

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Relics Of An Old Romance

In an interesting display in one of the cases in the Spanish period room in the old Pacific Building museum is a pair of wooden, carved candlesticks which is attracting much attention from all who visit the adobe building on lower Calle Principal, according to Mrs. Amelia Kneass, the curator. The matching sticks are on loan from George W. Sims of Carmel, who obtained them from a former owner along with a fascinating story proving their origin and history during early California days.

We will let the story speak for itself. Captain Henry Fitch, of New Bedford, came to California in the 1820s as master of the trading ship Maria Ester. He became enamored of Josefa Carrillo of San Diego and she returned his love.

According to the law of that period a foreigner wishing to wed a daughter of California had to accept her religion, obtain the consent of her parents and priest and also obtain permission of the governor. Fitch complied with all the rules except that of the governor's permission. It was well known that the young lady had not given due appreciation to the governor's own personal ambition to her hand.

A quiet wedding was planned in the bride's home and Father Mendenez arrived to perform the ceremony. Just as he started the rites a courier arrived from the governor forbidding the marriage.

Young Fitch left the Carrillo home in anger and disappointment. He consulted with Pio Pico, a cousin of Josefa, and with Captain Barry of the ship Vulture, then in port. It has been written that Josefa herself said to Fitch before he left the house: "Why don't you carry me off, Don Enrique?"

The following evening Don Pio Pico took Dona Josefa up on a saddle before him and rode swiftly to a waiting boat, on shore. The young couple were married July 3, 1829 in Valparaiso.

The elopement scandalized the church authorities and some unfriendly souls spread a rumor that Josefa had been forcibly abducted.

A year later Captain Fitch's ship came into Monterey harbor to clear customs. His wife and newly born infant son were with him.

The governor had the couple arrested, placing Josefa in the home of Capt. Cooper, and Fitch under the care of Mariano Vallejo.

In the following months, the couple faced an ecclesiastical trial. The findings of the court condemned the governor for his actions at the first ceremony and declared the marriage performed in Valparaiso was valid. However, due to the great scandal which the elopement had caused in California, a penance was ordered. Capt. Fitch had to give the church at Los Angeles a bell of fifty pounds, and the young couple had to appear in church with lighted candles for three "Dias Festivos," and to recite the rosary together for thirty days.-

The candlesticks in the case at the Pacific Building are those carried by Capt. Fitch and his wife during the penance period. They became the symbols of an early romance and a fruitful and happy marriage.

Dona Josefa gave the candlesticks to her oldest son, who in turn gave them to his grandson, and now they rest in Monterey.