

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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San Juan Festival

We recently were very happy the Mission Choristers at Old San Juan Bautista Mission in a summer festival of original mission music and sacred solos. It was a joy to be among those present in the audience within the adobe building founded near the close of the 18th Century.

The festival began on Sunday afternoon, June 24, and will continue each Sunday afternoon through August 26. Edgar Jones, baritone; Dorothy Renzi, soprano; and William T. Stone, organist, are the soloists. "Vahe Asianian is the director of the large group of children who sing the old-time mission Gregorian Chants - a musical experience long to be remembered.

In the processional of children from a very young age to those in their early 'teens, are many different nationalities, and one's imagination wanders back to the days when the mission was young, and the padres were teaching the children of the native Indians to sing the same songs to the same musical accompaniment we were hearing. It was a heart-warming experience which we will not soon forget. The faces of the children were so interesting as they marched down the aisle of the ancient mission singing from memory - for we knew that many of them could not read the notes or the words from the music sheets which they held in their small hands.

We are tempted to repeat a few paragraphs written by Charles Downie about this fascinating town of San Juan Bautista which is such a short driving distance from Monterey. He wrote: "Peace is only a few miles down the road and to your left. I thought you might like to know it's so near at hand. Everyone seems so intent on locating it these days and with little success.

"Of course, peace is actually all around us, usually just a few miles off the highway, a few hours from here. That's the natural peace of the countryside where no one else happens to be at the moment.

"But the name of this peace is San Juan Bautista, and it is inhabited by quite a few people. This is the miracle of the place. It is just a mile or so off the main highway between California's two major cities, U. S. 101."

Only a block off the main highway through San Juan is a state historical monument. Here around a tree-shaded

bare plaza, as it would have appeared in the days when the mission was founded, are grouped the remnants of Spanish days. The most impressive element of course, is the mission, which is still the property of the Catholic Church. It has been in operation constantly ever since its founding in June 1797. The remainder of the buildings around the plaza belong to the State of California and are maintained by the Division of Beaches and Parks, as our historical monuments in Monterey are cared for.

The mementos of olden days - the old furniture in the Castro House, the Zanetta House, the Plaza Hotel, the old firewagons and buggies collected at the plaza stables - are fascinating in themselves.

The mission garden and the garden at the rear of the Zanetta House, with roses brought from Spain still blooming, are a delight to visit.

Helen Hunt Jackson, author of "Ramona" said: "At San Juan Bautista there lingers more of the atmosphere of the olden-time than is found in any place in California".

Among the musical padres at Mission San Juan Bautista in the early 1800's, were Padre Estevan Tapis, whose beautiful manuscripts in colored notation are still in the mission, and his companion. Padre Felipe Arroya de la Cuesta, who preached in 13 different Indian dialects and reported about the Indian music in the Interrogato of 1812-14. The music was so beautifully sung that San Juan Bautista Mission could truly be called the mission of music. The mission music sung on the Sunday programs during the festival is to be found in Padre Tapis' two books of manuscripts in the museum of San Juan Bautista Mission.