

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Old Hotel Del Monte

I have before me a copy of Harper's Weekly, a Journal of Civilization, dated Saturday, April 16, 1887, in which there is a lengthy story describing the Monterey Peninsula and the Del Monte Hotel of those fabulous days.

The story begins: "The old Spanish town of Monterey, on the California seacoast, about one hundred miles south of San Francisco, has enjoyed a checkered history. It was settled originally by Spanish missionaries, who carried the standard of the cross into the unknown wilds to the north of Mexico.

"They built churches, many of which still remain, laid out plantations, and taught the native Indians the art of agriculture, and under their peaceful domination the little city by the sea slumbered peacefully for nearly a century.

"When gold was discovered and the rush of adventurers to California began, Monterey suddenly rose to a position of national importance. Its bay was filled with United States ships of war; from its Custom House the American Flag first floated to indicate the conquest of California, and of the new state it was made the capital.

"Its streets were filled with foreigners from the eastern United States; in its adobe buildings the officers of the state administration made themselves at home; and two widely different eras of civilization elbowed each other with some little acrimony for a time, the older and weaker, going steadily to the wall.

"The Constitutional Convention which set forth the fundamental law of the state met there, and in numerous ways Monterey identified itself prominently and permanently with the history of California. Then the change came. The capital was removed, the strangers disappeared, and Monterey, after its brief awakening, went again to sleep.

"For twenty -five years—from 1852 to 1877—it remained as it had been, a lazy, dreamy Spanish city. Only the music of the sea and the silvery bells of the church of San Carlos broke the stillness of the long sunny days.

"A few fishermen sailed in from time to time and pitched their tents to stay, the ubiquitous Chinaman

found the fishing grounds good, and the Spanish storekeepers bought a few more groceries to feed additional mouths. The march of progress in California was in other directions, and Monterey was changed scarcely at all from all its primitive quiet.

"The birds nested in the parapets of the fort, and the plaster fell piece by piece from the walls of the Custom House. Only the artists from San Francisco visited the town. They sketched in its nooks, swam in the surf, and dreamed under its magnificent oaks, delighted to find a harmony, an antiquity, and a peace incredible, entirely undisturbed by the whirl of commerce or the hum of manufacturers. But one day a locomotive gleamed, hissing and steaming, through the stillness of moss-grown oaks, and the quiet of Monterey was gone forever.

"California has no watering-place of any note, and the Central Pacific Railroad Company saw an opportunity. The natural advantages of climate, oak and pine growth, and sea and mountain scenery, made Monterey the location 'par excellence'.

Accordingly, they took a million dollars from their coffers, waved a magic wand, and in a year (1879-1880) Del Monte was a famous fact.

"Selecting a site about a mile to the northward of Monterey, they built a hotel, a system of waterworks, bath houses, and endless gardens, until the 'Queen of American Watering-places' became, not a phrase of advertising hyperbole, but a voluntary tribute from guests from all over the world.

The hotel which was beautifully endowed in oaks, was three hundred and eighty feet long and a hundred and eighty feet wide, and consisted of two stories and an attic roof, accommodating in all about five hundred guests.

"It was magnificently furnished and had every appliance for the comfort and convenience of its guests that any hotel could offer. It stood in the center of a natural park of one-hundred and twenty acres along the seashore, sixty acres of which were laid out and adorned with every beautifying device that the most tasteful landscape gardeners with unlimited funds to expend could suggest.

"Arizona and Mexico were drawn upon for every picturesque shrub or blossom they contained, and the cactus, the orange, and the verdure of the temperate

zone grew side by side— a botanical happy family that was a curiosity in itself.

“For those who found the surf too cold a bath, large, covered tanks were constructed, with graded temperatures for saltwater bathing. Every additional outlay that attracted the public was freely made, and the continuous throng of guests which, from the opening of the hotel to its destruction last Saturday night filled the hotel, produced a rapid and remunerative return for the investors.”