

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Senorita Maria Bonifacio

One of the most famous houses in Monterey was that of Senorita Maria Bonifacio, which was located on the corner of Alvarado and what is now Bonifacio place is. Situated in the heart of town, it was as well known as the Larkin House, Custom House and Colton Hall.

Jose Rafael Gonzales, the builder of the Bonifacio adobe, arrived in Monterey in 1833, and in that year became administrator of the customs and sub-comisario at Monterey, continuing through 1834. He had been appointed to these positions in 1829, but did not come to California until 1833 with Figueroa.

He was alcalde in 1835, and also the governor's secretary. He was commandante de cadetes at the Monterey Custom House from 1837 until 1846. He died in Monterey in 1868 at the age of 82.

John B. Bonifacio, the father of Senorita Maria Ygnacia Bonifacio, the heroine of the Sherman Rose legend, was an Italian or an Austrian, who landed in Monterey in 1822 with W.E.P. Hartnell, on the latter's ship, John Beg, on which Bonifacio was a stevedore.

Both he and Hartnell landed with governor's permission. Bonifacio continued for years in the capacity of stevedore for the Hartnell firm of Monterey. He was probably about 24 years of age when he landed.

In 1827 he married Carmel Pinto, and was naturalized in 1829. In 1832 he was in command of the Compañia Extranjero. He died in 1834, leaving his widow and three children.

After the death of Senorita Bonifacio on January 5, 1916, the property passed into other hands, and as the house stood in the path of progress, on the main street, it was decided to tear it down.

Isobel Field says in her book, "This Life I've Loved" "We drew up at the house of Senora Bonifacio on the main street. My father had rented the entire wing of this roomy adobe house set in the midst of a walled garden full of flowers and fruit trees."

Isobel Field was the daughter of Mrs. Osborne, who later became Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson. Mrs. Field's first husband was Joe Strong, an early day artist of California.

"Nellie and I slept in an upstairs room overlooking the garden. It was a noble room, its walls three feet thick and the ceiling beams hand carved. We hung our dresses and starched while petticoats in a large wardrobe with carved doors. There was a marble-top washstand with a pitcher and basin, a huge bed with a canopy, and we kept our underclothes and fripperies in a lovely painted chest.

"I suppose there were chairs, but I don't remember any. On a commode beside the bed, we always kept a candle and matches, for the charming Spanish custom of a serenade still prevailed, and the only response expected was the show of light."

The Nellie of whom Mrs. Field writes was the sister of Mrs. Stevenson, who later married Adolfo Sanchez of Monterey. She was well known as the author of "Spanish and Indian Place Names of California." "The Life of Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson" and many short articles dealing with California's historical events.

The late Louis Sanchez was the son of Mrs. Adolfo Sanchez and lived in Monterey and went to school in Colton Hall. He returned each year, until his death, for the school reunion held in Colton Hall.