

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Second in a Series

The Angels Sang

We thoroughly enjoy Victor Mossop's stories of the early days at Jolon and San Antonio in Southern Monterey County, so today we are repeating another delightful story concerning the life of the Indians in that yet unspoiled territory.

This, so Victor says is another true story concerning Maria Blanco, an old Indian woman, sometimes known as Marie White, who lived all her life in the country around Jolon.

Maria Blanco's maiden name had been Maria Norman. Her father was a native of Cuba who had arrived in the Jolon country in the early days where he married a native woman from over the coast side of the mountains and settled down on what later became known as the Gomez ranch. At one time this ranch had been an Indian rancheria and that place was Maria's birthplace.

Maria's mother died when she was a very little girl, so she was taken into the home of Mrs. Gomez where she was raised and cared for. Mrs. Gomez was an Indian woman, said to have been Maria's aunt, who was married to a half-breed Indian and Spaniard. In the early 1850's Mr. and Mrs. Gomez had charge of San Antonio Mission, their ancestors having been mission Indians.

When this little half-breed Indian girl grew up she married a man named Bill who worked as a handyman around the Dutton Hotel at Jolon. After Bill died, she married twice. The first time to a half-breed Portuguese named Williams and then to a Jolon Indian known as Olivos. She seems to have a charmed life for she outlived all three.

Left alone at last she lived in her small cabin away up in the mountains on the Nacimiento River. As she grew in age she seemed to revert to her Indian nature completely. First she threw her cookstove out of the house and built for herself a rock and mud oven or stove on the dirt floor in the middle of her one-room shack.

Maria had become very deaf by this time. She could not hear a sound but became expert at reading lips. When her friends came to call instead of knocking on the door

they would shake the house so she might feel the vibrations. As she grew still older and more and more feeble, her Indian friends of the mountains would call and try to persuade her to go to their homes and live with them, but she refused to leave her little house.

Maria would tell her kind friends that the angels came and sang to her every night from over the river, and that she was fearful if she left her home the angels would be angry, and they would not come again to sing for her. Finally Maria was taken sick and then her friends came for her, took her to their cabin and there she died. It is believed that old Maria was at least 100 years old at the time of her death, still a resident of the county in which she was born.

Las Milpitas, the rancho upon which Maria Blanco spent 100 years of life, was granted to Ignacio Pastor in 1838. It consisted of 42,280 acres, taking in most of the valley land of the San Antonio River and Mission Creek. Pastor was an Indian, in fact in his petition to obtain the grant, he classes himself as a "neophyte of the San Antonio Mission." With the exception of 33 acres around the San Antonio Mission, this ranch includes everything in that section. Mission Creek, from which the padres obtained their water supply for irrigation, was not included.

The real meaning of Milpitas is not known. Mrs. Nellie van de Grift Sanchez in her book "Spanish and Indian Names of California" writes "This word is one of the puzzles among California names. One definition is "little gardens," from "milpa," meaning a corn patch. Another explanation of the name is that it is a compound of the word mil, meaning thousand and pitas, meaning agavas or aloes. However, as these plants are not seen in this section, it is doubtful if that meaning is correct.