

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

February 27, 1957

Florencio Serrano

A house lives through the lives of the people who dwell in it, so let us look for a few moments at the young couple who first called Casa Serrano home—Florencio Serrano and his bride, Rita de la Torre.

Florencio Serrano was a young student in college in Mexico when the death of his parents left him facing the necessity of supporting himself and younger sister, Francisca. An uncle offered to help the young man complete his studies to be a surgeon, but Florencio with the enthusiasm of youth, decided that California offered better opportunities. Under the auspices of the Mexican government a colony was being organized of professional and skilled workers to migrate to California, and bright promises of land and financial assistance was offered by the government. So it was in September, 1834, that Florencio and his sister first looked with hopeful eyes on the town of Monterey, arriving on the ship Natalia. But while the colonists were ashore a storm arose, wrecking the ship on the beach, with the loss of most personal possessions, and due to intrigue and lack of support of government officials no land or financial help was forthcoming to the 200 colonists.

We are indebted to Mrs. William Kneass, the curator of the Pacific Building, now a state historical monument, for the details of this story concerning the history of the Serrano adobe on Pacific street and the family that built and lived in it.

Mrs. Kneass continues with the facts as gleaned through much research: Florencio found a position as clerk to the administrator of San Antonio Mission, and returning after a year in Jolon Valley, became a clerk and secretary to the local government officials. His sister Francisca was unhappy here in this new land and longed for her friends and the cities of Mexico. So, Florencio not only had to work to make a living for the two of them, but also to save enough to send her back to their relatives in Mexico. She later married a Juan Carvajal and in later years Florencio was pleased to receive many expressions of love and gratitude from her family. Her son, Antonio Carvajal, owner of a large manufacturing concern of Mexico City, wrote to his uncle, Florencio, asking if a son or a grandson of Florencio could be sent to him to be his son and heir-in-

memory of the kindness of Florencio to Francisca, but no son or grandson was sent, as by that time the Serrano family was growing in security, and loved Monterey.

Well educated, a man of good judgment, Florencio's services were always in demand. He became assistant Alcalde (Mayor) in 1844, served as juror in the first trial by jury in California, and during the early American period he succeeded Walter Colton as mayor of Monterey.

He established a school in his own home. Not only did he give the boys a good basic foundation in their letters, but he also taught girls to read and write at a time when few people thought it was even wise to send a daughter to school. With the advancing years Florencio developed eye trouble, final becoming completely blind. But his memory was so remarkable that he could continue teaching, even being able to gently correct a pupil who omitted a word in the reading lesson.

(To be Continued)