

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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More on the Ship Natalia

In 1879 Frank E. Mauk was sent to Monterey as the station agent for the Southern Pacific Railroad. When he saw the remains of the wreck of a ship within about 40 feet of the beach and was told interesting stories by the natives and whalers who called the ship Natalia, the vessel upon which Napoleon escaped from Elba, he determined to obtain a piece of the wood. When he had accomplished this feat, the piece of wood he had hauled from the wreckage was taken from him by A.C. Bassett, the S.P. superintendent, without explanation.

Mr. Mauk's story continues,

"After some weeks, Bassett again came to Monterey, 'Frank,' he said, "you might have thought it strange I was so arbitrary about taking that rib from the Natalia. I had a very good reason for it. I had a French naval officer as my guest at Menlo Park. I wanted that piece of wood for him, and I wanted it just as it was taken when it came from the water. He was familiar with the history of the vessel and has sent your piece to the museum in Paris. But I did not forget you."

Originally the Constant, French vessel, she was sold to the Mexican owners and was in their possession at the time of the wreck. This occurred on New Year's Eve, December 31, 1834, when the captain and the crew left the vessel to celebrate in Monterey. Morning dawned with the Natalia on shore near where the Monterey municipal wharf is now located, beyond possibility of salvage.

A few days after Christmas in 1875, there was much excitement in the old town. An old wreck that had been lying in the bay off the old wharf since 1857 had been uprooted and washed on the beach during high tide, and the talk was that it was the hulk of the Natalia.

But it was proven the wrecked vessel was brig Commodore Rogers, a New Bedford whaler wrecked in 1857 when Monterey was the most important whaling port on the Pacific Coast. The brig had been washed ashore opposite the new depot of the narrow-gauge Monterey-Salinas Valley Railroad. As the Monterey Ledger told the story, "A large number men and boys were soon on hand and as the tide receded, ruthlessly stripped the old vessel of every shred and spike of copper it contained. Quite a large amount was

obtained, which will find a ready sale in San Francisco Market."

Many persons at the time thought the wreck might be the Natalia, but its grave is in our crescent bay and that is honor enough.

Another supposed authority relates: "A group of colonists left Mexico City in April in high spirits, arriving at San Blas, July 23, 1833. From there they embarked for California on Aug. 1, sailing in two vessels—one of which had carried Napoleon Bonaparte from the Island of Elba, rechristened Natalia, Juan Gomez—master. They arrived in Monterey in time to celebrate the new year (1834); during the celebration the vessel drifted ashore, there to end her day."

The first story of the history of the wreck of the Natalia seems to be the one that is historically correct and accepted as a fact. But it is enough to know that the Natalia was wrecked in Monterey Bay and bits of the historical vessel probably still lie buried in the sand a few feet from the shore line.