

NOTICIAS del PUERTO de MONTEREY

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A CHRISTMAS LEGEND

Anne Fisher, former local author writing in the 1940's and 1950's, made important contributions to biographical and historical accounts for Monterey County. Her entertaining narratives based upon authentic sources should not be overlooked by readers since her time. This is particularly true of her stories for young people. *Stories California Indians Told* (1957), twelve authentic tales based upon myths collected by anthropologist, Dr. C. Hart Merriam, and told to Anne Fisher, is out of print but available in the Monterey library. *Bears, Pirates, and Silver Lace*, an earlier collection, is available in paper back and includes the following legend. This was also published in the December, 1947, issue of the former local magazine, *What's Doing*. Through the courtesy of Lee Harbick we re-print it from that as Anne Fisher introduced it.

THE CHRISTMAS STAR OF CARMELO

by Anne Fisher

*"The story came to me from the lips of dear old Isobel Meadows, who was born in Carmel Valley the day the American Flag went up over the customs house in Monterey. The tale was told to Isobel by her mother, Loreta Meadows, who was at the mission when the incident occurred."**

After Mexico took California away from Spain, the padres at San Carlos Mission on the Carmelo were in a bad way. The taxes were very high and must be paid often, and that left little for padres and the few remaining Indians to live on.

After San Carlos Day in November the struggle grew even worse. The rains came, and there were so few shoulders to carry the work, for old ones sickened in the wet and had to be dosed with herbs to draw rheumatism from their bones.

As Christmas drew near Father Prefect came to the mission and the padres planned a glorious Christmas Mass. Indians were put to work making candles from the scant store of tallow.

Loreta made the manger in the church for Christmas, and Juan, her old father carved the shepherds and the sheep and a cow or two from bits of wood.

The eyes of the newest Indian convert, Antonio Peralta, were bright with joy as he pulled some shiny silver thread from the pocket of his ragged pantaloons, and the stuff glistened in the light. "For Christmas."

The padre was worried. "Where did you get that beautiful silver thread?"

"The other day when I went to Monterey with cabbages and carrots to sell, a very rich Spanish Senora was coming out of the shop. Her dress had lace on it, made out of silver thread."

"You didn't *steal* thread from her dress, Antonio?" The padre looked right into the eyes of the Indian boy.

"It caught on the rough iron door latch and ravelled the lace," Antonio murmured. "I called out to her in warning, but she only put her chin up and walked away."

"So you saved the beautiful stuff and now you have something shining and beautiful of your very own?"

The Indian shook his head. "No, not for me. I'm going to make a Christmas star over the altar, and it will lead the Christ Child to our mission on Christmas night."

The padre had tears in his eyes as he turned from the boy.

Antonio took four sticks and crossed them in the middle, then he tied them together with rawhide strips, so that the sticks made an eight pointed star.

All day long he worked on the star. He wrapped the sticks with his precious silver thread and made it go just as far as he could and when he finished, his creation was beautiful beyond all things Indians had ever seen! Then when the greens were all up over the altar, Antonio climbed up and fastened his beautiful star in the very middle.

The Indians were dazzled by the beauty of this thing Antonio had made.

"It is shining with the unselfishness of a poor Indian boy, and lights the way for the Christ Child in his heart as well as in the church," the padre told them. "That is why it is so bright."

That night just before midnight all the candles were lighted on the altar, and each candle sent out its rays to make the star shine more brightly in the greens above the altar.

Indians, Mexicans, Spaniards; English and Americans all came to the church for the midnight Mass. The church was almost full when the Indians began to sing the chants that padres taught them long ago.

When the mass was over it was Christmas. Out in the mission yard a padre called to the Indians who had come a long way.

"You must stay here until daylight. We will have a feast to honor Christ's birthday. Everbody is invited to the feast."

Those Indians didn't need to be invited twice to a fiesta! Over a hundred of them stayed. They camped near the church with their wives and all their children.

An English ranchero came up to the padre.

"Why do you ask all these Indians to stay to a feast when you have hardly enough to feed yourselves?" he asked. "What will you give them to eat?"

The padre only smiled at the man's fears. "We will make what we have go as far as it will, but we *must* celebrate Christmas." He pointed through the door to where the star shone over the altar. "We have a star that an Indian made, to shine out and light the way for the Christ Child. Surely we must celebrate the Blessed Babe's birthday."

The English ranchero looked sadly at the Indians sleeping in the shelter of the mission, then he went away shaking his head.

Just before dawn, when all was silent, the padres were suddenly awakened by singing outside the mission walls. Indians woke up from sleep. Then there was a loud banging noise that drowned out the singing.

One padre got up and pulled on his patched brown robe, slid his feet into worn sandals and ran across the mission yard to the gate where the singing and banging had come from.

When he opened the gate horse's hoofs sounded in the distance as riders went away, singing as they rode.

There by the gate at the padre's feet were three whole beeves and six bags of ground corn—and a much smaller bag that was filled with something very hard and lumpy.

Indians helped to carry the Christmas gifts into the storehouse but the padre himself carried the bag that was filled with something hard and lumpy. He took it to a lighted candle to have a look at what was inside.

It was a big bag of rock sugar candy! A bag big enough so that every single Indian child at the mission could have some sweets to celebrate the birthday of Christ.

There was a note in the bag.

"May the Christmas Star always shine into the hearts of men all over the world, as it shone last night above the altar of San Carlos Mission on the Carmelo."

*Isobel was grand daughter of Onesemo, or Juan, the Carmelo Mission Indian the story of whose family is the basis for Anne Fisher's **Cathedral in the Sun**.

A splendid writer and Anne Fisher's contemporary, Susana Clayton Ott, likewise loved, understood, and communicated the lore of early mission days, especially the celebrations of *La Noche Buena* and *Los Pastores*. Parents will do well to seek out and read with their children for Christmas her exquisite little story, **The Good Night at San Gabriel**, (Harper & Brothers, 1947).

Set sometime in the 1780's near the pueblo of Los Angeles, it is a play within a story of the enactment of the ancient Spanish legend of the Nativity as adapted to early California by mission padres and Indians. Miss Ott writes an appealing story of uncommon joyousness, reverence, humor, and tenderness.

The *Presidente* of all missions, Father Serra, is walking in humility the 300 miles from the mission of Carmel to San Gabriel to take the yearly census and will be here on the Night of Nights and for the *La Noche Buena* play! Never has there been such excited preparations for the drama, such elaborate and remarkable devices to stage Heaven and Hell and to make costumes with tails, horns, and wings. Father Juan is giving the Indians full rein in this play which is their gift. And never such soul-searching by everyone to choose a gift to lay before the little Wanderer Babe, *El Pobrecito*, in his crib before the altar. For to him whose gift Fr. Serra deems best will go the honor to play San Gabriel who will stand on the threshold of the sky and announce God is born!

Pablo, who is young and loves Juanita, who is to be the Mother of God, wants above all things to have the part, that Juanita may be pleased. He has been gone three days to find his gift and is not back. Juanita is praying for his return. Fr. Serra is already here. It is time to begin the play.

Fr. Serra stands at the altar and smiles to receive gifts and see the play. But look! Pablo is here and approaches with his gift. Silently he draws from within his shirt and holds up prayer wise a little glass box. Within is a small wooden heart painted red and with two golden wings on top. Ahh! It is no less than the greatest treasure in the world, God's own flowing heart! But taken from the mission of San Juan Capistrano—Pablo's oblation for Juanita, his hostage for San Gabriel! Fr. Serra looks at it in pain, knowing it for what it is—a stolen gift. Silence. Then Fr. Serra smiles, takes the gift, and proclaims it the best gift in the world. Pablo cringes as Gabriel's robes are put on him, and he is crowned. He slowly climbs the ladder to the stage sky. The play proceeds with the Pastores song, the Devil pances from Hell with his

tempting song which overcomes the shepherds who then sleep, the cue for Gabriel to appear. But Gabriel comes not! The sky is undisturbed. There is tense silence. Then a scared little angel voice cries out that Pablo has run away!

But no—there he is, divested of robes and crown. He says he cannot be Gabriel because of his sinful theft. Alas, for the play, for Fr. Serra.

Then softly, Juanita, the little Mother of God, arises from her vigil by the crib and beseeches the Good Father:

“Has not Pablo brought a lovely gift? He has sinned and sorrows for his sin and has confessed his fault. Is not this a gift to please God’s Son?”

With great joy Fr. Serra deems it is indeed so! The play resumes. Just as Baltasar, the Devil, is again about to be triumphant, the sky parts, Pablo emerges with the little angels, lifts his head, a suppliant at Heaven’s gate, and sings “Gloria in excelsis Deo.”

“And so did the little Jesus come to the Mission of San Gabriel this night. Perhaps He also came to you and me.”

* * * * *

Wonders have continued since that Night of Nights, in the long ago days of mission Indians. Mayo Hayes O’Donnel in 1961 in her “Peninsula Diary” of the Monterey Herald re-told the following story, attributed to a Hal McClure, and taken from a scrapbook of old-time resident of the San Antonio valley, Victor Mossop. The story occurred on Christmas eve, 1881, along the old Jolon stagecoach road near Mission San Antonio. We call it **The Stagecoach Santa Claus of Jolon.**

Moonlight trickled slowly through the low-hanging clouds along the Santa Lucia mountains and plummeted into the ancient valley of the Mission San Antonio, and finally up the small gullies and ravines along the old stage coach road to the east of Jolon.

One telltale shaft of light from this brilliant December moon outlined the figure of a small boy crouched behind some rocks and hidden by undergrowth. Once he left his hiding place and went to the middle of the road, which was nothing more than two wagon ruts squirming off into the night. He seemed to be waiting for something, for somebody. It was Christmas Eve, 1881, and Carl Edward Browne, age 8, was waiting for Santa Claus to come in on the south-bound stage from Soledad.

Carl Edward remembered it had been only that morning when his father said, rather exasperatingly, “I’ve told you time and again, son, that Santa Claus will be here tonight because he will come in by the stagecoach.”

“Well,” said Carl Edward, “I know he can’t come in by sled. We ain’t got no snow here like we had in Ohio.”

“When you wake up tomorrow morning,” his father said, “you’ll find your Christmas stocking will be filled and you will have a fine time with all your presents, wait and see, son. Wait and see.”

The youngster had been worried about Santa’s arrival ever since the family moved out to this 160-acre ranch near the stagecoach stop at Jolon. And his father repeatedly told him that Santa would arrive by coach.

So there he was waiting beside the road for the night coach to come in. He would see Santa probably riding with Charlie Moran, the grizzled old driver who waved at him from his perch high atop the stage. Not that he believed Santa would not arrive, but maybe Charlie would not recognize him. Maybe Charlie would not stop at the

Browne's ranch a few hundred feet from the road. Carl Edward had crawled out of his bedroom window just to make sure everything was going to be alright for his first Christmas in California.

Suddenly from down the road he could hear the horses. Out of the flickering shadows which skitted and pranced nervously in the valley meadow the boy saw the team moving in the moonlight. And he heard the long wail of the horn which Charlie always blew to warn the hostlers at the inn to get ready.

Carl Edward shivered with excitement as the hoofs drummed nearer. He edged back into the brush, as if the driver could see him. He heard someone yell, "Come on Prancer, you lop-eared no good, flea-bitten varmit! You, too, Blitzen! Keep moving!"

High atop the coach perched a big fat man with a conical shaped hat which fell down over one eye. His long whiskers floated behind him, as if trying to keep up with their reckless owner. "Why it's Santa himself driving," Carl Edward thought. And they weren't horses, they were reindeer. He could see their antlers silhouetted in the flitting moonlight. It was Santa, not coming as a passenger, but driving his own reindeer.

When Santa did not stop at the Browne ranch, Carl Edward, only 8, began to cry. He walked slowly back to the sprawling ranch house and let himself in a bedroom window and back to bed.

When his mother woke him in the morning with the announcement he had better come quick to see what Santa had left for him, Carl Edward was startled and said, "But how could he? He went on by, I saw him, I saw him." He was amazed when he beheld the sparkling Christmas tree and all the presents in his stocking and under the tree.

Later that day Jack Browne walked into the inn at Jolon. Near the stove sat the driver, Charlie Moran, munching on a first-sized chaw of tobacco.

"Charlie, you old rascal, that was a wonderful stunt. My kid sneaked out last night and saw you ride by. He told us all about it. He swears it was Santa Claus and his reindeer instead of you and the team. Did you tie deer antlers on them horses?"

Charlie looked long and speculatively out of the window toward the green hills and sighed. "Funny thing about that, Jack, you're the third person that's said they'd seen Santa Claus last night. You see, what makes it funny is the fact that there ain't been a stagecoach out of Soledad for three days."

ANNUAL REPORT 1981-1982

An enthusiastic Association re-elected Martha Bentley as President for 1982-3 and applauded the many successful events and accomplishments of her first year's leadership. This 51st Annual Meeting of the Monterey History and Art Association was held in Monterey, September 27, 1982, in the Barbara McNitt Ballroom at the Naval Postgraduate School. Col. James Henderson served as Master of Ceremonies for the evening, and Mike Marrota and his musicians provided music. There were 162 in attendance.

President Martha Bentley called the meeting to order. Elections preceded dinner. The following 1982-3 slate of Directors put in nomination by Committee Chairman Jane Campbell was unanimously accepted: **1st term:** Mrs. Charles Aucutt, Mr. Kenneth W. Kelley, Mr. Robert Reese; **2nd consecutive term:** Mrs. Marc Del Piero, Mrs. Amelia Elinton, Mr. Fred Farr, Col. Guy G. Gilchrist, Jr., Mrs. Frank Ganito, Col. Perry Lamson, Mrs. Henry Ragsdale.

Jane Campbell, Maggie Downer, and Mr. Joel Dilworth were elected to serve on the 1982-3 Nominating Committee.

The following Directors were elected to serve as officers for 1982-3: President, Mrs. Charles M. Bentley; Vice President, Mr. Douglas Despard, Jr.; Secretary, Mrs. Laura Granito; Treasurer, Mr. Frank K. Fulton.

Following dinner, Mrs. Bentley resumed the business meeting and introduced Past Presidents Ed Bliss and Col. James Henderson, and thanked the Past Presidents Council, Chairmen of the evening, and expressed appreciation to Master of Ceremonies Col. James Henderson and to Mike Marrota and his Musicians.

President Martha Bentley gave a summary of the Association's activities and Special Events for the year 1981-82. She reported membership of over 2,000, and expressed appreciation for their continued support of the Association, as well as to Bea Ward for the Monthly Newsletter, Mrs. Dorothy Taugher, Noticias Editor, and the Men's Garden Club for Doud House Rose Garden.

Committee Reports: Mrs. Bentley introduced all of the Committee Chairmen and presented each with a Certificate of Appreciation. She called for oral reports for the Adobe Tour and Antiques Show and Sale, as well as the Maritime Museum.

Antiques Show and Sale: Mrs. Early gave a brief report thanking Patrons and inviting all to attend this year's show October 15-17. She expressed appreciation to her committee and introduced Mary Rohrback, finance, Sue Soliday, catalog, and Marlene Blaisdell, Secretary for Regular and Special Events.

Adobe Tour: Mrs. Betsy Finch reported she was delighted to serve as Chairman for the 1982 Adobe Tour. The theme "Women of the Adobes" included a "Textiles Fair" at House of Four Winds and music by Guy Horn and his strolling musicians at various Adobes during the day. Mrs. Finch thanked all who worked and contributed to the success of the Adobe Tour, and offered her prayers and best wishes to the Association for another successful year.

Maritime Museum: Capt. Wright gave an update on the status of the Maritime Museum. The Monterey City Council at the September 21st, 1982 City Council Meeting approved in concept the Association's proposal for Urban Renewal Parcel C-1 at Custom House Plaza as a site for the Maritime Museum. A fund raising effort will be necessary to construct the building. Capt. Wright expressed appreciation to the Museum Search Committee and Mr. Ted Minnis for their continuous support of this project.

Treasurer's Report: Mr. Frank Fulton gave a summary of our accounts. He reported good interest on Savings and an increase in the Building Fund and hopes for a larger increase next year.

President Martha Bentley expressed her appreciation to the office staff — Capt. James Wright, Martha Swain and Marlene Blaisdell. She thanked the Association for re-electing her President.

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned.

Laura Granito, Secretary

In Memoriam

Werner Sewald, Mrs. J.P. Markle, Gabriel H. Burnette, Mrs. Philip C. Brown, W. R. Holman, Mr. Robert Trenner, Mr. Gerrit van S. Henry, Mr. W.L. Hudson, Francis Palms, Mrs. Alfred Gawthrop, Mrs. Robert O. McMahan, Maj. Allen B. Sherman, Mrs. Robert Giet, Austin Frey; Mrs. Austin Frey, Greta DeSmet, Caryl Hazeltine, Mrs. Jessie Caffee, Col. James D. Land, Mrs. George B. Smith, Ruth C. Buol, Daniel W. Kohlsatt, Luke Shields, Elmarie Dyke, Col. David Donelson, James Castello.

JIMMY COSTELLO — He loved Monterey

By Ted Durein

It might be said that James Gragg Costello was the conscience of Monterey. But then, most Montereyans would not know him by all those fancy names. To most of those who knew and loved him, and they were legion, he was simply Jimmy.

To me, who worked with him at the Monterey Peninsula Herald for most of his 42 years there, he was Jaimie, a name he liked. It was, he told me one time, what he was called by his favorite grandfather when he would travel with him to far parts of the county.

Jimmy Costello's family has been part of the area since 1851, and two generations were engaged in ranching. Their holdings included the San Carlos Ranch and a ranch at Bradley in South Monterey County.

Jimmy was small in stature, but he carried himself with the immense and magnificent dignity of a Spanish Don. There was nothing small about Jimmy.

He had about him the grace and courtesy of a bygone era, and to have seen him at any one of Monterey's festive parties over the years leading his partner into the lively steps of a Varsoviana was something one never forgot.

Jimmy was so much a part of Monterey that the times he left it could be counted on one hand with fingers left over.

He went away to school for a few years, he went away to war in Western Europe, and last year after his retirement he and his first love, his wife Nancy, traveled to a Greek island to visit daughter Joan, who lives there. That was about it.

He loved Nancy, he loved his family of three boys and three girls and their children, he loved Monterey, and he loved being a newspaperman, a profession to which he dedicated all of his adult life from junior college until his untimely death in November of this year. He was first, last and always a newsman, and like all his other loves he worked at it with a passion. There were no half way measures with Jimmy.

And as reporter, from the more lofty viewpoint of editor, and finally in the Herald's Weekend Magazine he lavished his great affection for the city he loved. It showed every minute. And as "the conscience of Monterey" his work, his dedication and his participation had a marked effect on the old pueblo's growth and at the same time preservation of those things that remind us of her glorious past.

As just one example, the Stokes adobe at 500 Hartnell Street, where Jimmy grew up, and which later became Gallatin's restaurant, has long been a white elephant, a historic landmark on land that could have brought the family a tidy sum as commercial property. Jimmy was one of those who saw to it that this priceless heritage remained part of his beloved city's history. At considerable personal loss.

As a long time member of the Monterey History and Art Association Jimmy's presence was felt at every turn, and he was a frequent and outstanding contributor to the Noticias.

Every man should have some avocation for relaxation and pure enjoyment. To Jimmy it was the Monterey Jazz Festival, of which he was a founding member of the board, and of which he served as treasurer since 1970.

At the end, it was a Dixieland Jazz band that sang him to his rest, with stirringly emotional renditions of Stranger On The Shore, and The Saints Go Marching In at Jimmy's memorial service in little St. Dunstan's chapel in Carmel Valley which was filled with his friends.

"He was a real paisano," Monterey mayor Gerald Fry said of him with affection. "Nobody loved Monterey more than Jimmy Costello . . . and I don't know of anybody who didn't love him."

**THE EDITORS
MONTEREY HISTORY
AND ART ASSOCIATION**

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