

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Humblest Homes Have Flowers

MEXICO – We are in the typical Mexican Indian village of Tamazunchale, pronounced Thomas and Charlie, or so it sounds to those who speak English. It is a favorite overnight stop for most tourists for, if it is raining, as it is tonight, or there is a fog, the long trip over the mountains will not be the beautiful trip it is when the weather is clear.

We have traveled today from Valles in San Luis Potosi State, 321 miles from Monterrey and 228 miles from Mexico City. About 10 miles from Valles we stopped at Hotel Taninul, one of Mexico's largest and newest spa-hotels. It is in the heart of the Huasteca Potosina tropics and certainly one of the most beautiful places we have yet seen. The traveler may feast his eyes upon yards and yards of soft colorful tile floors which are immaculately clean and beautiful. The food was good and served by smiling, eager to please Mexican boys, most of whom spoke a bit of English, or at least understood what you wanted even before you finished using your hands and words and all else you could think of, to obtain one simple necessity.

In this town of Tamazunchale there are 7,000 persons we were told by a Spanish gentleman, Don Carlos Francis, who has a curio and silver shop here. He once went to the Catholic Brother's school near Watsonville, and often visited with a friend in Monterey, but he says that was 40 years ago and he could not remember any of the names of the people he met there.

Tamazunchale is a picturesque little tropical town, very old and very quaint, in the heart of the Indian country. It is said, and it certainly must have been true, that before the building of the Pan-American Highway most of the natives had never seen an automobile.

It is situated at the foot of the Sierra Madre Oriental and the highway is constructed through the most dense tropical growth one can imagine. We have traveled through a scene of tall palms of the variety from which the old-fashioned palm leaf fans were made; intermingled with bananas and bamboo which grows to the height of tall trees; coffee plants, both wild and cultivated and the elephant ear plants which we grow as potted plants in California. We have seen many of our most prized flowers, shrubs and vines growing and

blooming in profusion before the humblest of Indian dwellings in the most out-of-the-way places. In fact, we do believe, that we did not see a single hut in these miles and miles of travel, that did not have some gay plantings at the entrance.

Mr. and Ms. H.W. Hollingsworth and their son are the proprietors of Hotel San Antonio where we are guests tonight. Mrs. Hollingsworth seems to be the operator and a delightful person she is. Although an American she was born in Mexico during her father's stay here as a mining engineer. Her husband owns a plantation of coffee and bananas near the city. One night several years ago they could not continue on to their property after arriving in Tamazunchale and were forced to spend the night in a local rooming house. It was so terrible Ms. Hollingsworth declared, that they then and there decided to build a hotel that would be a joy to the tourists We declare that they have succeeded.

No imports were used in the construction of Hotel San Antonio, tile came from Pueblo, the cedar wood for doors and windows and the tin lighting fixtures from the country. All the furniture was made on the spot even to the coat hangers, which are wired to the poles so the tourists will not be tempted to remove them.

We walked through the main streets of the town today. Some sights were beautiful and interesting but others were most depressing. Men, women, children and tiny babies were in rags and the greater percentage of the population is without shoes. We saw men and boys carrying wood and supplies on their backs held there from bands across their foreheads and around their heads. We saw women carrying baskets and jars upon their heads, perfectly balanced. This practice tends to make them much straighter than are the men, we noticed.

We visited the sixteenth century church in Tamazunchale this afternoon and found it depressingly neglected. The rain had flooded the tile floor in many places and old Indian women were trying to keep ahead of the leaks with old and dirty brooms and mops. Paper flowers were everywhere in evidence and sincerely pious men and women were so intent upon their churchly duties that they seemed not to notice our intrusion. We did stop to observe that the interior roof line was exactly like our Carmel Mission's ceiling.