

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

December 28, 1953

Adolfo Sanchez

There are many fascinating stories of early days in Monterey. Today it will be interesting to repeat one as told by Mrs. Isobel Field in her original manuscript of "This Life I've Loved." Which was not used in the book when it was published.

Adolfo Sanchez and his brother Alex owned a cattle ranch out near Carmel Mission but when the artists came to Monterey they prevailed upon Adolfo to open the "Bohemia Saloon," according to Mrs. Field. The artists painted panels along the bar and decorated the small room very charmingly. It originally stood on Alvarado street directly opposite from where Del Monte avenue joins Alvarado.

Adolfo was one of the popular young men of the town when Mrs. Fanny Osborne and her two children, accompanied by her sister, Nellie Van de Grift, arrived in Monterey. Mrs. Osborne later married Robert Lois Stevenson, her daughter, Isobel Field married Joe Strong, an early day artist of Monterey, and Nellie married Adolfo Sanchez. She later became the author of several books—"Spanish and Indian Place Names of California," "The Life of Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson," and others.

In Mrs. Field's private papers, which she presented to the Stevenson House in Monterey together with articles of furniture, books and other possessions of Stevenson, she describes Sanchez as "very handsome, tall, dark, with flashing eyes, dazzling white teeth and a rich baritone voice."

He belonged to an old Monterey family. His father had been a councillor of Monterey and "nearly everyone in the town was related to him." A bit further on in the manuscript she writes: "He was so kind, so sincere and honest with the trusting confidence in the honor of other people that was the undoing of the early Californians."

Nellie Van de Grift is described as the intellectual one of the five sisters, and Mrs. Stevenson as the beauty. "There was a suggestion of the Indian in her aquiline nose, black eye-brows and long straight hair." Adolfo Sanchez promptly deserted all others and promptly fell in love with Nellie.

A few fashionable women found their way to Monterey, stopping at the St. Charles Hotel, now Mission Inn. It was a rambling two-story frame house with side verandas, many rooms, bad cooking and one bathroom, according to Mrs. Field's memory. These ladies did not stay long, but each and every one made some excuse to meet the handsome Adolfo, our story teller remembers.

"Would he teach them to play the guitar, or give them a few lessons in Spanish? Or tell them something of the history of the amusing old town?" Adolfo, all unsuspecting, answered their questions taught them a few chords on the guitar, a few sentences in Spanish, and then, when Nellie arrived, promptly fell in love.

"The Californians taught us," Mrs. Field noted in the manuscript, "some fine old Spanish dances; the jota, a sort of quadrille danced to waltz time, was the one we liked best. Once we had a cascarone party and we asked the Californians we knew to come in the costumes of their parents. These were not 'fancy dress,' they were actual garments that had been laid away for years in cedar wood chests.

"The Senorita Bonifacio lent Nellie and me dresses to wear that night, red silk and yellow trimmed with heavy flounces of black lace. The slipper she offered us were too small and when we asked what kind of stocking she wore she laughingly said, "None! No one had stocking in those days, the little satin slippers with low heels were worn over bare feet."

"The cascarone party was a great success," Mrs. Field wrote in her notes now in safe keeping at the Stevenson House, "Adolfo arrived standing in the doorway dressed in the costume of his grandfather. There was a sudden pause of startled admiration and then a burst of applause. He wore velvet slashed trousers, a short embroidered jacket, ruffled muslin shirt and a brilliant serape over one shoulder. His hat was a black low-crowned one with a wide stiff brim worn over a red silk handkerchief that bound his head."

Later in the notes Isobel Field described the hat as so heavy it took two hands to lift it and the brim had an unturned edge that Adolfo said was originally ornamented with silver dollars pierced so they could be sewn on. These were not solely for ornament but it was said that they would deflect the slash of a knife.

Mrs. Stevenson painted Adolfo in the hat, according to Mrs. Field. Too bad that picture is not available to add to the splendid collection of valuable historical items

now on display in the various state owned buildings in Monterey.