

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

July 20, 1955

### **A Box From the Sea**

A few years ago, we noted in this column a story about a religious painting which had been sent to Dona Augustias de la Guerra Jimeno by the famous painter Thomas Sully, whose son, Alfred Sully, had married Manuelita Jimeno, the daughter of Dona Augustias.

Langdon Sully, the great-grandson of that artist, was a visitor in Monterey last week seeking information of the life in Monterey of his grandfather Alfred Sully, who came here with the New York Volunteers and stayed to take part in the first plays at California's First Theater. The story of the painting might be enjoyed again, so we are repeating it today.

Thomas Sully wrote his son that he was going to paint something of a religious character for Dona Augustias, knowing that she was a devout Catholic and would appreciate such a work of art. Alfred said nothing to his mother-in-law about this promise, knowing that she was very strict about keeping a promise and fearing that the painting might never arrive, owing to the long distance and difficult transportation facilities.

Months passed and one day a man walking on the beach at Monterey saw on the sand a large flat, water-soaked box which had been washed in with the tide. Upon examination the box was found to bear the name and address of Dona Jimeno. The finder hastened to Don Manuel Jimeno to tell him of the find.

Two stout Indians with wheelbarrows were quickly dispatched to the beach with instructions to bring the box to the Jimeno adobe--a two - story structure located on Calle Principal about where the present San Carlos Hotel stands. Within the wooden box there was another box, one of tin in which a life-size painting of "Christ Blessing Little Children" was found. Not a drop of water had reached the picture. The signature of the artist was not on the picture, but Lt. Alfred Sully at once recognized his father's work, and produced the letter which his father had written telling him of the plans he had for the gift to Dona Augustias.

The mystery was partly cleared up when it was learned that the box had floated in from a vessel which had been wrecked further up the coast.

Sully, the artist, was born in England in 1783. He lived in the United States from early childhood and studied with

a miniature painter and also with Gilbert Stuart. In 1809 he spent several months working with Benjamin West in England. Returning to this country he established himself in Philadelphia as a portraitist.

In "Glances at California, 1847-1853" which included the diaries and letters of William Rich Hutton, surveyor, published by the Huntington Library, Hutton wrote to his mother from Monterey in 1850, as follows:

"Dona Augustias sends you many thanks for your kindness in offering to take leave of her boys. She has been pretty sick but is much better. Mr. Sully (of Philadelphia) has painted her an original historical piece but has not yet been able to send it." A footnote explains that the "historical piece" is not included in the list of Sully's paintings, which appears in "The Life and Works of Thomas Sully" by Edward Biddle, but we presume that the work of art was the painting of "Christ Blessing Little Children," which he sent to Mrs. Jimeno and which was washed up on the Monterey beach and delivered to her.

William Rich Hutton, who was in Monterey at the Presidio at the same time that Lt Sully was here and William T. Sherman was a resident and making a name for himself, also made accurate and artistic contemporary drawings of scenes in California from the time of the American conquest to the gold rush. There are 15 drawings which he made in Monterey in 1847 in "California, 1847-1852," reproduced from the originals in the Huntington Library and published in book form by the library.

One of the drawings, "Monterey, 1847," from the old fort on the hill, served as a valuable guide when the location of the original flagpole at the Old Custom House was being sought in 1946--the drawing showing the pole on the ground at the northeast end of the building. Where it is today.