

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

October 3, 1966

California Coast: 1842

Sir George Simpson an Englishman of the Hudson Bay Company visited the California coast in 1842 and in 1847 published a book in London under the title "Authentic Narrative of a Journey Around the World." Chapter twelve of the book deals with his experiences in Monterey.

Sir George writes: "A vessel had to keep peddling from one place to another, taking chances of bad weather and anchorage in all the ports from San Francisco to San Diego.

"As the hides are all green, or nearly so, each vessel had to cure them for herself: and as the upper half of the coast owing to the rains and fogs of the northwesterners, is unsuitable, the hides have to be carried to a dryer climate of the southern ports, particularly San Diego and then the curing is a great waste of time."

"Evidently Sir George was not in love with Californians or their traffic," say Mr. Bancroft in his California Pastoral.

In "Journey Around the World" Sir George writes of his voyage down the coast to Monterey:

"At three in the afternoon of the twelfth we left Yerba Buena, exchanging salutes with Captain Hukson of the Index. We passed the Presidio and fort under influence of a strong ebbtide, which, after rounding the southern side of the entrance, rushes to the southward at the rate of six knots an hour.

"In every direction of the current there are some rocks, and as the wind failed us just at this point the vessel, which no longer had any way upon her, hurried toward them like a log.

"The anchor was dropped with thirty fathoms of chain, but dragged till we were within a few yards of the object of our fears. When at last it did hold, it was raised so as barely to touch the bottom, that by this counteracting, in some degree, the action of the tide, it might enable the ship to obey her helm. By this operation of the kedging, as it is, I believe, technically termed, we steered clear of the rocks.

"Then the wind freshened sufficiently to enable us to stand off the shore, which was not above cable's length distance.

"Luckily the rocks in question show all their dangers above, for there is a depth of seven fathoms round each of them; so that the California now lying at Yerba Buena, was lately carried in safety between them.

During the greater part of the voyage, the appearance of the coast was very uninteresting, consisting as it did of a chain of sandy hills covered with scanty verdure.

"By the morning of the fourteenth we passed the point of Santa Cruz, forming the northern extremity of the Bay of Monterey, which resembles a segment of a circle with a cord of about eighteen miles; but in consequence of the lightness of the winds, it was eight in the evening of the fifteenth before we came abreast of the castle and cast anchor, in the neighborhood of four vessels, The American barque "Fama," schooner "Julia Ann," the brig "Bolivar," and the Mexican schooner "California."

"The harbor, if harbor it can be called, is merely the southern end of the bay, protected from the west by the northerly inclination of Point Pinos.

"It is sheltered from only one of the prevailing winds, the southeaster of the soft winter; and so little is landlocked, that in the most favorable state of wind, and weather, the whole beach presents nearly as troublesome surf as the shore of the main ocean.

"Well, it was described by one of the band of Franciscans, who first visited after the days of Viscaino, as "this terrible port of Monterey."