

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

November 1, 1967

St. Catherine's Monterey Academy

On the northwest corner of Calle Principal and Franklin streets, where now stands the San Carlos Hotel and the Moose Hall, there is a Monterey History and Art Association marker where once stood one of the leading educational institutions of the state.

Saint Catherine's Academy, as the school was called, was opened in 1851 by three nuns of the Dominican Order under the direction of the Right Rev. Joseph Alemany, O.P. Bishop of Monterey.

Bishop Alemany, a native of Spain, feeling the call of the missionary, left his native country in early 1840's to come to America. After zealously laboring in the Atlantic states, he resolved to pass the remaining years of his life in the Spanish speaking settlements on the Pacific Coast.

In 1850 he was consecrated Bishop of Monterey and realizing the need of a school for girls, and the necessity for having religious women to instruct the children of his new flock, he sent east for Sister Mary Gomare, a French nun of the Dominican Order, and a very cultured woman. She came in answer to his appeal, accompanied by two other sisters of her order, Sister Mary Frances Stafford and Sister Mary Alysis O'Neal.

They came to California by way of Aspinwall and Panama, from where they traveled on mule back across the Isthmus of Panama. On November 16, 1850, they left Panama on the steamer Columbus, reaching San Francisco on December 6, 1850.

When they arrived in Monterey a few days later they were met by Mr. Francis Doud and taken to his home on Van Buren and Scott streets, where he and Mrs. Doud entertained them until other quarters were provided.

That same Doud home is the charming long low, white colonial house which has been presented recently to the Monterey History and Art Association, which organization plans to restore it and use it.

On January 1, 1851, the sisters, at the invitation of William E.P. Hartnell, opened a school in his home, now the site of the Monterey Hospital. Owing to the increased attendance all the pupils could not be accommodated and shortly afterward the school was

moved to a new building on Calle Principal near Franklin.

The building was of adobe brick and had been built by Don Manuel Jimeno, a brother-in-law of Mrs. Hartnell. This building had been constructed as a hotel and adjoined the Jimeno home. The convent was formally opened and named St. Catherine's Academy.

The first woman in California to enter the novitiate was Maria Concepcion, the daughter of Don Jose Arguello, second governor of California, 1814-1815, and sister of Don Luis Antonia Arguello, second governor of California under Mexico rule.

The charming and pathetic story of her romance and the death of her Russian lover is another story. After hearing of his death she became an unofficial Dominican nun, or beata, at Monterey and when the convent was moved to Benicia she accompanied the sisters and died there on Dec. 23, 1857. Her body rests in the private Dominican cemetery at Benicia overlooks Suisun Bay.

Another worker and teacher at the convent was Fannie O'Neal, the adopted sister of Mrs. William Tecumseh Sherman, the wife of Gen. Sherman of Civil War fame.

Instruction in reading writing, grammar, mathematics, as well as French, English and Spanish, music and needlework, were given at the academy. The charge for tuition in regular branches and board was \$400 a year, while day pupils were received at \$2 a month. There were 159 pupils, many coming from different parts of the state. The following members of Monterey families enrolled as academy's first pupils: Luisa Moreno (Mrs. Thomas Watson), wife of an early Monterey sheriff and mother of Mrs. Fred Treat; Soledad Romie (Mrs. David Jacks); Ana Hartnell (Mrs. Pedro Zabala, mother of Ana and Jack Zabala); Dolores Munras, who became Mrs. Alanzo Allan and Engracia Munras who married John Callighan an early day Monterey postmaster and doctor; Mari Malarin, who lived in Oak grove was a niece of Concepcion Arguello.

After the convent was closed in Monterey the Rev. O. Sorrentini, the pastor of the Royal Presidio Chapel of San Carlos, acting under the instruction of the bishop, made the lower floor of the building into a chapel, and the large dormitory upstairs was turn into a banquet hall.

Here many of the old time fiestas, baptisms and marriages took place. The building was later rented for parties but rapidly took on the appearance of decay and finally was wrecked by order of the pastor, the Rev. Angelo Casanova. The adobe bricks were used to repair the streets of the old town.