

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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First School Teacher

Mrs. Olive Mann Isbell is a name well known in the annals of schools and school teaching in the State of California for it was she who opened the first school taught by an English teacher in California, in 1846. The school was located on the Santa Clara Mission grounds in a room 15 feet square. The following year, she moved with her husband, Dr. Isaac C. Isbell, to Monterey and opened a school "in a room over the calaboose," It is about the life of this woman that we write today.

Mrs. Olive Mann Isbell was born in Ashtabula County, Ohio, one of a family of 15 children born to Mrs. and Mrs. Warren Mann. Mrs. Isbell was always proud of the fact that she was the same stock as Horace Mann, the noted educator. She married Dr. Isbell at the age of 20 years, and settle in Warren County, Illinois. In 1846 they joined Gen. Fremont's train of 23 wagons which left Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, April 17 and landed at Sutter's Fort Oct. 1, going on to Santa Clara Mission Oct. 16 because of fear of Indians. They had originally expected to join the ill-fated Donner party, but missed connections and later joined with Fremont and came over the "Oregon Trail," The party kept together until Fort Hall was reached. Here four families left to go to Oregon and the rest proceeded to California.

This school continued in Santa Clara until in April five of the families moved to Monterey and took their oxen to help build fortification. Among them were Dr. and Mrs. Isbell. Dr. Warren Ferrier wrote "Ninety Years of Education in California—1846-1836." A review of Mrs. Isbell's life and teaching. He give Dr. Isbell the credit for building the first hotel in Monterey but does not name it. I find in "The early Inns in California", written by R.H. Cross, an attorney in San Francisco, this item which appeared in the "Californian" on April 1847: " 'Monterey Hotel'. We have the pleasure to announce that our worthy friends Messrs. Taber and Isbell have opened the above house on Main street in this city, and to assure visitors to the Capital that these gentlemen, with their good wives will do all in their power to make this house a 'home'."

Mr. Cross believes that the Washington Hotel was not the first hotel in Monterey but was the first private residence of Eugenio Montenegro who married Juana Maria Soberanes. It was built onto many times and its

appearance changed. Washtion street was formerly known as Montenegro street.

Ferrier writes that "Messrs. Thomas Oliver Larkin and Talbot H. Greene urged Mrs. Isbell to teach a school here. A room was fitted up in the Old Custom House used in the regime (others say it was the old adobe jail.) Three dollars per term was charged those who could pay. Rev. Walter Colton, who later laid the foundation for the first schoolhouse in California, gave her some assistance, a few books were obtained from whaling vessels and craft in the harbor. Mr. Larkin provided pencils and paper. Mrs. Isbell knew no Spanish and only the boys from the Don Jose Abrego family (Mrs. Abrego was Josepha Estrada, half-sister of Governor Alvarado), knew any English. Twenty-five pupils began the term and 56 finished.