

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Bonifacio Adobe

One of the most famous houses in Monterey was that of Senorita Maria Ygnacia Bonifacio, which was located on the corner of Alvarado street and what is now known as Bonifacio Place. Situated in the heart of town, it was as well known as the Custom House, the Larkin House and Colton Hall.

Jose Rafael Gonzales, the builder of the Bonifacio adobe, arrived in Monterey in 1833, and in that year became administrator of the customs and sub-commisario at Monterey, continuing through 1834. He had been appointed to these positions in 1829, but did not come to California until 1833 with Figueroa. He was alcalde in 1835, and also the governor's secretary. He was commandante de celadores at the Monterey Custom House from 1837 until 1847. He died in Monterey in 1868 at the age of 82.

John B. Bonifacio, the father of Senorita Maria Ygnacia Bonifacio, the heroine of the Sherman Rose legend, was an Italian or an Austrian, who landed at Monterey in 1822 with W.E.P. Hartnell, on the latter's ship, John Begg, on which Bonifacio was a stevedore. Both he and Hartnell landed with the governor's permission. Bonifacio continued for years in the capacity of stevedore for the Hartnell firm in Monterey. He was probably about 24 years of age when he landed. In 1827 he married Carmen Pinto, and was naturalized in 1829. In 1832 he was in command of the Compania Extranjero. He died in 1834, leaving his widow and three children.

After the death of Senorita Bonifacio on January 5, 1916, the property passed into other hands, and as the house stood in the path of progress, on the main street, it was decided to tear it down.

Thomas Work and the directors of the First National Bank, the owners of the property, published the following notice in the Monterey paper in 1922:

"The First National Bank of Monterey, being about to erect a new bank building on its land commonly known as the Sherman Rose property, hereby offers to give the historic adobe thereon to any civic body which will promptly remove and preserve same, elsewhere in the City of Monterey. The Sherman Rose itself, is reserved

by the bank, which will care for and preserve it in connection with the new building.

"This adobe was built in 1835 by Jose Rafael Gonzales, a retired lieutenant of cavalry and then the Administrator of the Custom House. In 1860 it became the home of Carmen Pinto de Bonifacio and remained such thereafter during her lifetime, and passed upon her death to her daughter, the Senorita Maria Ygnacia Bonifacio, whose romance with General (the lieutenant) Sherman, is preserved by the Sherman Rose, and there she lived until her death some seven years ago.

"By order of the Board of Directors.

"July 17, 1922.

"The First National Bank of Monterey."

A clipping from the same paper at a later date makes the following statement:

"Restoration Sherman Rose is Now Made a Certainty."

"The removal and reconstruction of the Sherman Rose house is now to be assured through the efforts of J.C. Anthony. Arrangements have been made to take down the old landmark, which is to give way to the march of improvement on Alvarado Street (?) and rebuild it on Sherman Lane, between Del Monte and Monterey. The famous Sherman Rose is to be removed and the house and its surroundings are to be restored as far as possible. This disposition has been favored by many of the civic, art, and women's clubs of Monterey."

The house was removed, and stands today admirably restored. It was for several years the home of artist Percy Grey and Mrs. Grey, and is now the home of Mrs. Guy Catlin. One of the Monterey History and Art Association historical markers stands in front of the house. The arbor and the Sherman rose are there. The reconstruction of the old adobe was the work of the late J.C. Anthony, who took accurate and complete measurements of the entire house and adobe brick by adobe brick rebuilt the house according to the scale on the new site.

Isabel Field says in her book, "This Life I've Loved," "We drew up at the house of Senora Bonifacio on the main street. My father had rented the entire wing of this roomy old adobe house set in the midst of a walled garden full of flowers and fruit trees." Isabel Field was the daughter of Mrs. Osborne, who later became Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson. Mrs. Field's first husband was Joe Strong, an early day artist of California

Nellie and I slept in an upstairs room overlooking the garden. It was a noble room, its walls three feet thick, and the ceiling beams hand carved. We hung our dresses and starched white petticoats in a large wardrobe with carved doors. There was a marble-top washstand with pitcher and basin, a huge bed with a canopy, and we kept our underclothes and fripperies in a lovely old painted chest. I suppose there were chairs, but I don't remember any. On a commode beside the bed, we always kept a candle and matches, for the charming Spanish custom of the serenade still prevailed, and the only response expected was the show of a light."

The Nellie of which Mrs. Field writes was the sister of Mrs. Stevenson, who later married Adolfo Sanchez of Monterey. She is well known as the author of "Spanish and Indian Place Names of California," "The Life of Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson" and many short articles dealing with California's historical events.