

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

September 28, 1967

Early Day Medicine

Seventeen years ago I attended a meeting of the Monterey County Historical Society at the home of the late Mrs. F.S. Baker on Romie Lane in Salinas, when the late Dr. Garth Parker spoke of the history of the medical men and hospitals on the early days in the county.

After reviewing the lives of the medical men in Salinas and hospitals there, Dr. Parker said: "Dr. Gonzales was the first doctor to practice in Gonzales, but he did not practice long. He was a very wealthy man. He had attended Cooper Medical College and it was rumored that while he was there as a student a large British syndicate was negotiating for the purchase of his ranch.

"During classes he would receive telegrams of offers from the syndicate which were delivered to him in class, and he would write his reply, giving it to a messenger boy who had brought him the first wire.

"During an examination, the messenger boy arrived, so the story goes, and Dr. Gonzales gave him a list of questions from the examinations. Shortly the boy returned with the answers which had been written by a couple of medical students in a rooming house nearby.

"Dr. Dozier was the first to practice in King City, and he deserves great approbation for the work he did in getting patients in and out of there. He was called into the Jolon section and discovered upon his arrival that it was necessary to do a Caesarian section. He collected all the white thread available and sterilized it; put all the sheets he could find in the oven, taught an old Indian woman to give chloroform and went to work. Both the mother and the baby lived.

"The practice of medicine in those days" to quote Dr. Parker, "was not easy. All Confinements were made in the homes, which in one way was better, but if complications arise it is better to be where expert assistance is available. My father, Dr. John Parker, went down the coast one time and delivered triplets alone, and there was no publicity given the event as would have been the case today. In the horse and buggy days, the mud in the valley was really a problem and a handicap.

"There was an epidemic of diphtheria during 1877, and 130 children died in the county alone. During the present time that great loss could have been combatted

by the use of vaccinations and serums, as we now can control typhoid and other disease of this type. In those days there was nothing. It was thought that the diphtheria epidemic was caused by faulty sanitation, and a great effort was made to clear the water."

The County Medical Society was organized in 1904, and there were at the time of Dr. Parker's talk, two charter members still living, Dr. Garth Parker himself, and Dr. Brummer of King City. "There were about twenty doctors in Monterey County at that time and in 1950 there were more than 150. There were in that year, according to Dr. Parker, 130 members in the Monterey County Medical Society. The number of doctors in the county has probably doubled since the war, according to the speaker, who continued, "These doctors all came well prepared and well trained. The old time doctor had had two years of medical school, with no internship. He was turned directly out on the public and it was a wonder he did as well as he did. The old doctors deserve a great deal of credit, there were no X-rays, no blood transfusions, and none of the present life saving devices."