

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

November 25, 1953

### **Flowers and Monuments**

MEXICO – One of the most beautiful and inspiring sights in Mexico is the abundance of flowers everywhere. In the most remote villages and around the grass and reed huts of the Indians, there are always bright colored flowers and plants. The flower markets are a sight to behold, with every flower imaginable and all colors of the rainbow being sold by hundreds of men, women and children, most of whom are barefooted and dirty. These markets are truly a paradise for camera fiends.

We visited one of these flower markets where large lavender orchids made into corsages sold for \$1 each., American money. A few blocks further on, we paused before another market, where only floral set pieces were made. They were immense and literally covered with gardenias, roses, white stock and several varieties of lavender blooms. Our guide informed us that these were used by individuals and patriotic organizations to place before the monuments and statues of the great men and great events in the history of Mexico – and there are hundreds within the city. Also they are bought by the wealthier class to send to funerals.

The casual traveler cannot understand that there could possibly be such a great demand for so many flowers. Every passing bus is piled high with great bunches of African marigolds, breath of heaven, callas and stock; they are loaded on the burros' sides and carried in baskets on the women's heads as well as in their arms.

A visit to Mexico would not be complete without a visit to Xochimilco (Flower Gardens), sometimes called Floating Gardens. It is a lovely place with canals that wander round island gardens bordered by willows. We went on Sunday, the day the boats are freshly decorated with all kinds and colors of flowers. These flower-decked punts, called canoas poled by Aztec Indians and furnished with chairs and tables for food, are for hire and we followed the custom and took a delightful ride down the stream. Other canoas carried native musicians who played as they were poled up and down the stream. Others carried native men and women who sold flowers – a purchase which was hard to resist. We came back to our hotel laden with pansies, orchids and roses.

We have mentioned the great number of monuments in the city, all interesting to study and all depicting epics in the history of the country. The ones which the Mexican people seem to venerate the most are the equestrian statue of King Charles IV and the monument to the Revolution of 1910. Christopher Columbus has been honored with several granite, marble and bronze monuments, as have a number of past rulers and presidents of the country.

"El Caballito," the equestrian statue, is of bronze, with King Charles astride a magnificent horse, a single casting weighing almost 30 tons and considered one of the finest in the world. It was made by Manuel Tolsa in 1802. The Monument to the Revolution is of marble and stone, with four huge arches supporting an immense copper dome 250 feet high.

The monument to Independence, completed in 1910, is perhaps the most impressive of the many monuments seen during a tour of Mexico. It is 150 feet high, a white marble column surmounted by a gilded angel. The bronze figures around the base represent Law, Justice, War and Peace. It is to this column that Mexicans and distinguished visitors bring floral offerings most often, in homage to the soldiers who died in battle. These offerings are placed near the constant flame that burns in their honor.