

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The Old-Time Dances

"Dances of Early California Days" is off the press and copies are available at the bookstores on the Peninsula. It should be very popular, for not only are the dances described authentic and popular, but the list of Peninsula residents who assisted the author, to whom she gives due credit, is long and impressive. Miss Lucille K. Czarnowski, the author, is an associate supervisor of physical education, Division for Women, University of California at Berkeley, where she teaches dancing.

Miss Czarnowski came to Monterey a year or so ago and remained for several days, visiting and interviewing those who were familiar with the music and dances of early days. She is a native of Arizona but has lived and taught in San Diego, where her parents live, for many years.

She has furnished in the book the authentic dance descriptions and music as actually danced and played. Where a dance pattern differed from place to place, she shows the variations. For instance, variations of the "Yucca" from three different localities are given and four variations of "La Varsouvianna." Miss Czarnowski is past president of the Folk Dance Federation of California.

In the introduction the author thanks Mr. Louis Sanchez for the many letters of introduction he kindly gave her to descendants of California pioneers living mainly along the coastal area of California. Mr. Sanchez was born in Monterey, the son of Mrs. Nellie Van Der Grift Sanchez who was the sister of Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson. She was the author of "Spanish and Indian Place Names of California" and "The Life of Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson." The family home was on Jackson Street. Mr. Sanchez now resides with his family in the East Bay area.

Her gratitude for assistance is also extended to Mrs. Mary Greene and Mrs. William Kneass, curators at the Custom House. Mrs. Kneass took Miss Czarnowski to Watsonville to visit with Mr. and Mrs. Lomasa Cano and her daughter, Mrs. S. Ardaiz and her granddaughter, Miss Elvira Ardaiz, who is a teacher in the Seaside school. They told her of the early dances and demonstrated the steps. Mr. and Mrs. Cano will be remembered by the members of the History and Art

Association members who attended a meeting in the Custom House where they sang early California songs accompanying themselves on stringed instruments.

Quoting from the book, Miss Czarnowski writes: "In Monterey and Pacific Grove I should especially like to thank Mr. Stanley Greeb, who gave generous assistance and supplied information and music on the Monterey Contradanza, the Polka in jig time, and a number of other dances; Mrs. Inez Harkless, who demonstrated for the La Cachucha, La Paloma, El Borrego, Pin Waltz, and discussed with me La Contradanza and La Varsouvianna; Mrs. Juan Garcia (at the First Brick House) who performed for me many Spanish dances, and described the cascarone balls in Monterey; Mrs. Florinda Noon and her daughter, Miss Flora Noon, who danced with me La Varsouvianna, El Borrego, and told many interesting details about early days in Monterey; Mrs. Maria Antonio Bach Thompson, who showed old treasures of early days, among them dolls dressed in early California costumes, Spanish shawls and other beautiful pieces; Mrs. Emma Ambrosia, who described dances which she saw performed when a child; Mr. and Mrs. Tony Castro, who performed La Varsouvianna, discussed with me a number of early dances and displayed beautiful cascarones from former seasons.

Others mentioned as giving information on social settings, dances and music of early California are Mr. Hugh Campbell and Mr. Harry Downey of Carmel, and Miss Maria Antonio Field of Monterey and San Francisco.

Several paragraphs in "Dances of Early California Days" are devoted to descriptions of early fiestas and cascarone balls in Monterey. One reference is made to a graphic account given by Juan Bautista Alvarado of a great celebration he witnessed in his youth in Monterey. Walter Colton's account of some of these early festivals is also mentioned when he described the Feast of Guadalupe at Monterey. Another is the Christmas drama, Los Pastores, as it was performed in the church at midnight mass on Christmas Eve, and on the following days, with actors going from house to house.

Drawings of ladies dressed for a ball, early California costumes, and diagrams for positions in the various dances, illustrate the book. Analysis of basic step patterns, dances before 1849, and dances after 1849 are included in the contents. "Dances of Early California Days" is printed by Pacific Books, Palo Alto.