

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Whalebone In Monterey

One of the unique innovations in landscape treatment in Monterey during the American period, was the use of whalebone for paving and ornamental purposes.

An article in the Monterey Gazette, December 23, 1864, seems to have been the first mention of its use by Juan Girardin, a merchant and one time owner of the Stevenson House. The editor in commenting upon the innovation wrote: "Improvements: We give Mr. Juan Girardin credit for having discovered a use of the large quantity of spines or back bones of the whale which are so plentiful on the beach. He has used them, after cutting and trimming to the proper size and shape, as paving blocks in making a neat and pretty sidewalk in front of his two stores which he is fitting up. We hope others may be induced to follow his example, as it is quite an improvement."

Girardin's example was followed by others in Monterey; in fact, the use of whalebone for paving blocks, curbing, and ornamental purposes became a Monterey tradition, and is noticeable today. Some of the best examples in existence are the sidewalks in front of the old whaling Station on Decatur street, the steps at the First Theatre, and for ornament some in the garden at Casa Soberanes and at the entrance to the Stevenson House.

The walk leading from the gate at the Royal Presidio chapel (San Carlos Cathedral) to the entrance to the church was formerly of whalebone and was a great attraction to tourists and townspeople alike. It was removed several years ago and a modern brick walk laid in its stead.

Back in the days when sailing ships anchored at Monterey to exchange their cargo for hides and tallow, they were forced to take back to their Boston harbor sometimes for ballast and many this ballast was rock from the beach at Monterey.

Being thrifty folk, the citizens of Boston used these stones to pave Louisburg Square in that old city.

Some years ago there was a project on foot by some of the modernists to replace the rock of field stone from Monterey with smooth paving. Such a protest was made known that the project was dropped very quickly and the square is still rough and beautiful with native

rock from Old Monterey. This story was told to the Diary by the late Mrs. Winthrop Allen of Pacific Grove.