

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Monterey In 1827**

The Century magazine in 1890 published an article titled "Domestic Life in 1827" concerning the ladies of Monterey, a byline credited the information to Brigida Briones, which might have been a real person or it may be a pen name. It would be most interesting to know if there was a person by that name in this historic city in 1890, even though she wrote of life 63 years before that date.

We quote from this Century magazine article: "The ladies of Monterey in 1827 were rarely seen in the streets except very early in the morning on their way to church.

"We used to go there attended by our servants, who carried small mats for us to kneel on as there were no seats. A tasteful little rug was considered an indispensable part of our belongings and every young lady embroidered her own. The church floors were cold, hard and damp and even the poorer classes managed to use mats of some kind, usually of tule woven by the Indians.

"The dress worn in the morning at church was not very becoming; the rebozo and the petticoat were black, always of cheap stuff and made up much the same way. All classes wore the same; the padres told us that we must never forget that all ranks of men and women were equal in the presence of the Creator, and so at the morning service it was the custom to wear no finery whatsoever.

"One mass was celebrated before sunrise for those whose duties compelled them to be at work early; later masses took place every hour in the morning. Every woman in Monterey went daily to church, but the men were content to go once a week.

For home wear and for company we had many expensive dresses, some of silk, some of velvet, others of laces, often of our own making which we much liked. In some families were imported laces that were very old and valuable. The rivalry between beauties of high rank was as great as it could be in any country and much of it turned upon attire so that those who had small means often underwent many privations in order to equal the splendor of the rich.

"Owing to the unsettled state of affairs for a generation in Mexico and in other provinces and the great difficulty of obtaining teachers, most of the girls of the time had scanty educations, some of my playmates could speak English well and quite a number knew something of French. One of the gallants of the time said that 'dancing, music, religion and amiability' were the orthodox occupations of the ladies of Alta California.

"Visitors from other countries have said many charming things about the manners and comeliness of these ladies, but it is hardly right for any of us to praise ourselves.

"The ladies of the province were born and educated here. Here they lived and died, in complete ignorance of the world outside, we were in many ways like grown-up children.

"Our servants were faithful, agreeable and easy to manage. They often slept on mats on the earthen floors, or, in the summer in the courtyards. (The climate has certainly changed in Monterey, if the above statement is true.) When they waited on us at meals, we often let them hold conversation with us, and laughed without restraint. As we used to say, a good servant knew when to be silent and when to put in his cuchara, or spoon." - Brigida Briones.