

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

October 26, 1951

### **In Pagandom And Christendom**

Sergeant Joshua S. Vincent of the New York Volunteers, Infantry, Company I, in his diary, written between 1846 and 1848, while serving in California during the Mexican War, described a church festival in Monterey in those early years. For the most part his description of Monterey, except for the scenery, was not too favorable, and the days he spent here were a bit monotonous, except when a sloop of war, or sailing ship arrived.

On June 3rd of 1847 the Sergeant wrote: "I have witnessed a very singular ceremony today. It was a Catholic church festival. In front of the church is a beautiful green square surrounded by the ruins of ancient buildings. Around this square the Spaniards had made a shaded walk by sticking pine bushes in the ground on either side of the walk. At each corner of the square there was a booth. These were tasty and beautiful in the extreme—it was the work of the Spanish ladies. I went to the church but could not get a place inside—it was already full to overflowing. In a short time a procession issued from the church door and proceeded toward the nearest booth.

"As the procession issued from the door the bells set up a terrible clatter and three or four little things resembling clock weights were loaded with powder and fired. The procession was preceded by a band consisting of four or five fiddles and an old drum, all played by long-haired Indians. In front of the priest walked a boy dressed in scarlet carrying a pot of burning incense. There were a number of lighted candles carried by the procession. As it moved along a number of rockets were sent up nearly as high as the church. After the procession had stopped at each of the booths a little while the performances ended."

Sergeant Vincent was too busy on the Fourth of July to write in his record of his life as a volunteer in the N.Y. Regiment, but on the fifth he reported what the national holiday was like in Monterey in 1847. The notation follows: "The 4th passed off more quietly than I have ever seen it before in any place. Co. F.G. artillery fired a salute of 13 guns from the redoubt at sunrise and another of 28 guns at 12 o'clock noon. One little vessel attempted to fire but made bad work of it.

"Today all the vessels of war are trimmed with all the flags in Christendom and pagandom and each vessel fired a salute at 12. Co. I. and D. gave a public dinner at 'Our House.'" Co. D. have been returned about ten days from a trip across the San Wauklen (San Joaquin) in search of Indian horse thieves. They had no engagement but lost one man by drowning crossing the river and one by hosing himself in the prairie in an elk chase the other side of the Waukien (Joaquin), and one lost this side of the river in the prairie on their way back. They brought in several Indian Chiefs and various articles of Indian curiosities.

On July 11, Sergeant Vincent writes of another early church service in Monterey and noted that he had been told that it was St. Rebecca's Day, the patron saint of California. Quoting from the diary we find:

"I have just returned from a most singular ceremony. Last night at dark the town of Monterey was completely illuminated by bonfires, tapers, fireworks, etc. which was kept up until about 12 o'clock. Upon inquiring I learned that today was St. Rebecca's Day, the patron saint of California. The padre sent an invitation for Co. I. to come and fire a salute. Accordingly at half after ten we marched over to the church and were drawn up in order of battle and fired eight rounds at a given signal. We could occasionally hear the Indian fiddlers and the chuse barrel go off (as one of the men sailed the little old bass drum.)"

In the annotations there is reference to St. Rebecca's Day. The San Diego Museum curator regrets that there is at hand no reference to Saint Rebecca as the patron saint of California. A past president of the Native Daughters, who was supposed to know a great deal about California lore, had not heard of the tradition; the Chancellory of the San Diego Diocese was questioned without success except to say that Saint Rebecca may perhaps be a special Franciscan worthy. The name does not appear in the National Catholic Almanac, but evidently she was a favorite in Monterey in 1847. Father Palou in his "Noticias de California, names San Carlos Borromeo and St. Joseph as the two patrons of Monterey.

The other date of which Sergeant Vincent describes as "singular" under date of June 3rd, was the feast of Corpus Christi. On that year, Corpus Christi fell on the anniversary date of the establishment of the Mission and Presidio of Monterey. The date is still celebrated each year on June 3rd in Monterey with a merienda in

Memory Garden sponsored by the Monterey History and Art Association.

Incidentally, although the sergeant did not mention it, Company I landed in Monterey the day before Easter, 1847; and on Easter Sunday was "encamped on a beautiful green in front of the Catholic Church.