

Natalia

By Katja Huebner

The Mexican company Compania Cosmopolitana, under the direction of Jose Maria Padres and Jose Maria Hajar, bought the brig Natalia in Acapulco on June 21, 1834, for \$14,000, (payable in 7200 arrobas of California tallow). Padres and Hajar planned to settle a colony of immigrants from Mexico on the California frontier, in the Santa Rosa valley, and export the California products the settlers would eventually produce. They hoped to make a profit monopolizing the growing California trade.

The Natalia set sail from San Blas, Mexico for Monterey, California on August 1, 1834, under the command of Captain Juan Gomez. In Monterey harbor on the afternoon of December 21, 1834, a storm struck, and the ship's anchor chains parted. A customs boat sent to help the Natalia capsized in the surf. The Natalia's crew hoisted the spritsail, in an attempt to control the ship, but it did not help matters. The brig drifted toward the mouth of the Salinas River, but before reaching it, was driven ashore about two miles above the town. Efforts were made to turn the bow to shore, but this too failed and the Natalia beached broadside. By midnight, the ship had split in two and the cook and two sailors were killed in the process.

A guard was posted to watch for and recover what might be washed up on the shore, but locals looted most of what surfaced. A Spanish merchant, Jose Abrego, salvaged the ship's hardwood timbers and used them in the construction of his house. The currents shifted the remains of the wreck westward along the beach until it finally came to a permanent rest near the pier.

During the ensuing ninety years, on two separate occasions, parts of the ship could be seen from shore. On September, 1924, Henry Lippert, a local resident, took advantage of a very low tide and salvaged some timbers, knees and ribs. Ernest Doelter and Sons also retrieved fragments from the ship, such as brass and copper bolts.

Bancroft noted that the Natalia was often confused with the ship Inconstant which carried Napoleon from Elba.

Sources

Bancroft, H.H. History of California. San Francisco: The History Company, 1886.

Craig, Donald. "A Tragic Christmas in Monterey Bay," in Noticias del Puerto de Monterey, December, 1961.

Marshall, Don. California Shipwrecks--Footsteps in the Sea. Seattle: Superior Publishing Co., 1978.

Reinstedt. Shipwrecks and Sea Monsters of California's Central Coast. Ghost Town Publications, 1975.