

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

May 6, 1968

Castroville

Castroville, part of the El Rancho Bolsa Nueva y Moro Cojo, Spanish-Mexican grant of 40,000 acres, which included the present Fort Ord, granted to Simeon Castro and Maria Antonio Pico de Castro, was founded in 1863 by their children and heirs: Juan Bautista Castro, early Monterey County supervisor; General Manuel Castro, who in 1846 fought General John Fremont at El Gabilan or Fremont's Peak; Maria Antonio Castro de Sanchez, wife of Rafael Sanchez y Galvan, a native of Cadiz, Spain, and one of the first attorneys in Monterey County; Juana Castro de Merritt, Wife of Josiah Merritt, a native of New York state, first Monterey County superior court judge, and three younger brothers, Leandro, Jose Antonio and Jose Francisco Castro.

A site was immediately chosen for a Catholic church and rectory. They were built and the church named, La Iglesia de Nuestra Senora del Refugio, translated means "Church of Our Lady of Refuge."

During those early years, successful church bazaars, were held in the town hall. This two-story wooden building still stands on the main street. In later years an Episcopal Church was erected in the other end of town.

A unique and small Chinatown, one block in length, bordered the town on the east side.

A tract of land on the north end of Castroville was given for a cemetery.

The population consisted mostly of Irish and Portuguese with smattering of Chinese and was a thriving community before the founding of Salinas and Watsonville.

Castroville boasted one of the first hospitals in the county, built and operated by Dr. James George Martin. Dr. Martin's wife was Guadalupe de Allen, heroine of Ann Fisher's "Cathedral in the Sun," and of George Allen, early Monterey settler.

Mrs. Martin's sweetness and gentleness of manner prompted her family and friends since early girlhood, to call her "La Senorita." This endearing pet name remained with her throughout her life. The hospital was later destroyed by fire.

The Saint James Hotel, built and operated by the James Murphy family and a lively small park stood near the

Southern Pacific depot. The Southern Pacific Company built the roundhouse and operated it there for many years before moving it to Salinas.

One of the leading papers in California In early days was The Castroville Argus published by Juan Bautista Castro. Young and brilliant Joseph Merritt, eldest son of Judge Merritt, was the editor.

The old brick building, remodeled, standing on Merritt street, was built by Manuel Merritt and Townsend Wood (father of Mrs. Charles Kiernan and Mrs. Ethel Little of Monterey) grain brokers and owners of a general merchandise store there.

Besides the above mentioned, there were many other homes and places of business in those early days.