

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

September 22, 1950

### **A Visit to Dona Ignacia**

Probably the most interesting of all the character sketches which Charles Warren Stoddard included in the diary which he wrote during his stay in Monterey in 1905 was that of Dona Ignacia Maria Bonifacio—the owner of the Sherman Rose adobe which stood, in the old days, where the First National Bank now stands. Bonifacio Place was named for her. When progress came the house was taken down and moved to the Mesa and is now the home of Mrs. Guy Catlin. In those days Robert Johnson was the mayor of Monterey. In those days Robert Johnson was the mayor.

Stoddard wrote in his diary on September 14, 1905; "Dropped in to see Mayor Johnson at his office. I was hoping that he would suggest going to see the Rose of Sherman. Later when I had gone the The Monterey for dinner, he called me and said; 'Come with me, I am going to the house.'

"The home is dismembered. Only the wing is left—that was the dining room and kitchen, with two chambers above. The house is very plainly furnished. In her room is an old-fashioned bedstead of camphor wood; old chests, and old picture of a Madonna such as touches me and a portrait of the little lady when she was a girl of 16, painted by a Spanish artist who came from Spain to paint it."

It is thought by the old-timers who remember the painting of Miss Bonifacio that it was probably the work of Leonardo Barberi, who also painted the portraits of Mr. and Mrs. W.E.P. Hartnell and other prominent residents of the time, including Don and Senora Amesti and their daughter, Celedonia Amesti de Arano. When Miss Bonifacio passed away Mrs. Robert Johnson carried out her friend's request, cut the portrait from its frame, rolled it up and placed in the casket beside her. This story related to me by Mr. and Mrs. Johnson's daughter, Mrs. John Cooper of Carmel Valley.

In the garden there were pear trees still bearing fruit—trees that had been planted by the Mission Fathers more than a century before. Stoddard writes that everywhere there was a sensation as if this was a dismembered portion, but half alive, of something dead and gone. Where the main portion of the old house had stood there were then, in 1905 two new upstart brick offices going up.

The little old lady was then land-poor, according to what Stoddard was told. She had nothing in the world but her house and its sparse furnishings. Robert Johnson, with

Mrs. Johnson and their family, owned and resided in the Larkin House, which they later sold to Mrs. and Mrs. Harry Toulmin. Mr. Johnson's mother was Spanish, and Mrs. Johnson was of Italian descent. Miss Bonifacio had known his parents well and had brought up Mrs. Johnson, so during her lifetime the Johnson family members were devoted friends and she was naturally very fond of them.

"Mr. Johnson had the wish to make her feel very independent." Wrote Stoddard after his visit "He was to make her an allowance. He said to her, "How much can you live on, per month, \$40 or \$40 dollars? She now has money in the bank and is drawing interest. She does all her own work and never was there a cleaner house than hers—and it is on the leeward side of the dusty street."

To those who ate with her, Stoddard relates, she would say in the morning; "Will you have a cup of coffee?" and make it. "Will you have a fresh egg?" and go out among her hens and find one newly laid. "A bit of bread?" and "rush away to the bakery, which was in the old Simoneau restaurant where R.L.S. (Robert Louis Stevenson) used to be fed when he had not the price of a meal in his possession."

Miss Bonifacio would not speak English, so those who remember her say. But she understood everything that was said to her. She willingly wrote her name in Stoddard's album—just her name—and when he suggested, half in sport that she date it from the Sherman Rose, she shook her head and smiled.

"The little old lady," wrote Stoddard "was very gracious. The mayor and I sat at the little dining room table. She was as spry as a cricket and nearly 80 years of age. It was pleasant to see her. I am told that when General Sherman was a young lieutenant he met her, but held his peace. When he was last in California, then a famous general, he called upon her."

Mrs. Cooper remembers that Miss Bonifacio told her mother that Sherman's son, then a Jesuit priest at Santa Clara University, called upon her in Monterey, and upon meeting her said, in Spanish, "I come in the name of my father." But Mrs. Johnson never knew if he had meant his Heavenly Father or the general.