

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

June 22, 1955

Lizzie Bingham's End

The last installment in the diary of the life story of Lizzie Bingham, and early day actress of California, told of the arrival of her theatrical troop in the mother lode, and the discovery of her twin daughters in two champagne baskets astride the pack saddles of a mule. We learned of the impressive entry of the troop and the welcoming committee into the town. Now we will continue the story to the end of her adventurous life.

The cavalcade which had met the actress and her troop and assisted them in fording the swollen river, moved on into the town, stepping to the inspiring strains of a popular song. The population of the entire village received the players. The news of the arrival of the popular actress and her daughters, Lilly and Rose, spread up and down the north and south fork of the Yuba, and the shanty especially assigned to the mother was for days besieged by anxious persons desiring to see the twins.

The opening night of the theatrical production finally arrived. Never was Lizzie more alive and at ease, or more thoroughly happy. The principal play was "The Wife," followed by a farce - "Mr. and Mrs. White." When the injured father bought on, as usual in all theaters, a rag baby, the miners demanded with vociferous earnestness that one of Lizzie's babies must appear and take the rag baby's part. This suggestion was promptly acceded to. Then rose a babble of shouts that both babies must appear; the delighted audience now reached a climax of hilarious enthusiasm. For three consecutive weeks the theatrical engagement each night concluded with Mr. and Mrs. White," newly christened "The Twins."

The season having finally closed, the miners agreed to give the younglings a complimentary benefit. The "babes in the woods" on the occasion behaved splendidly. They laughed and crowed, and kept their rude but good-hearted friends in a state of innocent enjoyment. The tiny presents in gold made to the beneficiaries filled a large goblet. However great may be the influence of a newly-arrived baby in the refined household, it was none-the-less humanizing among the rudest of miners of California.

After many years of the roughest life Lizzie at last reached Marysville, which had, while she wandered, frown into a thriving village. Here she indulged the hope that now a peaceful life awaited her, and that she could have a settled home in which to raise her daughters. But that was not to be.

In an evil hour for her happiness, her husband met with Gen. Walker, who was then raising recruits for his Nicaragua expedition. His seductive influence won over to his mad scheme the once handsome orderly of Gen. Taylor's staff, and his noble wife, though heartbroken at the idea of leaving her children, determined to accompany him.

He arrived in Central America just in time to be shut up in the besieged fortress in Granada, which was threatened on all sides by upward of 15,000 soldiers of the combined republics of Costa Rica, Honduras, Guatemala and San Salvador—an army determine to capture, at any cost of life, the little force of 200 Americans—"Filibusters:--under Gen. Henningsen.

The siege lasted for weeks, and Lizzie husband, who had charge of one of the guns, finally broke down from exhaustion, and was consigned to his cot. Again her early experiences made her invaluable as a nurse, varying her sad duties by occasionally taking the place of her husband's deserted gun.

Nature finally gave away, and the decimated force, accorded for their courage the honors of war, asked but one favor; That Lizzie and her husband be treated with the most merciful attention. The pledge was kept, for they were tenderly removed to the St. Vincent Hospital. There the Sisters were requested to indulge their patients with every alleviating luxury that money could command. But this merciful consideration came too late. Lizzie Bingham hovered for days between life and death.

"One delightful morning she was carried out on the broad plaza of the hospital that overlooked Lake Nicaragua. She tossed madly about on her narrow couch, and in her delirium called out for her children by their names. Then rising up she would, with unearthly look astonish the simple-hearted nuns by reciting eloquent and appropriate passages from the many tragedies she knows so well by heart, passages that described her feelings and situations.

"Thus she unquietly passed on until the close of day, and it was not until the setting sun cast its last rays upon the twin mountains that sent their lengthening shadows over the lake, that her troubled spirit was at rest." Thus is her passing described by the author of "The Career of a Remarkable Woman." But what happened to her twin daughters, Rose and Lilly, we have not been able to learn. Both Mr. and Mrs. Bingham are mentioned in many volumes which have been written on the early California Theater and those who acted in them—but we find no reference to the future of the children.