

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Early Days of Monterey

In the very early days of Monterey when the Presidio was located near El Estero, and the Royal Presidio Chapel was within the walls of this military necessity, the inhabitants who finally ventured outside to build their homes, naturally close land close by and built their adobe dwellings almost within calling distance. It is about that group of houses that we write today.

Up on the mesa to the south of Fremont street are four of these old adobes, still standing in much of their old splendor, though remodeled to modern ideas. One of these is Casa Buelna, now owned and occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Leo Ross. This adobe home was built by Antonio Buelna, Mexican soldier turned school teacher, during the years 1818-1821.

Mrs. Willis Abbey, of Pacific Grove, once told me the story of her mother's early girlhood in the Carmel Valley, and in Monterey. Senora Maria de Los Angeles Borronda de Pombert, the mother of Mrs. Abbey, was a child of 12 years when she and her sister came to Monterey from their adobe home on the Laurelos Rancho, in the Carmel Valley, to attend school in the Buelna home.

At that time the old adobe was owned and occupied by Senora Hillaria Buelna, who was the teacher. She was an intellectual lady of 60 odd years at that time, and was fondly called Senora Llaría, because of her unselfishness, her wonderful character and loving nature, and also to give her the dignity of a teacher, so it was said.

The home of Senora Llaría, so Mrs. Abbey recalled from many conversations with her mother, was frequented by the elite and prominent residents of those times, all of whom loved her devotedly. She conducted the school for girls, many of them attending at the age of nine years. They were taught reading, sewing, cooking, and general housekeeping, and the cultural fineness of a real Spanish lady.

Many of the children were from families of the Pueblo of Monterey, and boarded by the day; but Maria and her sister spent the week there, returning to their valley home for the week ends.

When Senora Pombert passed away several years ago, in her Pacific Grove home, she was 95 years of age. She

had taken her first Holy Communion in Carmel Mission 90 years before her death, and was said to have been one of the first Caucasian children to be baptized in the Mission church.

As a bride she had gone to Castroville where her husband, Don Juan Pombert, operated a hotel for half a century. He was the son of Don Louis Pombert, sole survivor of an expedition from Canada to Monterey in the early part of the last century.

The Buelna home, where Senora Pombert went to school, was built true to type, "L shaped" it was called. A large sitting room was flanked at each end by a smaller bedroom, while the kitchen formed the bottom of the "L." Apart from the house proper, but adjoining the kitchen were the chambers used by visiting relatives of Senora Llaría, so an early day newspaper clipping relates. A spacious corridor ran around the outside, connecting all of these rooms.

La Senora's rose garden was one to be envied, and was well known for all its variety of roses, according to the story which Senora Pombert told to her daughter. Mr. and Mrs. Ross, the present owners, still carry on the tradition, and have a charming and colorful garden, with roses in abundance.

Another of Senora Llaría's means of support were the sheep which grazed on the mesa in the rear of the Casa Buelna. Yearly the sheep were shorn, and the wool sold. Several of the old mattresses made from this wool are still being used in the household of other members of the Borronda family.

(To Be Continued)