

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Monterey Was Once a Good Baseball Town

Once upon a time Monterey was quite a baseball town, as was Carmel when the Abalone League was active. Both cities had their home-town ball teams when the young men and even the girls played ball. In Carmel, the Abalone League used to gather a sizable audience to root for a favorite team or player out on a vacant lot near Carmel Point, then later when that territory grew up with homes, the players and the crowd moved to vacant property in Carmel Woods.

In a Monterey Cypress dated January 24, 1907, we found an advertisement for a theatrical group called the Elleford Company playing in the Work Theater in Monterey. In the cast of "My Tomboy Girl," playing the part of the servant "Possum," was a former Monterey boy by the name of George Hernandez.

In an interview with Hernandez published in the news section, the actor expressed surprise that Monterey no longer had a ball team. Before he took to the stage, he said, he played ball and ran foot races when he wasn't working at his trade as a printer. Evidently, he was good at both sports. Those who saw him acting in Monterey in 1907 thought that he was also winning laurels on the stage.

Hernandez played with the old Monterey team in 1887. Ross Sargent and several who were later knee-deep in business in Monterey wore the uniform of the ball club the same year. Mr. Sargent's home was on Cass Street, where Mrs. Sargent and her daughter, Mrs. Stuart Weill, are living today. Hernandez told the reporter in that 1907 interview that "Monterey had a pride in her ball team those days, and nothing was too good for a hero of the diamond."

There was lots of money bet on ball games then, he added, and on one occasion he was given \$40 for making a good play. On that occasion San Juan and Monterey were playing for a championship. In the ninth inning, Monterey was one run ahead and San Juan had two men out. The next visitor from San Juan knocked the ball whizzing into left field, which position Hernandez always played. Quick as a flash Hernandez stopped the ball and threw it to first, putting the San Juan man out and winning the game.

The gallery made a mad rush for Hernandez. Brad Sargent gave him a \$20 gold piece, he recalled. Thomas Doud passed him \$10, and Conductor Morrison gave him another \$10. So that the one play brought him \$40. "Besides," said Hernandez, "they treated me like a king and gave me the freedom of the city."

"Monterey had sports in those days," Hernandez declared. "They tell me now that the city does not support a ball team. That's a shame! Nothing advertises a town so much as a good ball team."

"Why, in the 80s when I played here, the merchants contributed liberally. There was a strong rivalry to have the best nine, and Monterey came pretty near having the best at all times. The players were rewarded and looked after. They were given good positions and appreciated, and the old town turned out in force to the games."