

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

May 7, 1962

Convent In Monterey

Archbishop Joseph S. Alemany, O.P., was consecrated bishop of Monterey and San Diego June 30, 1850, and appointed to the see by Pope Pius IX. He invited Father Vilarrasa, O. P., to accompany him to California. Also realizing the need of educating the young, he visited the Dominican convent in Paris and asked for volunteers to come to California.

Sister Mary of the Cross, Sister Mary Frances Stafford and Sister Mary Aloysia O'Neil came to California on the steamer "Crescent City" via Panama, reached San Francisco Dec. 6, 1850 on the ship Columbia, having started on the long journey on Oct. 26, 1850.

On March 13, 1851, the Convent of St. Catherine of Siena was founded in the City of Monterey, this being the first convent in California.

Conception Arguello, daughter of Don Jose Arguello, was the first to become a nun in California, receiving her habit from Bishop Joseph S. Alemany, April 11, 1851, and was known as Sister Mary Dominica. She was born in San Francisco in 1791, and died in Benecia, Dec. 25, 1857, and is buried there, the convent having moved to Benecia from Monterey in 1854.

In 1896 there was one long building - a one-story structure of adobe brick commonly known as the convent - and another private building known as the Jimeno House and owned in 1850 by Senor Manuel Jimeno.

The convent itself extended along Calle Principal from the Jimeno house to the cottage built in 1850 by Jimeno for a hotel but was purchased soon after by Bishop Alemany for \$5,000 and transferred by him into a convent and school.

When the convent moved from Monterey to Benecia, the building was occupied by the priests of the mission until Father Casanova came to Monterey, when seeing the place was unfit for habitation, had the parsonage built near San Carlos Church. These building sites are now occupied by the San Carlos Hotel and a lodge hall. Several years ago, the Monterey History and Art Assn. placed a historical marker before the site of first convent in California.

This bit of Monterey history leads up to a letter which we have received from Sister Mary Dominica, SND, of the College of Notre Dame in Belmont, Calif., asking for interesting and important information:

"I am writing a book on the College of Notre Dame in San Jose, where it was located from its foundation in 1851 until its removal to Belmont in 1923. One problem concerns Robert Mills, who brought his family from Frampton, East Canada, by way of the Isthmus in the early 1850s. The Mills family was related to the Fitzgeralds, who settled in Gilroy, and like them, enjoyed the protection of Martin Murphy Sr. Robert Mills seems to have settled near Monterey. His daughter, Ann Mills, became a Sister of Notre Dame, and as first teacher in the Mission Dolores College of Notre Dame, was one of the best-known educational leaders of her time. She died in 1905.

What I principally wish to know is where Ann Mills (Sister Mary Xavier) was educated. Apparently, she did not attend school in San Jose. There were obituaries in two San Francisco papers, but these give no information about her family nor about her education. If you have in your files any mention of early Notre Dame alumnae, I shall be most grateful for this, as well."

If anyone can help Sister Mary Dominica in her quest for information, either write to her or to this column and we will be happy to forward it to Belmont College.