

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **'The Poor, Deluded People'**

In the last Issue of the Peninsula Diary we wrote of the strange story of Bandit Murietta's widow and the New Idria cult as recorded in the diary of J. Warren Matthews, one of the first settlers in the Bitterwater Valley in San Benito County. The entry was made on May 15, 1883.

At the close of our last recording a group of early Spanish and others had gone to the summit of the coast range near the head of the San Benito Cantu Canyon and White Creek to search for treasures supposedly buried there by Joaquin Murietta. There they declared they heard spirit voices especially that of a Father Mahine, who claimed to have passed to the spirit land several hundred years ago. He urged his hearers to give up worldly life and come to the rocks to live, for within three years there would be general destruction, and only those who obeyed his word would be spared.

The believers were encouraged to think that Father Mahine was visible at all times to Mariana Joaquin and two or three others of the faithful.

At the time the cult came to Matthews's attention there were at least 100 men, women and children encamped about the rocks, and new arrivals were reported to be arriving at the rate of 10 to 15 persons each day. They were all wild with excitement and had disposed of their property and placed the proceeds in a common fund.

"The brotherhood is composed mostly of Californians, Mexicans, Portuguese and Frenchmen. Many of them formally have been the toughest cases to be found anywhere," wrote Matthews. "That they are right in their wild fancies no one in his right mind can for one moment believe, and what it will all amount to or what will become of these poor deluded people is hard to conjecture."

A few days later he wrote, "We learn that there are over 400 people at the Joaquin Rocks now and still fresh arrivals every day."

This was the last entry in the diary but Victor Mossop, the nephew of the author of the diary, learned from family members the end of the affair in the high hills of San Benito County.

For several months more the faithful continued to gather. At last the day arrived which Mariana Joaquin had foretold would mark the end of the world. She announced that she would be the first to ascent to heaven and that the rest of the chosen would follow.

Mariana climbed as close to heaven as she could. While her converts watched from their encampment below, the aged woman slowly ascended the highest peak. At the summit she paused a moment, arms outstretched, and then she leaped out over a precipice which dropped 300 feet to the rocks below.

It is not recorded that any of the flock followed her. The strange cult of Mariana Joaquina died with her at the foot of Joaquin Rocks.