

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Casa Figueroa

MEXICO – It is said that the first silver sent from Mexico to Spain was from the Taxco mines. Jose Borda made a fortune in Taxco and with his money he built a palatial home there and in 1757 he had constructed the handsome parish church which dominates the town and countryside. Within this church are excellent oils by Miguel Cabrera, and a portrait of Borda.

Aside from the many silver shops, the public markets, the street vendors, and the gay dress shops, many of which are operated by Americans, one of the most fascinating places to visit is Casa Figueroa in Guadalupe No. 2. It is the home of Fidel Figueroa, who a few years ago, spent several months on the Monterey Peninsula. As we walked into this artist's studio home, a large portrait of Figueroa painted by Buck Warshawsky of Monterey met our eye. We had seen it many times in Buck's studio at home and had met Figueroa there on several occasions, so it was a happy reunion we had in Taxco.

This palace, which Figueroa has restored, was built in the middle of the 18th century by Count Cadena (el conde de Cadena). It was used as his residence and was finished in 1767. The Count was a friend of Jose de la Borda, the Silver King, who was the magistrate of the district. It is said that he required Indians to pay their fines by working on his house, which probably accounts for the thickness of the walls and well built ceilings. It may also account for the name which Figueroa told us had been given to the home by the natives. They called it "La Casa de las Lagrimas" or in English, "The House of Tears."

We will let Fidel Figueroa tell the story as he has told it in a folder which he presented to the writer:

"After the death of the Count, his house suffered many vicissitudes. It is indeed a house of tears. One of his descendants, a Spanish aristocrat, shot and killed his daughter's suitor when he came to ask her hand in marriage. During the visit of Morelos, when leading business men were shot down in the Zocalo (plaza) below, soldiers stationed in the church towers fired on the palace and bullet marks can still be seen on the upper corridor.

"In 1935 workmen killed an aged spinster, rich and alone, in the house. She was the last of her line of a Spanish family who had purchased the house and partially restored it. After that it became a grocery store, etc.; until purchased by Figueroa in 1943."

Figueroa has kept the interior as Spanish as possible. In the walls, he told us, he found five secret recesses for hiding treasures. There was also a secret room, provided with a trap door in the ceiling, which was discovered while repairs were being made. Mr. Figueroa had a door cut through the adobe into another room and now uses it as a "siesta" room.

The house contains 26 rooms and only two windows, both barred and opening onto a private patio. Ventilation came from the patio or inner court. Mr. Figueroa has changed this by inserting glass and screen in the doors, thus making it more consistent with modern living.

The room which was once a cantina, is now the main studio where oils and larger works of Mr. Figueroa are shown. In a lower patio is an exhibit of water colors and small oils. The entire house is furnished in both Mexican antiques and modern furniture but the hundreds of pieces of religious works of art are all very old and very beautiful. They have been collected from all over the world and Mexico by the artist and are greatly prized and admired by him, and the tourists who are privileged to visit there.