

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

November 7, 1955

Visit to Tucson

Tucson, Arizona at this time of the year is delightful. At least we found it so when we visited there on our recent trek through Southern California, a bit of northern Mexico and Arizona. It is always a delight to get back to this old desert place, which claims to be the oldest city in Arizona. It is also on the Camino Real, the King's Highway traveled by conquistadors from Vera Cruz and the most northern outpost of the new world. Padre Eusebio Francisco Kino is the name most mentioned in Tucson history, for it was he who came up from Vera Cruz as an adventurous priest in 1692 and became one of the greatest of the mission builders. We learn that he was the first to introduce into the region the livestock, fruits, grains, and the first to explore, study and map the unknown lands.

It was Kino who visited Bac, the Indian village, in 1692 and two years later discovered the ruins of Casa Grande, now a national monument. He laid the foundation in 1700 for the first San Xavier del Bac Mission known as "The White Dove of the Desert."

There is so much to see around Tucson but time passed on and we were forced to depart after three days stay. We did find time to spend one full day in Nogales, Mexico, where many of the shops are a tremendous temptation to anyone's pocketbook, so tempting are the displays. We came away loaded down with packages with the excuse that we had accomplished our Christmas shopping, but knowing full well that several of them will remain in Casa Soberanes for our own pleasure.

We visited the two very fine museums in Tucson—one at the University of Arizona and the other within a stone's throw of the first—The Pioneer Museum. The first is on the campus of the State University.

This excellent museum was established two years after the University had opened its doors, 13 years after railroads replaced stage coaches, ten years after Geronimo's surrender ended two centuries of Apache wars. A territorial legislative act in 1893 created the museum for the preservation of "archaeological resources, specimens of mineral wealth, and the flora and fauna of the territory."

The displays in the museum are arranged in quite modern fashion and are excellent in every respect. A great deal of color is used as background in the various uncluttered exhibits of Indian life and culture in Arizona down through the centuries. The dioramas are fascinating works of art. One could actually spend several hours viewing the exhibits without losing interest in a single object—but time again passes, and we continued on to the Pioneers' Museum which opened last February in a brand new building. The exhibits are also excellent there in a different sort of way, for they do not deal with the Indians but with the early American period in Tucson. The trustees and curators had the valuable help of Arthur Woodward, formerly of the Los Angeles County Museum. In what will be the final arrangements of the materials.

What appealed to us most about this museum was the very fine library and the tiers and tiers of filing cabinets containing manuscripts, papers and other data of inestimable value to history and to researchers who frequent Tucson. Each steel cabinet was placed upon a plate of tin which extended several inches beyond the four sides of the cabinet to prevent book worm or termite damage. The director of the museum told us that the Arizona termite differs from ours in that it comes from the ground and must return there every 12 hours for water—an interesting commentary on the difference in termites, having left home temporarily because of the planned destruction of one variety, which the State of California thought might inhabit some portion of Casa Soberanes.

Thousands of dollars have been given to this Pioneer Society in Tucson in order that the museum and library may be great in its exhibits and visitor interest. One generous benefactor alone has provided the salary for one filing clerk for several years, another has promised the money necessary to properly furnish the library's reading room, and so the citizens of Tucson are actually supporting their museum and library. This library should not be confused with the regular city library, which is supported by the city.

We hope by now that our readers of the Peninsula Diary are convinced that Mrs. Mary Greene, the curator of the Old Custom House Museum, and yours truly, Mayo Hayes O'Donnell, had a pleasant and educational vacation. But we wish to assure you that we were also happy to return home to Monterey.