

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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San Miguel

MEXICO – Cuernavaca is a much-loved residential town whose history is as romantic as its present appearance. The many beautiful residences are bowered in flowers. Hibiscus, vast masses of purple and rose bougainvillea, and scarlet and even yellow poinsettias dominate the show.

The home of the late Dwight Morrow, former United States ambassador to Mexico, at Cuernavaca, is modest two-story home on a corner; surrounded by a wall and iron fence enclosing a colorful garden. It was in "Casa Manana," where the ambassador lived with his family, that Charles Lindbergh met and courted Anne, who later became his wife. We were told in Cuernavaca that when Dwight Morrow left Mexico, his fellow townspeople literally wept, so deep was respect and devotion. Later a street in the city was named in his honor.

Taxco is officially a "national monument," protected by the federal government, and it is zealously supervised in this respect by federal architects. Every home and every business building in the town has – and must have – a red-tiled roof and this law alone adds measureless beauty to the place.

Returning to Mexico City for the night, we proceeded on the next morning to San Miguel Allende, a popular American-Mexican art center. Artist-students from all over the Americas attend the "Escuela Universitaria de Belles Artes" on the outskirts of the city.

San Miguel is a lovely colonial city situated in a beautiful valley, producing simple pottery and good serapes. The name Allende was tacked on to San Miguel in honor of its native patriot. It is one of the picture towns of Mexico and although not officially called a "national monument" in the same sense that Taxco is so called, nevertheless much care is taken to prevent its appearance from being spoiled.

This means that no new construction and no actual alterations to existing buildings or homes may be undertaken without due authority. Architectural harmony is maintained even at the cost of commercial gain or personal convenience.

We agree with one author whose book we read, that San Miguel is a jewel of unspoiled Spanish – colonial

aristocracy, for it was the home of many pedigreed families who had extracted wealth from the Guanajuato mines.

There is a central hotel, Posada de San Francisco, which strikes just the right note. It is a structure in the colonial style with two delightful patios, fountained and flowered in exquisite taste. Its location is directly across from the central plaza and the church, inevitably named "San Miguel." Its oddity, with a wide straddling tower cutting sharp lines against the sky and the sun illuminating its pink stone, is glorious to behold. It was designed by Ceferino Gutierrez, who did many other things for his home town.

The home of Ignacio Allende, for whom the town was named, is at the corner of the Plaza, marked with an appropriate tablet to identify it. The old street that runs past this building is called "Lane of the Cradle of Allende." An old time pharmacy occupies the corner shop of the two-story building and within we were amazed to see at least 100 handsome white apothecary jars lining the shelves, still being used to store the various herbs and medicines. The sight would make any antique dealer more than envious of the owner.

During our visit in San Miguel we came across this item in a one-sheet newspaper printed in English: "Senators are considering the convenience of passing legislation prohibiting the sale of historic buildings as recently occurred in San Miguel Allende with the home of the Mexican patriot whose name the city bears.

"Legislators say that proper respect should be maintained toward these buildings as well as other national monuments which should remain the property of the nation forever."