

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Historic Sketch of Monterey

"The Handbook to Monterey and Vicinity" published in Monterey in 1875 by Walton and Curtis, is rich in historical data about the old town and its people and so for a few days we will repeat in this column some of the interesting items appearing in the small but thick little book.

From an advertisement on page 131 of the "complete guidebook for tourists, campers and visitors, we are led to believe that Mr. Walton was the same Mr. W. H. F. Walton who was in the insurance business with J. B. Sniveley, and also "accepted orders and filled them promptly for books, in all languages, at San Francisco prices."

Mr. Curtis was also listed in the advertisements as E. E. Curtis, agent for Parlor and Vestry Organs. He was probably the same Mr. Curtis who wrote the poem for the front page entitled "Monterey," and signed Edwin Emmet Curtis.

The handbook begins with an historical sketch of Monterey, from 1602 when Vizcaino landed on the shores of Monterey, through 1847.

Following the removal of the capital to San Jose after the Constitutional Convention, Monterey began to think of incorporating and so by an act of the Legislature, passed April 30th, 1851, the town was duly incorporated. Philip A. Roach, who was then Alcalde, was elected the first mayor.

His administration was unmarked by any events worthy of special mention. He was succeeded by Gilbert Murdock, of the firm of Curtis and Murdock, merchants, who was followed by W. H. McDowell, who, although duly elected, never served as such, the duties of the office being discharged by Mr. Charles Herron.

Monterey did not long remain a city, for by an act approved May 11th, 1853, her charter was amended, and the control of municipal affairs vested in a board of three trustees, according to the records of that time.

"In 1859 the town found herself so much in debt that it became necessary, in order to meet her obligations, to sell the greater portion of the Pueblo grant. Such extravagance brought the trustees into disrepute, and at the next session of the Legislature, the charter was

again amended in such a manner as to render their powers, "either for good or for evil, exceedingly limited," continues the report of the handbook.

During the legislative session of 1869-70 an attempt to reincorporation was made the bill passed the Assembly but was defeated in the Senate. Another attempt was then made, but in some manner the bill again miscarried. A third effort to obtain the desired result proved somewhat more successful.

In 1873-74 the "Act to re-incorporate the City of Monterey" was carried through both houses and reached the governor who, it is alleged, failed to return it within the specified time. Be this as it may, nothing more was heard of the bill, and Monterey still remained under the nominal control of its trustees.

"The board at present consists of S. B. Gordon, president; H. Escolle, treasurer; and W. H. Bryan, Clerk."

On the 6th day of November 1872, the day also of the presidential election, the board of supervisors of Monterey County called a special election to decide between Monterey and Salinas as the setting for the county seat. Salinas won and the following February the county records were moved to the present location.

From that time until the commencement of the narrow-gauge railroad in April 1874, the fortunes of Monterey were at their lowest ebb. The handbook reports that business of every description was almost stagnant; enterprise and improvements seemed to have no foothold within her quiet precincts, and aptly was she called "The sleepy hollow of California." The editors quote "Like Atri in Abbruzzo, described by Longfellow as:

"One of those places that have run

"Half up the hill beneath a blazing sun,

And then sit down to rest, as if to say,

"I climb no farther upward, come what may."

"She rested in peaceful somnolence — a veritable land of lotus eaters — where the struggles of the outside world found no abiding place."

"Monterey dreams icily on and will so dream until a fresh race of men, such men as are now (1875), building up our California cities, enters her dreamy Eden, and, with the rough but kindly hand of energy, arouses her from lethargy." So says the handbook of Monterey.