

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

December 20, 1961

Our Lady Of Guadalupe

A commemoration in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe was held in the Royal Presidio Chapel on her very feast day, Dec. 12. As the choir sang hymns honoring Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe, the congregation knelt in prayer asking for world peace. A statue of Mary in this manifestation is found occupying a special niche high on top of the facade.

In 1789 there was a disastrous fire in the Presidio chapel. This church, in these days better known as San Carlos Church, was damaged beyond repair. But then workmen were sent by the viceroy of Mexico to build the new church to serve the capital of Monterey, and it was dedicated in 1795.

Among the workmen sent from Mexico to assist in the building was a stone carver, Manuel Ruiz, who it is thought, was the one who carved the small figure of the patron saint of Mexico. For many years it was scarcely discernible; there had been so many layers of paint applied and the dust of the ages had gathered in the niche. But the time finally came when, in WPA days, a face-lifting took place and the figure of Our Lady of Guadalupe was again to be admired.

During this Christmas season a story about the Madonna is not forgotten. This is the story of her creation as told in Mexico:

In the year 1543, there lived a very humble and simple Indian, 55 years old, in the hill country north of Tepeyac. It was here that Juan Diego saw for the first time the now famous apparition of Mexico's Guadalupe. The name Juan Diego had just been given him as he had recently received baptism from the friar at the Church of St. James.

It was only 10 years after Cortez had conquered the City of Mexico and the surrounding countryside, but even then several churches had been built and the first bishop-elect was at his post. His Grace Fray Juan de Zumarraga. Progress was slow but encouraging, as not long before human sacrifices were being made to Tescatlipoca, the "soul god."

Juan Diego was a good neophyte. On the morning of the 9th of December as he was on his way to holy mass a rainbow of many hues stopped him in an unbroken rapture and amongst the stones he saw a beautiful

brown maiden, smiling as she spoke: "Juan Diego, my child, where are you going? I want you to know that I am the Virgin Mary, mother of God - author of life, creator of all things and Lord of Heaven and Earth.

Off went Juan Diego to relay the message that was given him in his native Nahuatl, the only language that he knew. Bishop Zumarraga, who was a true son of Saint Francis, listened with kind attention, but knew that good lowly folks - even himself, might easily imagine things ...

That evening Juan Diego returned to Tepeyac and again saw the lady. He begged that she send someone else to relay her message to the bishop, some noble or high-born person who would be believed more readily. The lady replied that he would be the message bearer and none other...

Early the next day Juan Diego returned to the bishop and, not seeing him, was told he would have to return with some sign proving the message. Juan related his plight but was delayed as he had to care for a sick uncle who was in his last hour. Now having returned to Tepeyac, he avoided the usual path only to be confronted on another path through the hills. As he saw the beautiful maiden, he explained his negligence and was told he need not bother about his uncle, that he would be well. She gave him the necessary proof, rare roses of Castile, sweet-scented. Plucking these, he placed them in his tilma, thanked the lady, and ran to show the bishop.

The lady who showed her presence by allowing a mantle full of roses in the dead of winter, captivated the sandal-shod, robed Franciscan bishop. Furthermore, on the tilma was an impression of the beautiful Lady radiant with the sun, moon, and stars.

Many of our residents have visited the shrine and basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe near Mexico City and while there have marveled at the beauty of the church built in her honor.

Yea, too, here in Monterey memories live and should live.