

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The Old Convent (2)

After St. Catherine's Convent was moved from Monterey to Benicia in 1854 where, with Notre Dame at San Jose in later years, it still ranked as one of the foremost educational institutions.

Another pioneer worker among the nuns of St. Catherine's was Fannie O'Neal, the adopted sister of Mrs. William Tecumseh Sherman, widow of Gen. Sherman.

Instruction in the Monterey convent was given in the elementary branches - reading, writing, grammar and mathematics; also, French, English, Spanish, music and needle work. The charge for tuition in the regular branches and board was \$400 a year, while day pupils were received for the small sum of \$2 a month. The school accommodated about 150 pupils, many coming from different parts of the state.

After the convent was closed at Monterey, Rev. G. Sorrentini, the parish priest of San Carlos Church, acting under instructions of the bishop, had the lower floor of the building made into a chapel and the large dormitory in the upper story was turned into a banquet hall. Many old-time fiestas were held in this room, such as celebrating of baptisms and marriages of prominent members of the Church. For many years the other rooms were reserved as guest rooms for the bishop and visiting priests.

The building later was rented to private parties and rapidly took on evidence of decay, finally degenerating into ill-kept tenement - a shelter for California Indians.

It was at this period that Charles Warren Stoddard first saw the convent when he visited Monterey in 1885. In describing that afterwards wrote: "I saw her in her decay, the once flourishing capital. The old convent was windowless, and its halls half filled with hay."

A few years afterward, the building was wrecked by order of the parish priest, Rev. Angelo Casanova and the adobe was used to level some of the streets in Old Monterey.

There is probably no one left to have tender memories of old St. Catherine's, but scattered over the state may be found some whose grandmothers tried to tell grandchildren of its grandeur and peaceful surroundings

as well as its devoted program for the education and culture of the young ladies of that early period.

The city of Los Angeles recently has passed an ordinance creating a five-member Cultural Heritage Board to determine and record the historic buildings in Los Angeles, temporarily prevent their major change or destruction, and help purchase them. The ordinance also provides for the setting up of a private fund to acquire or restore historic monuments and recommends government acquisition when private acquisition is not feasible.