

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

October 24, 1966

Stoddard's Recollections

Probably the most interesting of all the character sketches which Charles Warren Stoddard included in the diary which he wrote after his stay in Monterey in 1905 was that of Ignacia Maria Bonifacio, the owner of the Sherman Rose adobe which stood, in the old days, where the Crocker Citizens Bank is today.

Bonifacio Place was named for her. When progress came, the house was taken down piece by piece and moved to the Mesa and is now the home of Mrs. Guy Gatlin. In those days Robert Johnson was mayor of Monterey.

Stoddard wrote in his diary on September 14, 1905: "Dropped in to see Mayor Johnson at his office. I was hoping that he would suggest going to see the Rose of Sherman.

"Later, when I had gone to Monterey for dinner, he called me and said: 'Come with me, I am going to the house!'

"The house is dismembered. Only the wing is left that was the dining room and kitchen with two chambers above. The house is plainly furnished.

"In her room is an old-fashioned bedstead of camphor wood; old chests and a picture of a madonna, such touches me, and a portrait of the little lady when she was a girl of sixteen, painted by a Spanish artist."

It is thought by long-timers who remember the painting of Miss Bonifacio that it was probably the work of Leonardo Barberi, who also painted portraits of Mr. and Mrs. W.E.P. Hartnell and other prominent residents of the time, including Don and Senora Amesti and their daughter, Caledonia Amesti de Arnao.

When Miss Bonifacio passed away, Mrs. Robert Johnson carried out her friend's request, cut the portrait from its frame, rolled it up and placed it in the casket with her.

In the garden there were pear trees still blooming and bearing fruit-trees that had been planted by the Mission Fathers more than a century before. Stoddard writes that every here and there was a sensation as if this was a dismembered portion, both half alive, of something dead and gone. Where the main portion of the old

house had stood there were then, in 1905, two new upstart brick offices going up.

The little old lady was then land-poor, according to what Stoddard was told. She had nothing in the world but her house and its sparse furnishing.

Robert Johnson, with Mrs. Johnson and their family, owned and resided in the Larkin House, which they sold to Mr. and Mrs. Henry Toulmin.

Mr. Johnson's mother was Spanish and Mrs. Johnson was of Italian descent. Miss Bonifacio had known his parents well and had brought up Mrs. Johnson, so during her lifetime the Johnson family members were her devoted friends and she naturally was fond of them.

"Mr. Johnson had the wish to make her very independent," Mr. Stoddard wrote after his visit. "He wished to make her an allowance. He said 'How much can you live on per month, 30 or 40 dollars?' She said 'Eight'. He arranged for an adjustment of her property. She now had money in the bank drawing interest. She does all her own work and never was there a cleaner house than hers—and it is on the leeward side of a dusty side of the street."

To those who ate with her, Stoddard relates she would say in the morning: "Will you have a cup of coffee?" and make it. "Will you have a fresh egg?" and go out among her hens and find a newly laid one. "A bit of bread?" and she would rush away to the bakery, which was in the old Simoneau restaurant where R.L.S. (Robert Louis Stevenson) used to be fed when he hadn't the price of a meal in his possession.

Miss Bonifacio would not speak English, so those who remember her say. But she understood everything that was said to her. She willingly wrote her name in Stoddard's album—just her name—and, half in sport, Mr. Stoddard suggested that she date it from the Sherman Rose. She shook her head and smiled.