

# The Posse

## Setting the scene

Our local Rumsen Ohlone Native American tribe is descended from tribes that arrived in the area from Siberia some 10,000 years ago at the time of the last ice age.

When the Spanish arrived in 1769 the native population in upper CA was estimated at 340,000. The Missions and new diseases, think smallpox, soon reduced this population by at least half.

In 1846 President Polk provoked Mexico into starting a war because the US wanted the territories. The war and treaty drew fierce criticism for the casualties, monetary cost, and its heavy-handedness.

Sound familiar?

The Mexican–American War ended on February 3, 1848, although California was a de facto American possession before then because of so many people having already settled there overshadowing both the Mexican and Native American populations.

The California gold rush began on January 24, 1848 and brought an additional 300,000 people to CA. The gold mining operations silted up and destroyed the streams that the Native Americans depended on. Disease and open hostility killed even more.

CA becomes the 31st state on September 9, 1850. Monterey is the capital, as it was for Alta CA. By the time of our story there were fewer than a thousand Ohlone in the greater Monterey area. The non-native population in Monterey was also around a thousand.

So many people were coming to CA, half of them by sea, that navigating the route from the south proved dangerous along the rugged often foggy coastline.

A series of seven lighthouses were commissioned for the coast of CA.

Materials for the lighthouses arrived in 1853 by a ship coming around the horn.

The first lit was at Alcatraz Island in San Francisco bay leading men to the gold fields.

Five months later came the critically important Point Pinos Lighthouse, guiding ships to the CA capitol through the dangerous southern entrance to Monterey Bay.

## Introducing the major characters

Young Monterey County Constable Thomas Williamson, friend of Issac Wall.

Sheriff John Keating, 3rd sheriff of Monterey, late 1855 to 1857.

Jim Beckwith had just come to Monterey a few days earlier, looking for excitement.

Issac Wall (b 5/11/1822 Halifax C. VA) - speaker of the house and Monterey's 1st senator, attorney, was hired by Sheriff William Roach (1st sheriff of Monterey) to protect him from Mrs. George W. Crane who was trying to get money from him. Collector of Customs at Monterey port. Hired Layton as an assistant. Got him the lighthouse job.

Anastacio Garcia ran with a gang called 'Manila' with Tiburcio Vasquez (who was later executed for murder in 1875). The two of them killed Monterey County Constable William Hardmont, September 2,

1854 at a dance in Monterey. All told Garcia will have killed fourteen men, the most ruthless nasty person known at the time.

Deputy Jose Joaquin Carmen Santiago de la Torre, born 1812 in Monterey. A grantee of Rancho Arroyo Seco in 1840 by Gov of Alta CA Juan Bautista Alvarado, active in the revolution against Mexican Gov Manuel Micheltoarena. Cousin of Vallejo, chased by Fremont across SF Bay on Christmas Eve on assignment to rid Sonoma of all 'gringos'. Was alcalde of Monterey at one time and a scribe in Colton Hall. Wife Maria Elena Los Angeles De La Torre was of the Rumsen Ohlone tribe.

Charles Layton was born on March 3, 1811 in Oxford Shire, Banbury County, England. Layton, as a young British soldier fought with the American army in Mexico and rose to the rank of sergeant. Layton came to CA in 1847 with Company F, Third U.S. Artillery. Spent 16 years in the military. From 1849-1852 tried his luck at gold mining. He, his wife Charlotte, and four children arrived in Monterey in 1853.

### **As this story is posted on the Point Pinos Lighthouse website . . .**

Issac Wall allowed his assistant Charles Layton and his family to stay in the lighthouse to safe-guard the property until he was nominated by Issac and commissioned as its first keeper. The lighthouse was lit on February 1, 1855

The only way to town from the LH was by horseback or mule over a twisty dirt and sand trail.

Pacific Grove did not exist yet. Bears, wolves, coyotes and mountain lions were common in the area.

The lamp was lit with expensive stinky whale oil that arrived in barrels by mule cart.

Rations arrived the same way, as canned or salted meat, bushels of potatoes, flour, sugar, etc. plus whatever could be grown at the LH itself, which had excellent soil at the time (not so later).

Toilet paper, flush toilets and refrigeration had yet to be invented.

### **The Day Before**

Issac Wall and Constable Thomas Williamson left Monterey on Nov 6, 1855 on a hunting trip and camped 25 miles south of Monterey. They were found dead by David Spence, owner of the ranch, on Nov 9, 1855.

### **The Story**

Six men had already been killed in the quest for the gold left by Jose Sanchez, including the aforementioned Wall and Williamson. Something had to be done to bring the suspect, Anastacio Garcia, a known cattle rustler and now murderer, to justice.

On November 10, 1855 Sheriff John Keating formed a posse. He chose his Deputy de la Torre, Layton (who had military experience and knew the murdered Issac Wall), Jim Beckwith along with two others for a total of six men. Unlike in the movies where people are rounded up at the nearest salon, these men were carefully chosen for their abilities and experience.

They arrived at dusk on horseback in front of the suspect's shack nestled in the willows of the Salinas river just south of Rancho El Tucho. This all happened at night, in the dark, with low visibility and only a waxing crescent moon that night. Not known, but they could have carried lanterns of some kind.

Sheriff Keating and two men went in front of the house and Deputies Joaquin de la Torre, Charles Layton and Jim Beckwith went to the rear to cut off a possible escape route.

When Keating knocked at the front door, the back door opened and out walked Garcia's wife with a young girl at her side.

Deputy Sheriff de la Torre said he wanted Garcia. She stated he was not there.

The huge six foot Garcia then jumped out from behind her skirts and killed de la Torre instantly with two shots to the face.

Another shot dropped Layton with a shot through his hand, completely removing an index finger and half of another. The bullet then ricocheted off Layton's gun and lodged in his stomach.

Two men down, Garcia grabbed Beckwith's horse, shot him twice, in the hand and thigh, and escaped into the night.

The remaining unharmed men brought the dead de la Torre and the dying Layton and Beckwith back to Monterey, arriving around 10pm.

de la Torre was the first Hispanic deputy killed in the line of duty in the United States.

Layton, as was often the case with a body wound at the time, died nine days later on Nov 19, 1855.

It is not known when Beckwith died, only that he did, probably from bleeding out or infection.

### **After Story**

Layton's wife Charlotte (b 3/2/1824 in Beauford, NC and d 2/11/1890), then assistant keeper, became principal keeper (the first woman keeper on the west coast and eighth in the US) appointed by Wall's successor. In 1860 she married an assistant keeper, George Harris (b 3/25/1825 d 12/14/1890), who became principal keeper and she returned to assistant status.

Charles Layton, Joaquin de la Torre, Jim Beckwith, Isaac Wall and Thomas Williamson, who all died as a result of Garcia over those two fateful days, were all buried at the Monterey Cemetery. Beckwith's exact grave location is unknown.

Upon his escape Anastacio Garcia made his way to Los Angeles.

Mrs. Garcia arrived in Monterey a few weeks later to then go by boat to San Pedro (the Los Angeles port). Tom Clay, an eccentric school teacher was hired to follow her, pretended to work with her to obtain a team of horses and bring them to a specific spot, Rancho La Brea (about 20 miles north of the port). She waited at the port while he did this, only instead he got the Santa Barbara Sheriff. They got Garcia before he met his wife and took him to Salinas to await trial.

Garcia sent for the men who helped him murder Wall and Williamson and threatened to tell all unless he was released. They promised to break him out that night. Instead they put a lariat around his neck and over a wooden beam, tied his feet to an iron ring on the wall and then pulled until his neck was broken. He was found strangled the next morning, Feb 17, 1857.

All three deputies who died as a result of this episode are honored at the Monterey County Sheriffs office, Sacramento, CA and at the Washington D.C. memorial to fallen officers.

Thus ends our tale.