

# NOTICIAS del PUERTO de MONTEREY

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The Monterey History and Art Association

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## Letters From An Abandoned Sister, 1838 - 1851

In the March, 1959, issue of the *Noticias* we published a sketch of the career of Don Florencio Serrano, an important figure in the Monterey of 1834 to 1877, whose old adobe home the Association has saved from the bull-dozer. One of the touching incidents in the life of Don Florencio was the sad parting of the ambitious young settler and his homesick sister, Francisca, in 1837 and her return to Mexico. Here we have the making of a sentimental California legend, and like all legends, it contains some, but not all, of the truth.

What no one has known until very recently was that the separation was to have been only temporary, that Florencio himself was ready to sail back to his native land, and that for a good many years thereafter he regretted not having done so. Furthermore, Francisca turns out to be no helpless adolescent but a grown woman with much common sense, hardihood — and two little children. The boy, Antonio Carvajal, could not have been less than six or seven years old; the girl, Genoveva, was apparently a few years younger.

Since Don Florencio was sixty-three when he died in 1877, he was about twenty-three when he waved farewell to Francisca at Monterey in December, 1837. Even calculating that his sister had married at sixteen (a not-uncommon thing when Mexican girls today ordinarily make their debut at fifteen), and reckoning her son at seven, it seems likely that Francisca had about a year's advantage on Florencio.

When she speaks, too, the tone is decidedly that of an older sister. Francisca loved her brother dearly, but she worried about him, advised him and scolded him as few younger sisters would.

And she had just cause to burn his ears. Here a penniless girl was set down on a sandy beach at Mazatlan, Mexico, with a trunk, two lively children, and sundry baskets, bags and bundles. In that scorching little town she waited almost a year for her errant brother who, although he had promised faithfully to join her, never saw her again but remained in Monterey.

Francisca never got over it. For years she let him know how cruelly he had treated her, but she never ceased to cherish him and to write, although the return letters were scanty. In a way, our sympathy goes out to Don Florencio, too, because Francisca, for all her loving solicitude seems something of a nagger. It may not have been just malignant fate that parted the two, but the firm intention of the brother to remain out of ear-shot.

We know this through the five tattered letters, dating from 1838 to 1851 that Francisca wrote to her brother. The letters now belong to the State of California and have been made available for this article by Mrs. William Kneass, curator of the Pacific Building and co-editor of the *Noticias*. They are translated by Donald Craig.

The hand-writing is generally small and precise, and the spelling is highly phonetic. Francisca may have written the letters herself, an accomplishment far beyond most women of her time, or she may have used the medium of the public letter writer. The old paper has stood the test of these hundred and more years remarkably well. Through much folding and re-folding, the oldest letter has come apart at the points of wear, but the loss in words is negligible.

The letters are interesting not only because they set the record straight, but for the picture they give us of the manner in which the ties of family and friendship operated in those days when the roads were often horse trails, and there was rarely a hotel where a decent lone woman might stay. Besides, several names pop up that are not noted in Hubert Howe Bancroft's register of pioneers before the discovery of gold. Apparently, too, despite the discomfort, tedium and danger of the voyage, there was a brisk going and coming of businessmen between California and Mexico. Lastly, there is a letter from Nephew Antonio Carvajal to Uncle Florencio at the news of the Gold Rush suggesting a flyer in business in the diggings. We do not know what happened here, but Don Florencio was never fortunate as a merchant.

Apparently, too, the transfer of California to the Americans was gall and wormwood to Serrano. Under the Mexican government he had obtained a few official jobs, for he was, according to the standards of the times, well-educated. He had had hopes; he had married fairly well in 1845, — and his first son was born eight or nine months after the seizure of Monterey by Commodore Sloat. All his plans for the future must have crumbled into dust. As a man of honor and a Mexican official, he had refused to serve under the American military government. His livelihood was gone, and for many years, as the gold fields of California enriched the aggressive American newcomers, and the Californians were stripped of their lands and positions, he must have harbored a deep resentment.

There are gaps of many years between the letters, and we hear but one side of the story, yet they give us one more angle from which to view the turbulent years of Monterey's history and one more facet on the life and times of Don Florencio Serrano.

The following letters are in chronological sequence.

— DONALD M. CRAIG

*Puerto de Mazatlan, June 7, 1838*

My dear and never-to-be-forgotten brother:

Now that the presence of Don Juan Malarin<sup>1</sup> allows me the opportunity, I shall take advantage of it to let you know of my arrival here. I landed on January 20th and then Dona Manuelita Munoz came down to the shore to receive me and took me to her home. Within a short time my *comadre*, Senora Cosio, came and took me to hers where I stayed for several days until Mazatlan announced its adherence to the Federal cause. Since Cosio did not

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<sup>1</sup> Monterey figure from 1820 to 1850: ship's captain, judge, councilman, First Jury, land owner, port captain, etc.



join this party, . . . (about four or five words worn away) from here. Then I went with the Gonzalez family, where I was for a few more days; but seeing how poor they were, I came back to Dona Manuelita's, where I am at present, for she is not so badly off in spite of Munoz having had no work for three months because of the revolution. But now that the government troops have entered the town and have forced it to withdraw its support of the Federalists, they have given Munoz back his temporary job. \*

As soon as I got here I wrote to Romero and he answered me, telling of the death of his mother three days before he reached Mexico (City). Just now he writes me from San Luis Potosi where he is employed. He also tells me that he was robbed on the road and left with only the clothes he stood in.

It is probable that he will send for me as soon as he gets somewhat settled. I tell you this so that in case you come here or to Tepic and do not find me, you will know where I probably am.

I beg you, I beg you, come as soon as you possibly can, no matter what the sacrifice, — oh, come at once for many reasons. The first is that France has declared war on Mexico and a great fleet is blockading Veracruz, and it is greatly feared that they will do the same with the other ports. \* They have captured some Mexican vessels, and I have not an hour's peace when I consider how great would be my misfortune if, when you come here (worn away in letter but probably was "the French would attack you and leave me") without hope of ever seeing you again. Therefore, what I desire with all my heart is that you come overland, even though it is a longer journey and will be a little more tiresome. But the most important thing is that you get here safely. If you come right now I shall not go to San Luis (Potosi).

Antonio is continually pestering me with questions about his uncle; Genoveva occasionally remembers you. If I had known how long our separation was to be, I would not have come. Ever since I arrived Genoveva has been sick with fever, pimples and dysentery and every day becomes more whimpering and contrary. She is as thin as a rail. If you could see her, you would not know her. I have been cursing the mosquitoes and stinging gnats.

As in San Blas, it is already devilishly hot here. Give Don Pepe de la Rosa \* and his family my best regards and the news of the death of Don Manuel Lopez. The (?) broke on him and he woke up dead in bed. Don Gregorio Avana died, too, but he was murdered in his bed by rivals.

As soon as I got here, Gonzalez took Antonio in charge so that he would not waste time, for he has the public school and should be well off, it it were not for his eccentricities and the poor way his house is run. He and his family send greetings, Munoz and his family too, as well as Meneces and Quintero, and on my part, greetings to Dona Carmencita, the widow, and her mother, the Madariagas \*, Rangel \* and his family, and the Arguelles.† Antonio sends you a hug and Genoveva sends another. From your sister who wishes to see you with all her heart.

Francisca (*clumsily printed*)

2 This constant jockeying for position between the Federalists (States Rightists) and the Centralists (Strong central government) went on for ten years, to the great annoyance of everybody except the generals and politicians.

3 The ridiculous Pastry War of 1838-39. The French demanded reparations for damages suffered by some French citizens in Mexico City riots. Especially looted was a pastry shop.

4 A printer who came up with Serrano. He was later alcalde of Sonoma.

5 Clerk in Monterey from 1830. Commissioner of police and councilman. Went back to Mexico in 1842.

6 Came in 1829. Technically a prisoner until 1834.

7 Shoemaker in Monterey in 1836.



**The Casa Serrano before the work of restoration had begun. Abandoned for years, the roof leaking, infested with rats, the rear buildings a hodge-podge of wooden board-and-bat additions, it was doomed to be razed by the bull-dozers.**

Photo courtesy of Claude Faw

P.D. I forgot to tell you that the reason why I have not gone on to Tepic as we had agreed upon, was because the day after my arrival, the little money I had was stolen from my trunk. Even now, I do not know who it was, and since then I have not had the means to get the evidence.

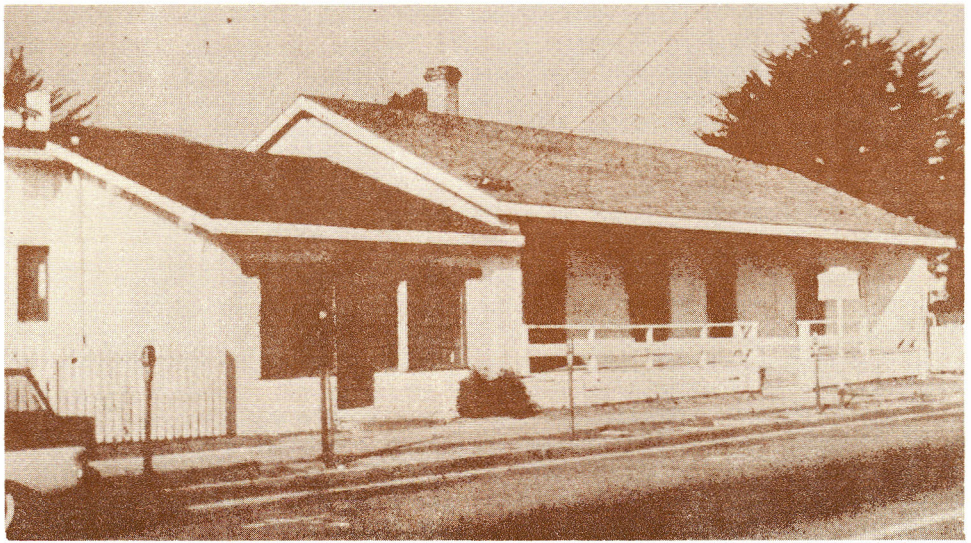
*Mexico (City) July 9, 1840*

My never-forgotten (although ungrateful) brother:

It will soon be three years since we parted and I see that you, instead of being sorry for it, are actually glad; just remember, you gave me your word that we would see each other in Tepic within three months, and three years have passed. Not only have you not come, but you have not even thought me worthy of a letter for a long time. You cannot say that you do not know where I live, for Don Jose Maria Andrade<sup>8</sup> must have told you that he left me in Mexico (City); besides, both I and Victorio Gomez wrote you in care of Andrade. Moreover, the whole eight months I spent waiting for you in Mazatlan, I never failed to write to you at every opportunity, but the result is that (although) ships have not failed to come to Acapulco and Zamorano and Anita (?) Castanares always get word of their families, but as for me — not even remotely. This makes my life one of such uneasiness and worry—for I begin to think that you have again had trouble with your eyes (this is the only reason I can give for your delay) that I wish you would do me the favor of telling me truthfully (what is the matter).

<sup>8</sup> Came to Monterey 1836. Land grant in San Francisco 1846.





After restoration by the Monterey History and Art Association, the Casa Serrano has been preserved as a part of Monterey's historical heritage. The roof is repaired, the interior cleaned, cleared, painted, shored up, and made ready for use by the entire membership, the additional structures have been removed or adapted, and the old fireplace again gives off a cheery glow.

Photo Courtesy of Claude Faw

If it is really a case of illness, I am ready to make any sacrifice for you that may be in my power. I shall face the dangers and discomforts of the journey and all that now divides us to go and contribute my care to the recovering of your health. But if that is not the reason, I also want you to tell me so that I can live more tranquilly, for I will know that you stayed in California because you wanted to, and not because you had to. If you are now well established and you have the means to get along. I am not so imprudent as to demand that you leave everything and risk all by coming to Mexico, especially considering the circumstances in which one finds the capital today.

The only thing I want is that you tell me *why* you do not come. For God's sake, let me know as soon as possible, for you cannot imagine with what impatience and longing I await the arrival of some ship at Acapulco. But when I go, and Don Enrique Vilmo tells me that he has brought no passengers, — and even when he does bring them, none of them is you, — I could die with rage, and at that moment I would like to be a bird and fly to Monterey to see what your fate is. Every day I repent more and more having believed your words, for if I had not believed you with such faith, I would never have left California without you. You deceived me, something for which I cannot pardon you, but let us not go on with such things, for if I get started to tell you all that I wanted to on that score, I would never finish.

I'll just tell you that Dominga and her family send greetings. They have been in Mexico (City) for two months and they have left for Toluca this very day. Jose Maria and his "little pug-nose" send their love. They are here, too. Rafaelita, her family and everyone in general send thousands of kindest expressions of affection. Antonio and Genoveva are very big and look forward



to seeing themselves in your arms. Please give my regards to Dona Guadalupe, the wife of Teodoro Gonzales, \* to the Madariagas, to the widow, and to all those who remember me. And here is the heart of your sister who loves you dearly and longs to see you.

Francisca Serrano (*well-written, shaded strokes of pen*)

Mejico, August 29, 1848

Dear never-forgotten brother:

I received your very much appreciated letter of May 23 of last year, which I answered along with the one of the same month of this year, which was when I received it through the mail and not by hand as you said, and not having had any answer, I take this opportunity which I judge will bring my letters to your hands.

By your letters I am informed that I have a little nephew whom, sight unseen, I cherish because he is the son of so dear a brother whom I have always loved deeply, and of a sister who, although I have not had the honor of meeting her, the fact that you have chosen her is enough for me to judge her worthy of you, and I do appreciate her and count her from this instant as one of our little family. The little curl from Pedrito has been a darling gift, for which I give you thanks and Genoveva has claimed it with a thousand expressions of joy.

As for what you tell me about intending to come here, I must tell you that I would be infinitely over-joyed to see you and your family, — which is mine, too, — and to re-join you, never to separate again. But, by sacrificing my love for your well-being, I cannot do less than counsel you not to think of such a thing. Resources (jobs?, funds?) here are very scarce. Mejico gets worse every day, while where you are, for better or worse, you are already established, and if you make an effort and try to get along with the American government, I believe that you can recover from your losses and even make your fortune, for here they say that California is certainly becoming a paradise, while Mejico is just as surely becoming a purgatory.

I am writing you nothing of my present situation, for Antonio is going to write to you and he will tell you. I do not send word of Rafaelita and the rest of our relatives because I never see any of them. Rafaelita is in Texcoco, Dominga in Toluca, and the rest in like manner.

I charge you with the responsibility of giving the most loving greetings from Genoveva and me to my sister Ritita \* and that you give my nephew Pedrito many hugs and many kisses, and that as soon as he begins to talk (which will probably be soon, for we have counted up the time and today he should be one year, seven months and eleven days old) that you teach him to say our names and to know that in Mejico he has an aunt and two cousins who, although far away, love him and will never forget him.

Do not fail to write, and when you do, let it be a long, very long letter, for a little bit does not satisfy me. Goodbye, brother, and may God bless you and grant us the happiness of seeing each other again, —

Your adoring sister, Francisca Serrano (*well-written, firm signature*)

— TO BE CONCLUDED

<sup>9</sup> Came to Monterey in 1825. Held many civic positions, including that of alcalde. Guadalupe, his wife, was previously married and the mother of Francisco Rico.

<sup>10</sup> Serrano married Rita de la Torre in Monterey in 1845.

## COSAS DE INTERES PARA LOS SOCIOS

At the December 7 meeting of the directors, the directors of the Monterey Foundation were honored guests and Claude Faw gave them a full report of the restoration work done on the Serrano Abode with the \$3,000 gift and \$2,000 loan that the Foundation had made available for this purpose. Foundation directors present were Colonel Allen Griffen, Mrs. W. M. O'Donnell, Mr. Frank Work, Mrs. W. R. Holman, Mr. Rollo Peters, Mr. J. F. Van Loben Sels, and Mr. Carmel Martin, Sr.

For the first time, the photographic record of the work undertaken on the Casa Serrano was displayed in slides by Mr. Faw. During his report he emphasized that the aim had been restoration, not modernization, and that it was the Association's intention to perpetuate the historic tradition of Monterey and to preserve for posterity an appreciation of the work and craftsmanship of the pioneers of California.

It was voted that Mr. Faw be granted \$100 for the preparation of a brochure that will illustrate the Association's work in connection with the restoration of the Casa Serrano and that this brochure be used in the application for an award by the National Trust for the Preservation of Historic Houses in America. We also intend to compete for the award given by the California Historical Society for out-standing contributions to the cause of protecting and restoring the historic land-marks of California. We won it last year.

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President Allen Knight asked a committee of directors to contact the State for funds and support to have the plaque of bronze made which commemorates the historic events of Monterey Bay. The wording of the plaque is the work of Mr. Talbert Josselyn. The monument would face out upon the bay from the walk-way near the mission benches.

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The first membership meeting of the new year is planned for January 4 in our new headquarters at the Casa Serrano. Besides the regular reports of President Allen Knight, Secretary Mrs. William M. O'Donnell, and Treasurer Mrs. Isabel Tostevin, there will be interesting talks by people well acquainted with old California. Refreshments will be served, as usual.

It is hoped that the Casa Serrano, our permanent home, will be suitably furnished by then. There will be a cheery fire in the old fireplace.

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We welcome the following new members. This brings our membership to 609 adults and 27 junior members. Mr. and Mrs. B. V. McMenamin, Judge and Mrs. William James of San Jose, Major and Mrs. John Orwelle Simpson, Leonard G. Heller, Mr. and Mrs. H. G. Jorgenson, Mr. and Mrs. Augustus Pollock, Admiral and Mrs. Lucius Chappell, Mrs. John L. Kueffer, Robert J. Kaller. The new juniors are Constance and Randolph Chappell.

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Among the gifts received by the Association have been a beautiful rosewood square piano, two Spanish chests, two oriental rugs and a chest of drawers from Mr. Frank Work. From Captain and Mrs. Charles M. Jett has come a fine old blue-painted kitchen safe, and from Mrs. Juan Garcia, for many years a colorful figure at the Association's meetings and Meriendas, her father's Spanish Cape, several fine lace mantillas, a gorgeous manton de Manila, Spanish coins and several other items.

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The sincere thanks of the whole Association goes to the Monterey Foundation for its donation of \$3,000. toward the restoration fund of the Casa Serrano. The old abode has now received its new roof, has been properly fenced, the inside cleared of obstructions and made useable for meetings.

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A very jolly first meeting of the general membership at the rescued building was held on November 7. Those present could visualize how the adobe will look when properly furnished and open as "our very own" permanent headquarters.

Mrs. Tod Singleton, general chairman for the annual "Adobe Tour", gave a summary of the work of the committees involved in this most successful of all tours. We only wish we had space to list each and every member and friend who helped so much during the tour and at the various adobes. The day, after a night of storm, was bright with sun, and from far and near the visitors poured into Monterey, toured the eleven adobes by daylight and candle-light, and went away with lavish praises for each house and the charmingly costumed hostesses.

Working with Mrs. Singleton were sub-chairmen Mrs. William E. Oberholtzer, Jr., Publicity; Mrs. Lucius H. Chappell, Tea; Mrs. M. R. Gragg, Tickets; and Charles Simpson, Transportation.



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## COSAS DE INTERES PARA LOS SOCIOS

The adobes open for the day and their owners or head hosts and hostesses were Mrs. Raymond Spruance, Casa Abrego; Mrs. John Shephard, Casa Amesti; Dr. and Mrs. Mast Wolfson, Casa Boronda; Mr. and Mrs. Leo Ross, Casa Buelna; Miss Margaret Jacks, Casa Castro; Professor and Mrs. A. Boyd Mewborn, Casa Serrano; Mrs. William O'Donnell, Casa Soberanes; Miss Edna Browning, Colton Hall; Mrs. Frank Culin, House of the Four Winds; Mrs. Edward K. Barnes, Larkin House; Mr. and Mrs. George H. Leutzinger, Old Whaling Station.

At the Larkin House, the traditional tea was furnished by Mrs. Henry W. Toulmin, granddaughter of Consul Thomas Larkin. At Miss Jacks' home, cold punch and cookies were served.

The tour raised almost \$3,000 toward the Casa Serrano restoration fund. The Association owes a great debt of thanks to Mrs. Singleton, her sub-chairmen, and all the loyal workers in this project.

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Mrs. William O'Donnell, our indefatigable secretary, was featured at an October 21 workshop of the San Francisco School Department under the auspices of the California Pioneer Society. She talked to 150 teachers on "Monterey's Place in California History."

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On December 11, the Lions Club of Bonsall in San Diego County, in co-operation with our Association, dedicated a new bench on the Monterey waterfront to Pala Mission. Although Pala, built in 1816, was originally an asistencia, or chapel of the larger Mission San Luis Rey, it is the only surviving Mission carrying out the purpose for which it was built, for it still ministers to the Indians of the Pala Reservation on which it stands.

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Another vote of thanks goes to Mr. Claude Faw, who has worked like a dozen men supervising the labor at the Serrano Adobe. He has not confined himself just to supervising, either, but has gotten in on the dusty and dirty end of cleaning and repair as well.