

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Texas Missions

We learned from the map given to us by the California Automobile Association in Monterey that the first mission in Texas was established at Las Cruces, so it was a must that we should visit this historic building.

We found out in front of the weather-worn church this information: "Site of the first mission in Texas, 'Corpus Christi de la Ysleta del Sur' 1682, by Don Antonio de Otermin and Padre Fry Francisco Ayeta Ofm for the education and Christianization of the Tigua Indians."

The first church, we learned was damaged by fire but was restored upon the same site. When we went within, we found six small boys in their bright vestments rehearsing their part in the service and singing the Mass, creating a colorful atmosphere for our visit.

After this brief pause, we journeyed on to El Paso, located in the northwestern tip of Texas in the Rio Grande Valley. It is the largest city on the Mexican border and has a decided flavor of old Mexico in street names, billboards, and store signs, which are written in both Spanish and English, and the conversation heard on the streets is more often in Spanish than in English.

We went across the river to Juarez to show a young niece the Mexican city, her first visit outside the borders of the United States, and had a typical Mexican meal in El Central, an eating place which we have visited a great many times in years past, for we have an uncle in El Paso who was the manager of the late Mrs. Phoebe Hearst's Mexican properties for many years. This association with Mexico has left the dust of Mexico on our feet and we always welcome a visit there, no matter how brief it is.

The next stop was our first visit to San Antonio, located in a fertile valley on the San Antonio River. It is probably one of the most picturesque and historic cities in the United States, or even in America. San Antonio has lived under six flags – French, Spanish, Mexican, Republic of Texas, Confederate, and United States. Prior to 1824 San Antonio was the capital of the Mexican state of Coahuila. The most entertaining visit we made here was to the Alamo and to the Governor's Palace.

The Alamo has become even more famous during recent years through the songs and stories of Davy Crockett, but it really is worth visiting because of its

own history, for Crockett was, but one of the many heroes of early days. The Alamo is properly titled the Mission San Antonio de Valero. It was erected in 1718 as a church and fortress by the Franciscan fathers, the walled Alamo served as a house of worship, school for Indian converts and haven for early settlers. When Texas declared her independence from Mexico, it again became a fortress and on March 6, 1836, after a siege of two weeks, it fell before the onslaught of the Mexican army under Santa Ana.

We learned from reading a bronze plaque upon the wall of the old church that a woman had made the gift of the Alamo and the property upon which it stands to the State of Texas. Her name was Mrs. Clara Driscoll and the gift was made in 1905. Later while we were eating lunch in the old Menger Hotel we saw the donor, now an elderly woman who makes her home in this historic hotel. The building is now cared for and maintained entirely by the Daughters of the Republic of Texas - which organization of patriotic women was, many years ago. given the custodianship of this Shrine of Texas liberty.

We crossed the ancient Plaza de las Armas (Military Plaza, now) to visit the old Spanish Governors' Palace. This building reminded us so very much of Monterey and what could be done with some of the old buildings in Monterey. The floors were made of native stone, worn with the tread of many years, or handmade tile, which had been baked in crude ovens of the early days. The kitchen was delightfully primitive, and the dining room was charming. In the north end was a quaint lavabo for washing hands before meals. In the south end we observed a high open-throated fireplace, making a rare setting for the scene of a recreated Spanish Colonial banquet.

The patio and courtyard are thrills of joy. Garden walks laid in beautiful pattern of light and dark pebbles, flowering native shrubs and a portico covered with native Texas grapevines, make a charming place for lingering dreams.

This building was an inspiration to return to Monterey and recreate there the atmosphere of the old town, for there the same Spanish and Mexican influence was just as influential and charming as it is in San Antonio today.

In the lobby of the Hotel Menger is a large portrait of Gen. Wainwright painted by Antonin Sterba. We, in Monterey, also honored this famous hero of Bataan by

naming a street for him. When he returned after distinguished service with the United States Army, he went to San Antonio to live and there he died.