

NOTICIAS
del
PUERTO de MONTEREY
A Quarterly Bulletin of Historic Monterey Issued by
The Monterey History and Art Association
Contents copyright 1993 by Monterey History and Art Association
Member: National Trust for Historic Preservation
California Historical Society o Conference of California Historical
Societies
American Association of Museums

Vol. XLV, No. 3

December 1993



The Royal Presidio Chapel of San Carlos Borromeo de Monterey, the only surviving presidio chapel in California. It was founded in 1770 as a mission by Fra. Junipero Serra, but was converted into the Royal Presidio Chapel in the next year when the mission was shifted to Rio Carmelo. It has had several additions since its completion in 1795, but it is essentially the same today as when Los Pastores were performed in 1846.

Inside: The Devil Attended Church on Christmas

In researching a topic for the winter NOTICES, the editorial board could do no better than excerpts from that which was published for the enjoyment of the membership in the winter of 1958 by Donald Craig.

We believe you will enjoy it, too.

SEASON'S GREETINGS

Monterey History and Art Association Publications Committee

THE DEVIL ATTENDED CHURCH ON CHRISTMAS

Excerpted from an article by Donald M. Craig,
Noticias Volume II, Number 4, December 1958

Well, not really, he was just an actor in a religious drama, but the mere presence of the sham Prince of Darkness at the Presidio Chapel's celebration of the Nativity was enough to rivet the fascinated attention of the newly arrived Americans in 1846.

Los Pastores was the title of this play, a survival of a custom once common in medieval Europe. From the tenth to the fourteenth century the incidents surrounding the career of Jesus Christ, particularly those concerned with the Nativity and the Resurrection, were used by churchmen as the basis for dramatic pieces called Mystery or Passion Plays. They were excellent educational devices

and most advantageous for the teaching of doctrines.

The churches themselves made splendid settings for these dramas. To one side of the high altar the manger could be set up, sometimes with live animals to



lend a realistic note; Herod might have his throne on the other side, and in the center there remained a natural and appropriate stage for the whole Nativity Play. Here sang the Shepherds in adoration, here the Wise men proffered their gold, frankincense and myrrh to the Infant Jesus, and from that throne, Herod shouted his orders for the Slaughter of the Holy Innocents while the harassed Holy Family fled into Egypt. Into this serious religious spectacle there crept by the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries a counterbalance or farcical element. The Devil, he who tricks poor sinners but is ever worsted in his struggle against God, became a comic figure. His sly attempts to pluck men into perdition by tempting them to impiety, to lust, to avarice, to anger were vastly amusing to the crowd in the church. They knew that sooner or later, despite all his wiles, Satan would get his come-uppance, but until that happened it was fun to watch him try on his fellow actors the very lures he presented daily in their work-a-day lives.

As time went on, this tendency toward broad comedy and buffoonery steadily increased, and eventually it succeeded in getting the plays ejected from the churches and into the streets, and from these back into the theatres from whence, paradoxically, play-acting had been driven by the Church in the first place. However, although the church-centered religious drama lost ground rapidly in most of Europe after the middle of the sixteenth century, it did not entirely vanish, due to

the hold it had in such conservative areas as Spain. Very naturally, the Spanish missionaries to the New World found these impersonations of Biblical events particularly effective in fortifying the unlearned people in their faith, the chapel became the dramatic center of the Indian mission.

The mission fathers were the authors of the first Mystery or Miracle Plays in Mexico and in California. They composed the music for the chanted parts and taught their Indian charges how to accompany the songs with the sweet music of the harp, violin, guitar, flute, triangle and drum. The Devil and his dupes were not forgotten, but under the watchful eye of the Inquisition and the padres their roles in the dramas were strictly supervised. They were still objects of merriment, but inside the church proper, they confined their antics within respectable limits.

Walter Colton, in his *Three Years in California* has left us a sprightly account of the Nativity Play, *Los Pastores*, at the Presidio Chapel of Monterey during the Christmas Eve ceremonies of 1846. To this Congregationalist minister and naval chaplain, the capering of the actors within the sacred portals of God's house must have been among the most novel scenes that he had ever witnessed. But Walter Colton was no narrow fanatic; he did not regard the performance as blasphemous, - had not King David danced before his Lord? Indeed, so deeply interested was the first American alcalde of Monterey in the curious customs and childlike simplicity of his legal parishioners that scarcely anything these Monterenos did shocked, irritated or threw him out of countenance. He was full of admiration for their good qualities and good-naturedly tolerant of their shortcomings:

As soon as the sun had gone down, and twilight had spread its sable shadows over the hills and habitations of Monterey, the festivities of Christmas Eve commenced. The bells rang out a merry chime; the windows were filled with streaming light; bonfires on plain and steep sent up their pyramids of flame; the sky-rocket burst high over all in showering fire. Children shouted; the young were filled with smiles and gladness; and the aged looked as if some dark cloud had been lifted from the world.

While the bonfires still blazed high, the crowd moved towards the church; the ample nave was soon filled. Before the altar bent the Virgin Mother, in wonder and love, over her new-born babe; a company of shepherds entered in flowing robes, with high wands garnished with silken streamers, in which floated all the colors of the rainbow, and surmounted with coronals of flowers.

In their wake followed a hermit, with his long white beard, tattered missal, and his sin-chastising lash. Near him figured a wild hunter, in the skins of the forest, bearing a huge truncheon, surmounted by an iron rim, from



Fig. 72. THE FOOL AND THE DEVIL

which hung in jingling chime fragments of all sonorous metals. Then came, last of all, the Evil One, with horned frontlet, disguised hoof, and robe of crimson flame.

The shepherds were led on by the angel Gabriel, in purple wings and garments of light. They approached the manger, and kneeling, hymned their wonder and worship in a sweet chant, which was sustained by the rich tones of exulting harps.

The hermit and hunter were not among them; they had been

beguiled by the Tempter, and were lingering at a game of dice. The hermit seemed to suspect that all was not right, and read his missal vehemently in the pauses of the game; but the hunter was troubled by none of these scruples, staked his soul and lost! Emboldened by his success, the Tempter shoved himself among the shepherds; but here he encountered Gabriel, who knew him of old. He quailed under the eye of that invincible angel, and fled his presence.

By a fortunate stroke of research [we can now] add, for the first time, certain details to this very scene from the diary of another onlooker. The diary's author, determined by us to be William Robert Garner, an Englishman of twenty-two years residence in California, was Alcalde Colton's secretary and interpreter and presumably accompanied him to the Nativity Play.

Captivated by Colton's habit of jotting down for publication the odd things that befell him, Garner, too, had begun the practice of writing a running commentary for the same purpose.

Colton's writing is easy, urbane, flowing; Garner's, although not lacking in a kind of Coltonesque wry humor, is factual and business-like. Since he was an educated man, spoke and wrote excellent Spanish, and probably understood much more of the background of the play than the spellbound Alcalde, his account of the customs and characters may be considered reliable:

Monterey, California, December 29, 1846.

It is the custom of this country to ring the church bells at midnight on Christmas Eve for the purpose of waking up all those persons who wish to hear High Mass before daylight; it being customary to sing this mass about one or two o'clock on Christmas morning. The church is then illuminated outside and brilliantly lit up within - as much perhaps for the purpose of being able to read the church service, as to see plainly the masquerade which takes place at the end of the Mass. This masquerade, or perhaps farce would be a better term, is intended to represent the adoration paid by the shepherds to our Savior at his birth; but there has been introduced a certain "dramatis personae"

which entirely destroys the effect the representation was originally intended to produce. The boy who represents the Archangel Michael is dressed in a sky-blue tunic, drawn up on the outside part of each side as high as the knee; short sleeved, and open at the breast; a paper crown set off with false pearls, gilt paper, and various ribbons of various colors curiously worked in; a pair of large wings are fixed to his shoulders, elegantly worked over with rich lace; between the wings and down the back a red scarf is hung, to give the light blue of the tunic a more striking appearance. On his feet he has a pair of red or blue satin shoes, and plaid silk socks halfway up the leg. This, with a small sword, completes the costume of the Archangel.

Satan is dressed in black, with a red sash over his left shoulder and knotted under the right arm, with a large sword, a most terrific looking mask, and a cap of black feathers. The hermit is dressed in a friar's old cloak: he has a book and a bag in his hand, and wears a mask made of sheep skin. Old Bartholomew has likewise a sheep skin mask, is dressed as a poor wayfarer, with his budget at his back and a staff in his hand, with some old tin pots or rags made fast to the top of it, intended to form a contrast with the gaudy staves of the shepherds. For the full performance of this farce two more persons are indispensably necessary. These are a fiddler, and a person to play the guitar.

Their first performance is always in the church, and consists of a Christmas carol spoken by the shepherds, or rather sung. Satan, the hermit and Bartholomew act their parts almost without interfering with the shepherds, having very little connection with them. Finally, the Archangel overcomes Satan whilst he is tempting Bartholomew and the hermit to sin, and after a few more verses are sung the shepherds leave the church.

Colton makes Bartolo or Bartholomew, a wild man from the woods; Garner has him a vagabond. In any case, Bartolo was a key clown and a juicy part

for an actor. Jacinto Rodriguez of Monterey, later signer of the Constitution of 1849, was a famous figure in *Los Pastores*, playing either Bartolo or the Devil. The small boys of the town hid and watched him round-eyed as, days before the enactment, he used to stride up and down the sandy beaches of Monterey practicing his fearful shouts and mad gestures. Mrs. Mike Noon, aged about ninety when interviewed in 1944 by Mary Greene, then Curator of the Old Custom House, remembered that as a small child in Monterey there were wonderful Christmas celebrations, but the only actual figure of the play that stuck in her mind was "a very lazy man who didn't want to do anything but sleep, and when the shepherds came to him and said, 'Get up, Bartolo. Come and see la Gloria,' he replied, 'Go



away! Don't bother me! If la Gloria wants to be seen, let her come to me!" She could remember, too, the angels with very high wings, glittering with silver paper brought in the sailing vessels from China.

According to Arturo Bandini, writing in the *Californian Illustrated Magazine* of 1892, the Archangel Michael and the Foul Fiend put on a rousing sword fight at the climax of the play. This last scene occurred outside of the church, and all observers are agreed that although the Shepherd's Play was reverent and edifying before the altar, once it had emerged from the chapel into the street or plaza, the clowning became uppermost.

Bandini tells how the Devil, worsted in his battle against St. Michael, a mere boy, would rise in simulated wrath and rush with hideous shrieks at some impressionable youngster in the inner circle of the crowd. Superstitious fear lent

wings to the frightened youth as, with the Evil One bounding close behind, he ran for dear life around the gathering, afraid to leave the torchlight and human companionship. The chase, uproariously cheered on by the spectators, usually came to a close when the despairing fugitive, feeling the whack of the pursuer's sword, halted, drew his knife, and prepared to sell his soul dearly.

As Colton describes it, the whole cast adjourned the day after Christmas to the house of the chief magistrate (in this case himself) to pay their respects:

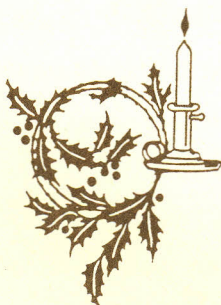
The large hall, occupying the center of the building, was sufficiently ample to accommodate them, and some fifty gentlemen and ladies as spectators. They brought their own orchestral accompaniment, which consisted entirely of violins and guitars. Their prelude had so many sweet harmonies that the listener determined to listen on. The dialog and chant of the shepherds would have awakened their appropriate associations, but for the obtrusions of the hermit, hunter and devil, who now gave much freer scope to their characteristic peculiarities than they did in the church. The hermit forgot that his lash was intended for himself, and began to use it on others. The hunter left off snaring birds, and commenced setting springs to catch Satan; but his intended victim not only managed to escape, but to decoy the hunter into his own net. The hermit tried to disenchant him through the power of his missal; but this having no effect, he threatened to chastise the subtle author of the mischief, but wanted someone to seize and hold him.

After having exhibited at the civil magistrate's house they go from one house to another until they have visited all the principal houses in the town. [And thus, *Los Pastores* becomes *Las Posadas*.]

Both Mary Greene's questioning of the old-timers of Monterey and Bandini's recollections leave us the impression that Christmas was a time of

happiness, of feasting. One old man, when I asked if they had celebrated *Las Posadas*, answered, "Oh, yes, indeed! That was the one time in the year that the poor had all they wanted to eat. They journeyed from house to house, and all the more fortunate families had piles of food ready to be served to their more humble neighbors."

The colorful and delightful Christmas plays in the churches have been silent for almost a hundred years now. When Fr. Mestres, he who had done so much to revive interest in the early day traditions, was alive, an attempt was made to bring *Los Pastores* back and have a real early California Christmas, but no one could be found who could remember the costumes nor the wording, so that the proposal was dropped. The California Historical Society has recently [December 1958] published a *Pastorela*, composed in part by Padre Florencio Ibanez of Soledad Mission sometime between 1803 and 1818 which is available in the original Spanish at the Bancroft Library of the University of California. [So perhaps someday] the Monterey Peninsula may again see Lucifer come stalking into church while the Shepherds sing the song that has echoed down the ages.



Illustrations

Title Page - Royal Presidio Chapel of San Carlos de Borromeo de
Monterey - photo by Andrew Blaisdell

Page 2 - Illustrations from a morality by Hans Sachs: "On
Stage A History of the Theatre" by Vera Mowry Roberts,
Harper and Row, New York, 1962

Page 4 - Fig. 72. *The Fool and the Devil*, from an illustration
describing Medieval theatre: "The Development of the
Theatre" by Allardyce Nicoll, New York, 1966

Page 7 - Illustrations from a morality by Hans Sachs: "On
Stage A History of the Theatre" by Vera Mowry Roberts,
Harper and Row, New York, 1962



We wish you a merry Christmas

**OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS
OF THE
MONTEREY HISTORY AND ART ASSOCIATION, LTD.**

OFFICERS

President: Mrs. William Evans
Vice President: Mr. Edward Magner III
Secretary: Mrs. James Vaughan
Treasurer: Mr. Jack Holt

DIRECTORS

Mrs. Arthur Benoit, Mr. Bob Brandt, Ms. Morley Brown, Jean Darragh, Mrs. William Evans, Dr. George Faul, Mrs. Donald Higgins, Mr. Jack Holt, Dr. Ted Hooker, Mrs. Barbara Burdick Lombardi, Mr. Edward Magner III, Mr. John McCune, Mrs. Martha Mosher, Dr. Philip Nash, Dr. Ned Prothro, Mrs. James Robeson, Mrs. Sue Solliday, Mrs. James Vaughan, Mr. Tom Verga, Mrs. Bernard Wahle, Capt. James Webster

HONORARY LIFETIME DIRECTORS

Mrs. Charles M. Bentley, Mr. Edwin Bliss, Mr. Ted Durein, Mrs. Gordon Paul Smith, Mr. Gordon Paul Smith, Mrs. Robert Stanton, Mrs. Duncan Todd

EDITORIAL BOARD

PUBLICAITONS COMMITTEE:

Donald Freeman, Thorne Hacker, Philip Nash (Chair) Donna Penwell, Margo Toy, Grant Voth, Meg Welden

NOTICIAS
MONTEREY HISTORY
AND ART ASSOCIATION
5 CUSTOM HOUSE PLAZA
MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA 93940
RETURN REQUESTED

Non-Profit
Organization
Bulk Rate
U. S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 88
Monterey, California

Mrs. Robert W. Johnson
1145 Harrison Street
Monterey, CA 93940