

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Chihuahua

MEXICO – Now that a splendid highway connects El Paso with Mexico City, passing through the central portion of the Mexican Republic, many tourists choose this route, in order to vary their journey if traveling by motor. We made the return trip by way of Chihuahua and Juarez to El Paso.

May we have just one more column in the Diary to tell our readers something about Chihuahua, the city we have known the longest in Mexico. Since childhood we have had a favorite uncle, who managed the vast properties of the late Phoebe Hearst there, tell us stories of the happenings at Hacienda de Babicora. He is over 90 years of age now and makes his home in El Paso, Tex.

Chihuahua's population has grown since the All-American highway was completed and now numbers almost 90,000 persons. It is the capital of the state and the most important city in northern Mexico. Maybe it is best known as the home of the tiny Chihuahua dogs but its fame really comes from the rich silver mines and ranching and cattle industry.

This visit to Chihuahua was unusual because we kept looking for at least one Tarahumara Indian to put in an appearance either in the city or on the roads, but not one did we see. They are distinguished by the white shorts, colorful turbans that they wear and the fast trot by which they travel.

The city is also noted for its cathedral, the Palacio de Gobierno (state capitol) and as the place in which Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla was executed during the war for Mexican Independence in 1811.

Since our last visit in Chihuahua a number of years ago, many things have taken place in this Mexican city. There appears to be no poor there, no slums, no beggars as in the past. There is a great deal of civic pride and social conscience. This city was the first to see the beneficial effects of sport for the populace, and they built a sport city that is a model of its kind

The handsome buildings housing baseball courts, bowling alleys, and handball rooms, have showers, gymnasiums, refreshment stands and every other sort of comfort and service. There is a huge swimming pool,

a football field, track and baseball diamond. It is a favorite youth center.

But of most interest to us was the knowledge that there was a small compact group of private citizens who meet in Chihuahua every month to read papers and discuss the work to which they have devoted their leisure – the work is preservation of Chihuahua's history.

Thanks to their unselfish devotion, no old building with historical associations has yielded to demolition squads to make way for the commerce or even for broadening of streets. The historical society has protected every stone that carries with it some memory of heroes, of patriotism, or of the story of Mexico.

Most admirable of the efforts of the historical society was that which preserved, in its original state (inside a brand new federal building, which was erected around it, but not allowed to touch it, or destroy it), the tower and dungeon in which Mexico's great hero of independence, Hidalgo, spent some months before his execution. We made the trip to the bottom of that dungeon and saw Hidalgo's handwriting on the walls. There is the three-cornered stool on which he sat, there is the poem to his jailer, which Hidalgo wrote with a charred stick on the door, thanking him for having treated him gently.

We also visited the house of the widow of Pancho Villa which has been preserved in its natural state, together with such papers and mementos of the "Commander of the Northern Divisions" as have been found. On a previous visit we saw Villa's mother seated beside a window knitting on a piece of Mexican lace. She was an old lady then so we presume that she has passed away long since.

Our guide told us that he does not mean that the historical society members are all in favor of Pancho Villa as a person; they merely stand firm that he is a part of Mexican history, and that therefore everything he thought and touched and did should be preserved for study.