

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

December 4, 1953

Cuernavaca

MEXICO – Cuernavaca and Taxco richly deserve the popularity they have won. All things considered – romance, beauty, variety, simplicity, are all combined to make these cities a must in Mexican provincial travel. The highway is paved all the way, and a great part of it is a divided toll road built by private interests.

Cuernavaca means “Cow’s Horn” in Spanish. It is no wonder that Cortes loved Cuernavaca and that he built his palace there, as did Jose Borda, the “Silver King” who spent millions there building his own Versailles. Ambassadors have also fallen in love with its charm as did Dwight Morrow, late ambassador from the United States. We were shown his beautiful home with its lovely garden.

One of the most interesting places we visited in this charming and colorful little city was the Palace of Cortes built in 1530, now used by the State Legislature. In its lofty loggia are the huge frescoes painted by Diego Rivera in 1930 and given to his beloved city by Dwight Morrow.

Our guide through the building pointed out to us that the motifs are taken from the Spanish conquest of the region down to the social revolution of 1910. He also gave great credit to Morrow for the popularity of Riviera’s work in Mexico, for he has enjoyed continued success after finishing the Cuernavaca murals.

Near the great cathedral, built in 1529 of massive severe design, is the Borda Gardens, constructed by Jose de la Borda who came to Mexico in 1716, and amassed a great fortune from the Taxco silver mines. The gardens are laid out in formal Italian style, but the huge swimming pool is the eyecatcher, for it is said that Maximilian and Carlotta enjoyed the pleasure of a swim there and spent much time in the elaborate garden.

We left Cuernavaca with regret and hurried on toward Taxco, interrupted with a stop for lunch at Hacienda Vista Hermosa, and I wish I might have the words to describe how utterly fascinating it is. The publicity folder tells us that the hacienda had its birth in the middle of the 16th century, when begun by Hernan Cortes, conqueror of Mexico, lord and captain of New Spain and the South Seas. Charles V, Emperor of Spain,

honored Cortes with a title and rights over 23,000 vassals, towns, and vast land holdings.

Vista Hermosa in full Spanish title means “Saint Joseph of the Beautiful View.” Cortes is said to have established the sugar industry which exists today in the region.

Lacking wood and iron, the hacienda is built in fortress-like proportions, surrounded by high stone walls and including within its area the residence buildings, animal shelters, stables, warehouses and the tremendous stone installations of the sugar refinery. The walls here are six feet in thickness, with spectacular arches in the classic style. It was in this latter building that we ate luncheon as strolling musicians played and sang Mexican music for our pleasure.

Taxco de Alarcon, simply called Taxco, means “Ball Game” in Aztec. The altitude of 5,740 feet and the climate it is claimed is delightful the year around. The two days we were there a thin dress was comfortable. Taxco is surrounded by green hills; its houses cling to the hillsides, the red tile roofs are features of the scenery, and to climb the narrow cobble stone streets is an adventure, for they all lead to intriguing spots.