

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

July 7, 1958

Spanish Arcadia

A copy of "Spanish Arcadia" by Nellie Van De Grift Sanchez is a highly prized book on early California and well worth the effort to hunt a copy, either from the libraries of the Peninsula or from a friend who has not yet taken the pledge not to loan books so seldom are they returned.

"Spanish Arcadia" was published a number of years ago and is now out of print as are her other books "Spanish and Indian Place Names," "The Life of Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson," and "A Short History of California" with Dr. Rockwell Hunt of the College of the Pacific at Stockton.

Mrs. Sanchez was the sister of Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson. She lived in Monterey as did her husband, Adolfo. He and his brother, Alex, owned a cattle ranch out near Carmel Mission, but when a number of artists arrived in Monterey they prevailed upon Adolfo to open the "Bohemia Saloon." Mrs. Isobel Field, daughter of Mrs. Stevenson, tells this in "This Life I've Loved."

This was in the time of Robert Louis Stevenson's visit in Monterey and also the time of Nellie Van De Grift's marriage to Sanchez. Mrs. Sanchez became interested in the history of the community and in the customs and homes of its people. That is the reasons for the interest in her book "Spanish Arcadia." In it she gleaned from old Spanish documents and reminiscences and formed an active picture of the daily lives of the Californians.

Mrs. Sanchez presented facts and incidents that enable the reader to see the people as they actually were, "rather than as shadowy heroes with whom we have little in common."

During the earliest years of the Spanish regime there was little amusement in California. It was a man's world, and life was hard. By the time of the Mexican period marked differences may be noticed. The arrival in Monterey of Governor Sola in 1814, called for an elaborate feast; "the tables were loaded with the delicacies of the province - game, olives from San Gabriel, wines from San Francisco, 'oven fruits' - made from San Antonio flour. The table decorations were flowers from the garden of Don Felipe Garcia, whose daughters waited on the governor."

An interesting illustration of the change in California from the pastoral days when the cattle industry was the

outstanding occupation of the people, to the present is acceptance into the English language of such words as corral, reata, rancho, vaquero, rodeo, with meanings now clear, but pronunciation most incorrect by many.

The fourth annual conference of California Historical Societies elected the following officers at a recent meeting held at Hoberg's:

President, Clyde Arbuckle, San Jose, to succeed Harold Schutt, Lindsay; vice president, Dr. Frank Stanger, San Mateo; executive secretary, Dr. R. Coke Wood, Stockton; treasurer, Miss Ivy Lieber, St. Helena.

A resolution urging that the teaching of California history at high school level was adopted.