

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

September 3, 1965

### **Monterey Murder Case**

"Thomas Williamson, Murdered in Monterey County 1855." So reads the epitaph in the Monterey Catholic Cemetery. He was killed by Garcia and his wild gang, who fired from ambush, the old records inform us. There are many stones dated 1855 when a bad epidemic in that year, similar to influenza of today, killed great many persons.

Then there is an amusing, but nevertheless sincere tribute, among the stones in the city cemetery, which once appeared in Ripley's "Believe It or Not." It reads thus: "Emma, beloved Wife of J.O. Johnson. Born in Ohio, April 24, 1844, Died Sept. 13, 1884. 'She Was Always Right'."

In our cemetery wanderings we read with interest the name Spence upon several headstones. The several graves were marked "Dona Adelaide de Spence. Born 1875: Don David Spence, born in Scotland also died in 1875: and their two baby daughters who died two days apart. March 18th and 20th of the same month, probably from diphtheria."

The name Spence was a name well known in the very early history of Monterey County. The founder of the family was David Spence, who became secretary to John Beggs and Co., hide and tallow merchants of Liverpool, England. In 1822 he was sent to establish a branch office in Callao, Peru, and two years later he was ordered to Monterey. Here he found a fitting field for expansion. He served as alcalde under Governor Alvarado, and also held many offices of importance under Mexican regime.

Guinn's "History of the Central Coast" tells us that Spence took up two grants of land, the first called Buena Esperanza, in Salinas Valley, contained 12,000 acres, and the second, the Liano Buena Vista, also in the Salinas Valley, and included the present site of Spreckels. Spence married Adelaide Estrada in 1829. She was born in Monterey, the daughter of Mariano and Isabel Estrada, natives of Monterey and one of the best known Spanish families. Dona Isabel was the sister of Governor Arguello and daughter Governor Jose Dorio Arguello.

"Maria Josefa Cano Stokes, Born Nov. 15, 1815, Died Sept 16, 1855" was another interesting and historical

marker. James Stokes was an Englishman who came to Monterey in the 1830s and became a prominent trader druggist, and consulting physician to Gov. Figueroa. He married Dona Josefa Soto de Cano, a widow and mother of five children. James and Josefa raised ten of their own.

Dona Josefa was baptized in Mission San Antonio where her father Damaso Soto, was a soldier under the King of Spain: married first to Gil Cano, soldier of Mexico, in 1827 at San Carlos Church in Monterey, widowed in 1838, she married James Stokes, and saw the flag of the new nation raised over the land of her ancestors.

The Stokes Adobe, later known as the Gregg Adobe, was built by James Stokes.

We gazed for a time upon the graves of Josiah Merritt and his wife, Dona Juana Castro de Merritt. Josiah Merritt was born in New York State August 21, 1796. He was a lawyer who had practiced in New York City before arriving in Monterey, via Texas. In January 1850, he took an active part in organizing Monterey County, of which he was elected judge, serving until 1854. Shortly after his arrival in Monterey he married Juana Castro, eldest daughter of Simeon Castro, judge of the first instance under Mexican rule and one of the most influential citizens of the community. The Merritt Adobe on Pacific street was built by Josiah Merritt.

Standing alone in the cemetery is a marble shaft bearing the name Rosalia Vallejo Leese; Born January 27, 1811; Died July 30, 1889. Dona Rosalia was the sister of General M.G. Vallejo, and mother of Rosalie Leese, the first child born in Yerba Buena. A number of years ago the Daughters of the American Revolution placed a bronze plaque upon the Leese home site on Grant avenue, between Jackson and Washington streets, in San Francisco, a location which is now in the Center of Chinatown. The Leese family once owned the Larkin House in Monterey. Thomas Oliver Larkin entered into an agreement with Jacob Leese to trade properties shortly after the Gold Rush. Leese taking over the Larkin House and Larkin the San Francisco building of Leese.

To anyone interested enough to drive in or walk through the Monterey Cemetery they could read the names of many persons who helped to make California history. The families of Abrego, Soberanes, Serrano, Sanchez, Hartnell, Castro, Gonzales, Doud, Cooper, Meadows, etc. and many others are resting in the historic ground, not to mention those of a later period

who saw Monterey grow from a small Spanish village to the city it is today. Let's not destroy any more of the headstones that mark the graves of the departed—they were placed there by descendants and are a part of the history of California. The western half of the cemetery should be cleaned up and kept clean. It is a shame to set a match to dry grass and thereby burn the old wooden crosses, thus leaving the graves unmarked. The eastern half or city owned property with the green grass and beautiful oak trees is a joy to see and not at all depressing which cannot be repeated for the looks of the eastern side. Let's do better and make both sides worthy of the history and the noted persons who are buried there.