

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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A Cigarillo From a Senorita

California in the days of the Gold Rush is entertainingly described by Carl Meyer, a German, who visited Monterey in the late 1840's and later published his book under the title "Bound for Sacramento", in 1855. The publishers were residents of Aarau, a small town in Switzerland in one of the German cantons. Meyer himself was obviously a German Swiss and the book gives every evidence of having been written by a highly educated man, possibly a graduate from some German university. He may have been a mining engineer for he tells in his narrative of the silver mines at Alisal owned by W.E.P. Hartnell, discussing it with noticeable knowledge.

A delightful few pages in the book are devoted to the family of Hartnell, who for many years was a resident of Monterey and whose adobe home was situated where the Monterey hospital now stands.

"Telling of a "California tertulia," Meyer writes that a cigarillo, rolled by a seniorita's deft fingers, is the stranger's reward for his cheerful song. He is indeed unfortunate if he does not like to smoke and does not accept the cigarillo "con mils gracias" (with much thanks), and smoke it to the health of its beautiful donor; for then she will never bestow her favor upon him, even if he is an Apollo, so says the author.

Only the men take part in the national card game and while they amuse themselves at this the young people play "juegas de prendas," a popular forfeit game.

The fandango, without which the tertulia cannot be concluded, brings everyone together again to increase the pleasure of the group to its highest point.

The traveler soon learned during his visit with the Hartnell's that the dance in Spanish-American is unavoidable, even more than that—it had become the law of society here, the most universal leisure—for the Spanish dance was the "circling of the object." Meyer found that at daybreak in 1849 there was already much activity on the Hartnell rancho near Salinas. The vaqueros and servants received their breakfasts and disappeared, some going to the savanna, while most of the members of the household would start off on their morning ride. All necessary work in the house and yard

was finished in the morning that the afternoon might be dedicated to rest and idleness if a cattle taming and killing did not take place.

Lasso throwing on the California rancho was the greatest entertainment observed by the German visitor. The men, he reports are accustomed from their earliest childhood to approach a goal with a lasso. This goal, which he attempts to lasso, is that someday he may be an excellent lazadero.

The ambition to learn early that which may later admit them to society was also observed in the young girls. The tiny girls, barely six, writes Meyer, have already learned dancing and riding. "California easily escapes," he noted, "that posture and foot movement, which seems so ugly in a great part of the female sex and reminds one of certain feathered domestic creatures.

"The rancho cannot bear monotony in his daily ride even" wrote Meyer, "he knows how to choose his daily ride so that he always returns home with new adventures and stimulates new conversation, jokes and laughter by his animated Hudibrastic telling of them."

When the visitors left the rancho to continue their journey to the gold fields they were armed to the teeth with spurs and in costumes which completely harmonized with the country. As they were bidding their friends a final adieu, the circle of vaqueros opened and a fat female donkey, packed with all kinds of provisions was led forth from their midst as a present from the hospitable family.