

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

September 10, 1968

The Moorish Cannon

One day in the spring of 1948 I answered the telephone to hear the voice of Mrs. Grant Stevenson asking me if the Monterey History and Art Association would accept a gift of an ancient bronze cannon presumably of Spanish origin. Of course I could not say "yes" fast enough, sight unseen.

Mrs. Stevenson told me this fascinating story over the telephone then added more information when the late Mrs. Mary L. Green, long-time curator of the old Custom House, and I arrived at Heather Hedge in Pebble Beach. She said that her father and Lt. Cmdr. Grant Stevenson, assisted by the family dog, were cleaning out a spring in the garden when they discovered and dug out this beautiful bronze cannon. That was in 1933. It was an admired decoration in their garden until 1948.

In 1948 Mrs. Green and I drove to the Stevenson home in Pebble Beach, saw the cannon and appreciated its value both in beauty and history. We decided that surely some Spanish galleon had once anchored in Stillwater Cove. In want of fresh water its crew had followed a trickle up the hill and found the spring, taking the cannon for protection against possible attack. After talking it over they must have decided to bury the heavy cannon there rather than carry it back to the ship and it could be picked up again as they returned from further adventure. But the cannon waited for years underground until discovered by Americans living in Pebble Beach.

With help the cannon was put into my car and delivered to the Custom House where it now rests on a redwood pedestal, greatly admired by all who visit this national monument.

Identification of the gun was provided by Sgt. John Gavin, on duty with the 7th Ordinance Company at the Presidio of Monterey. It was identified as a Moorish lantaka.

Sgt. Gavin, on staff at the U.S. Military Academy Museum was able to identify the gun positively through two dolphin shaped handles and a pointed swivel found only on the Moorish cannon.

Although such guns are never stamped with the date of casting, Sgt. Gavin said they dated back almost as far as modern knowledge of gun powder, at least to 1600.

Remarkably well preserved, the cannon is cast in bronze and shows clearly the ornate etched decorations with which some Moorish craftsman completed his masterpiece. A light field gun, probably carried by infantry troops, the cannon is a muzzle loader with about an inch bore.

The swivel is sharply point, enabling the gun crew to mount it in sand, on the wooden deck of a ship or any other solid place.

According to Sgt. Gavin the Spanish took many of the lantakas to the Philippines from where this gun must have been transported across the Pacific to Monterey.

Since it was found near a spring, it was probably brought ashore by sailors in search of water and abandoned when the party was surprised, perhaps by Mexican or American troops who were staging a little war here in the forties.

As an ordinance expert, Sgt. Gavin valued the gun at \$500.