

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

May 19, 1958

Concepcion Arguello

As the California Historical Society members did in April for the Petaluma Centennial celebration, they are playing a prominent part in the Concepcion Arguello Centennial Commemoration to be held in Benicia on Saturday, May 24.

Dr. Albert Shumate is the chairman of the Commemoration Committee and George L. Harding, society president, will be the principal speaker at the luncheon. Assisting Dr. Shumate are Dr. A. T. Leonard Jr., the Hon. Raymond W. Williamson, and Mrs. George Applegarth. Mrs. Applegarth is the daughter of the late Mrs. Laura Bride Powers, former curator of the Old Custom House in Monterey.

The celebration will begin at 11 o'clock with a Mass in Saint Dominic's church. A talk on Concepcion Arguello by the Rev. John McGloin, S. J., will be followed by a brief wreath laying ceremony at her grave.

Members of the California Historical Society are cordially invited to attend the luncheon to be held at 1 o'clock in Benicia's Veteran's building.

A bit of the Monterey background of this announcement should be repeated here. When the Rt. Rev. Sadoc Alemany, a Dominican, followed Bishop Garcia Diego y Moreno, as Bishop of California, he landed at Monterey in 1850, bringing with him the first nuns to this country, also Dominicans. They established St. Catherine's Convent the following year in a two-story adobe building erected by Don Manuel Jimeno for a hotel. Today the spot is marked with one of the Monterey History and Art Assn. markers on Calle Principal just back of the Hotel San Carlos.

This first convent in California - the first formal school for girls on the Pacific - has long disappeared to make room for a modern building but the story of Concepcion Arguello still keeps the religious order's activities alive in both history and fiction.

Don Manuel, at one time secretary of state, had married Dona Angustias de la Guerra, daughter of Don Jose, commandante at Santa Barbara and had built for her a rambling adobe on the present site of the San Carlos. The adobe structure, adjoining the residence, was bought by the new bishop, who moved the

teacher-nuns from the temporary establishment in 1851.

It was in this convent that Concepcion Arguello came to "take me veil," after she heard from Admiral Simpson the fate of her lover, Nicolas Resanov. After 40 years of waiting, she heard he had died on the steppes of Russia, faithful to the end. By so doing she became the first woman to become a nun in all California.

The Dominican Sisters moved their school, at the end of two years to Benicia, and for a time the old convent served as a chapel and a stopping place for visiting clergy. Mrs. Powers says in her book "Old Monterey:" "When paved streets began to be thought necessary by an ambitious populace, the convent was torn down and its adobes used to pave them."