

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### Teacher's Own Story

Mrs. Olive M. Isbell, our first American school teacher in Monterey wrote a bit about herself, date March 17, 1863, six years before her death in Santa Paula. It will quote from the article as Mrs. Isbell wrote it:

"My first teaching in California was commenced in the month of December, 1846 in a room about 15 feet square, with neither light nor heat, other than that which came through a hole in the roof. This room was in the Mission Santa Clara, near San Jose. There most of the families which came across the plains that year were housed by Col. John C. Fremont. I taught the children of my fellow immigrants under great difficulties. We had only such books as we chanced to bring with us from across the plains. As superfluous baggage was not to be thought of, our stock of books was very limited. I had 20 scholars.

"When our soldiers were disbanded, some five or six families removed to Monterey where the first American Consul, Thomas Oliver Larkin, engaged me to teach a three-month term. They specially fitted up a room for me over the jail; I had 56 names enrolled at \$6 for first term. Part of the scholars were Spanish and the other part were children of the immigrants.

"Those were 'the first American Schools in California.

"I came to California first in the year 1846 and started on my return to Ohio on May 1, 1850. In 1857 I went to Texas to live, but left there in 1863. In 1864 we went to Santa Barbara, lived in Ojai for 2 years and then arrived in Santa Paula in March 1872, where I have resided ever since."

"I am Buckeye, born in Ashtabula, Ohio. I have been a widow since Jan. 6, 1885. The doctor was killed by runaway horses as he went to pay a call to a sick patient. My only means of support is a Mexican War pension of \$8 per month."

At this point I should probably review a bit of the history of the schools that preceded the one in which Mrs. Isbell taught in Monterey. The school which W.E.P Hartnell established in his Monterey home December, 1833, was for boys only. He had associated himself, I read in "California Pastoral" by Bancroft, with Rev. Patrick Peter Short, a refugee priest from the French missions in the Hawaiian Islands. The charge per pupil

for board, lodging and education was quoted at \$200 yearly.

In May, 1834, Governor Figueroa reported to the supreme government that there were primary schools only at Monterey, Santa Barbara and Los Angeles, which were taught by ill-qualified, inexperienced men, and attended by a few pupils.

In 1844, Bancroft records, the school at Monterey was receiving an annual appropriation of \$600. About this time a visionary proposition was made to the government by Henri Cambustton, a Frenchman who had been master of the Monterey school, but had been discharged on account of some trouble with the prefect. He offered to teach more subjects—from primary instructions to the application of the sciences—than any four men could have taught properly; the offer was not accepted.

"The Californians In 1846 were scarcely more learned than those of 1769, they hardly knew enough fully to realize their ignorance." Wrote Huber Howe Bancroft.