Simoneau, who was the friend and benefactor of Robert Louis Stevenson during his residence in Monterey. Simoneau was the father of Mrs. Thomas Fussell, who now lives in the family home on Van Buren street in Monterey.

The old clock finally found a resting place for a time in the reading room of Jules Simoneau's restaurant on Pearl street (torn down in the 1920's, where, as a writer

of that day said, "It ticks as clearly and plays as sweetly as it did in the days of yore."

Later Feliz gave the clock into the keeping of his sister, Mrs. S.F. Butler, and when Mr. and Mrs. Butler moved to San Francisco they took the clock with them. Now it is back home where it is a valuable part of the historic exhibits in the Custom House, on loan from the Monterey History and Art Association.

The word clock, which means a method of telling time, may have been derived from the Saxon "clugga" or French "cloche", the handbell which was rung each hour as indicated by the sundial. Today, when even a child in school has a timepiece, it is difficult to realize that there was a period when clocks were so expensive that one was maintained by the authorities to tell the people the time of day. The town crier ringing his bell and calling, "Ten o'clock and all is well" was performing a definite service for the citizens of the community.