

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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'Navidad and Pastorela'

Among the very good Christmas books published this 1958 holiday season is "Navidad and Pastorela," issued by the California Historical Society and printed by Lawton Kennedy. Clement Hurd is the illustrator of this, the third in the series of "California at Christmas."

There are two delightful stories in the Christmas book: "Navidad," a holiday with early Californians by Don Arturo Bandini; and "Pastorela" a shepherd's play, translated by Gladys Louise Williams. Mrs. Susanna Bryant Dakin has written the editor's note.

Arturo Bandini's colorful account of yuletide celebrations in old California sets the stage effectively for the presentation of a Pastorela, or Christmas play, as only the reminiscences of an eyewitness could.

"Navidad" was published originally by the California Illustrated Magazine, December, 1892. In the Bandini family of rancheros, famed for good looks and revolutionary fervor, Don Arturo seemed a sport, or mutant. The son of darkly handsome Don Juan (who introduced the waltz into California), the brother of one great beauty and nephew of another, he himself was unremarkable in appearance. He lived in a simple Los Angeles home filled with books and manuscripts, leading the quiet, unspectacular life of a scholar and collector

Mrs. Dakin also tells us: "Close by his home, for many years, stood El Palacio' – as the paisanos called the spacious, ever-hospitable home of his sister Arcadia and her husband, Massachusetts-born 'Don Abel' Steans. Here, Don Arturo could observe the daily pageant of 'Adobe Days' – silver-saddled horses suddenly reigned in before the patio entrance, calico-padded carretas carrying those who were either too young or too old or too fat to ride, bring country cousins or sea captains or grey-robed priests to visit the childless Steans household."

Don Abel Steans was once one of the group of influential foreigners in Monterey including Hartnell, Spence, Captain Cooper and others. Steans was in Cooper's employ here in the 1820s.

A niece of Bandini married John Gaffey – a brilliant Irishman with scholarly tastes, so Mrs. Dakin relates – and Don Arturo willed them his manuscript collection. It

later became the nucleus of the "Steans Collection" in the Huntington Library.

There are two Spanish manuscripts of "Pastorela." One is lodged in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, History and Science, and one is in the Bancroft Library. Gladys Williams pieced together the fragments while turning Spanish into English verse.

If we could be taken back to old Monterey of 1846 and earlier, we would be celebrating the Christmas season entirely differently than we are today. The religious comedy of El Diablo on La Pastorela would be in preparation for the performance in San Carlos church with angels, the devil, a hermit and the clown, Bartolo, all taking part.

Father Ramon Mestres revived the play here in 1915 for the pleasure of the people of the community. It was portrayed in English by local talent at Mission Hall on Sunday afternoon previous to Christmas.

Walter Colton, first American alcalde to Monterey, wrote in his diary of this religious comedy. His first knowledge of this drama was when he attended the performance in San Carlos Church Christmas eve in 1846.

In the days before now and Christmas we will tell in this Peninsula Diary the stories of several of these old time Monterey Christmas celebrations.