

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The Lenore Pearls

In 1896 there was a long one-story adobe on the corner of Franklin and Calle Principal commonly known as the convent. In an article written by Ross Bemrose for the "Old Monterey," a booklet published that year by the Monterey Public School containing sketches of leading interest, he imports it was not the convent, but a private dwelling house owned by Manuel Jimeno and usually called the Jimeno House.

The convent itself extended along Calle Principal from the Jimeno house to the cottage built in 1850 by Senor Jimeno for a hotel but was purchased soon after by Bishop Alemany for \$5,000, and was transformed by him into a convent and school. The convent, wrote Bemrose, not long before this had been established in the Hartnell House. It was an old adobe building on Hartnell street where the Monterey Hospital now stands.

April 11, 1851, Maria de la Concepcion Arguello took the white veil, she being the first one to enter a convent in California. Three months later Sister Rose Castro joined her, and here they remained until 1854, when the convent was removed from Monterey to Benicia. After this event, the adobe building was occupied by the priests of the mission until Father Casanova came to Monterey, when he, seeing the place was unfit for habitation, had the parsonage built near San Carlos Church.

After the removal of the priests, the building was used for a skating rink, also in part, as a storeroom and band room, but it soon fell into decay. In 1887 it was torn down and the timbers were sent to Mission San Antonio to repair that church. The adobe was used to help fill in the streets of Monterey and all that remained of the building in 1896 when young Bemrose wrote his article, was a small portion of the foundation. The Monterey History and Art Assn. placed an historic marker at the site of the first convent on Calle Principal in 1932.

Owing to the confusion of facts about the old ruin standing before 1887, many romantic tales have been repeated for which there is little or no foundation; yet to most people a romantic tale is not unpleasing, and for their pleasure, so young Bemrose wrote, some of

the tales connected with the Jimeno House, which cannot be vouched for, he re-narrated:

"In the time of Pio Pico this place was occupied by a wealthy Spaniard and his daughter. The young lady, who was very beautiful and accomplished, was the belle of the town and was greatly admired by all the young Spanish gentry and the Americans about the place. The only person the girl looked favorably upon was a young American miner, but she told him that she would marry the person who would fill her lap with pearls.

"The young man, who was deeply in love with her, resolved to get the pearls at any price; so he went to a mission in Southern California, and, after killing the priest, stole the pearls from the altar. Hastening back to Monterey he found everyone preparing for a ball at the Custom House. He went to the girl's home, and, on being shown to her room, filled her lap with pearls. She at once promised she would marry him and asked her to meet him at the Custom House ball.

"Late that evening she appeared wearing the pearls, but as she with the young American started to lead the dance, a priest stepped forward and accused, the man of murder. The officers were about to seize him when he sprang out of the door telling the girl to follow him. Just as he was about to jump into the bay and swim to an American ship at anchor off the shore, a shot was heard, and he fell into the water. The girl, true to her love, followed him. Both were drowned and for many years afterward, as the inhabitants walked along the shore they would think of the lost pearls of Lenore and search among the rocks to find them, but the sea seldom gives up its treasures, and so the beauty of the pearls is known only by tradition."

In 1902 Gertrude Atherton, a famous California author, wrote another version of this romance which, she published in her "Splendid Idle Forties." a collection of stories of early California. Her story is entitled "The Pearls of Loreto," and the scene of action is laid in Monterey, as are many others in this delightful book.