

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

October 30, 1953

### **Reliving the Past**

The second day of Mrs. Fred Bertrand's visit to Monterey the home of her father, William Stokes, and grandfather, James Stokes, in the 1850's, she was taken to the Monterey cemetery by Mrs. William Kneass to find the grave of her grandmother. Of this experience Mrs. Kneass writes for the Diary:

"Under a beautiful tree, among the early pioneers of Monterey we found her resting place with this inscription "Maria Josefa Soto, Wife of James Stokes, Born Nov. 15, 1815, died Sept. 16, 1855."

"As we stood in silent contemplation we thought of the life of this young woman. Baptized at Mission San Antonio where her father, Damaso Soto, was a soldier under the King of Spain; married first to Gil Cano, soldier of Mexico, in 1828 at San Carlos Church in Monterey; widowed in 1839, she was married again to James Stokes, and saw the flag of a new nation raised over the land of her ancestors. She died in 1855 on the family rancho. She had ever been a faithful daughter of the church and was loved by the sisters of the convent school in Monterey. The had her body carried from the rancho, so that she might be buried from San Carlos church, and lie in sacred ground.

"We thought also of the ancestors of this woman. One bright day June 1776 a caravan of pioneers left the Presidio of Monterey to found the future City of San Francisco. Accompanied by the officers of the Spanish ships, Lieutenant Don Jose Joaquin Moraga, led a sergeant, two corporals, ten soldiers, and seven settlers, with their wives and children. There were also the priests for the future Mission Dolores, servants, muleteers, and vaqueros who drove about 200 of the King's cattle, and the mule train laden with provisions.

"They crossed the arm of El Estero toward the oak covered flat where the Navy School now stands. There the ship's officers bade them God speed, and watched them pass on toward on toward the Salinas River.

"Among the children of the caravan were Francisco Solano Alviso, aged 10 years, son of a corporal, and little Maria Augustina Bjorges .What would they have thought if some seer had told them then that 12 years later they would be married in San Carlos church, and that a granddaughter of theirs would one day lie in the

very ground they were then walking over? And what would have been the thoughts of the young couple, Ignacio Soto and his wife, Barbara Espinosa, if they had been told that the child Barbara was about to bear, would be the first white child born in San Francisco, and that one of their youngest sons, Damaso Soto, would marry a descendent of their friend and corporal Domingo Alviso?"

In Bancroft's History of California, we read the following:

"In 1846 Dr. Stokes is vaguely accredited in tradition with having intrigued for an English protectorate, but he was the first to raise the United States flag at San Jose." Mrs. Bertrand was told by her father that actually James Stokes was an undercover agent for the U.S. government during the period just before the Mexican War.

As an Englishman married to a California lady he was not suspected by the Mexican authorities. When the Americans first landed in Monterey in 1846 a group of officers were sent to investigate Stokes as a possible suspect. It was then he showed them his credentials from their government and from that time on openly supported the new flag.

Commodore Sloat appointed him alcalde (a mayor) of San Jose during the first days of military occupation.

Maria Josefa Soto de Cano de Stokes, a link in California history. Daughter of old Spain, she gave to this new land many sons and daughters; the Johnson family of Salinas, The Sherwoods, The Canos with their love of music, the Stokes, who have scattered from Santa Barbara County to Chicago—Americans All.