

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The Bishop's Palace

MEXICO – In Monterrey we picked the Gran Hotel Ancira for our overnight home, because of its central location, near to the cathedral and the Palacio del Gobierno (state capitol). As usual in all Mexican cities, these important buildings face the plaza, in this case on Plaza de Zaragoza, where it is said the young people promenade on Thursday and Sunday evening following the band concerts.

The Cathedral, the building which dominates the plaza, is of typical colonial design. We find that it was begun in 1790 by Don Jose Rafael Verea, second bishop of the diocese of Linares, and was finished 50 years later. The exterior has a beautiful high tower and carved stone façade, the interior some very fine sculptures and murals.

We visited the Palacio del Gobierno, a majestic building of red granite, with stately columns, facing a very attractive and well-kept plaza, where a bronze statue of President Juarez dominated the scene. Built in 1908 this building of Spanish colonial architecture houses the offices of the Governor and all other state officers. Of special interest here is the Red Reception Room, containing the first printing press brought to northern Mexico in 1813 by Padre Mier, a priest who was among the first heroes of Mexican independence. The press was intended for the printing of insurgent manifestoes of the Mexican patriots.

To see the sights of Mexico the visitor should be sightseeing in the morning for in the afternoon there is always the siesta. Because it was that time we were unable to see the first printing press, which was, of course, a few years older than the press which came to Monterey, California, to publish the Californian, our state's first newspaper.

El Obispado, or the Bishop's Palace, was a delight to visit. It is on Chepe Verea Hill on the west side of the city commanding a marvelous, breathtaking view of the city and mountains. It was built by Don Jose Rafael Verea in 1782, a year of famine, to give employment to Indian victims of a terrible drought. The home of the Catholic diocese during the colonial period, it became famous in 1846 during the Mexican-American War, when it was converted into a fort and resisted the

invading American Army for two days after the city was lost. It was again used as a fort during the war with the French, in 1864, and later by Villa and Carranza. It is now being restored by the government as a national monument.

Our guide, Rodolfo Gaitan of the International Tourist Service, told us that Theodore Roosevelt visited Monterrey in 1912 and spoke from the steps of the Palacio, facing the bronze statue of President Juarez of Mexico. His visit marked the first time that a President of the United States had visited Mexico. President Truman visited Mexico City during his term of office but did not come to Monterrey.

Gaitan also related with emphasis the admiration which the Mexican people had for Juarez, that he was the only Mexican president to die in bed, all the rest had been killed by being shot in the back. His likeness is commemorated in stained glass in a window in the Palacio as are several other of the great men of Mexico.

The Palacio is built entirely of stone brought by oxen teams from mines 350 miles distant from the city. It was begun in 1895, but because of the slowness of the transportation of materials, it was not completed until 1908. Beautiful colored tile is used in the floors throughout the immense edifice, which incidentally is greatly in need of repair.

As in all Mexican cities, there is the wealth and the poverty, no in-between. We made a tour today of the residential section of Monterrey and we doubt if a more beautiful, exclusive home community could be found anywhere. There were gardens and flowers everywhere with tropical plants growing outdoors in profusion. Roses climbed over walls and high fences and bush and tree roses were lush in greenery and in full bloom.

We will leave tomorrow proud and happy that our sister city to the south of us, is just as beautiful in many ways as her California namesake.