

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Tales of Old Monterey

"The curse Upon Monterey" we will place as the headline for this story as told by an old Montereyan. Long ago, a certain priest coming up from San Diego by boat put into the harbor of Santa Barbara, and went up into the town while the boat lay over loading cargo. He was in a very happy mood because he had collected quite a sum of money to use among the Indians around Monterey.

There happened to be a couple of men from Monterey among the people the priest was talking to, and they were much interested in the work the father was planning for his natives in Monterey. When the boat sailed these two men made their speedy way on horseback to Monterey.

When the boat pulled into the harbor of Monterey, the priest learned that there was a large landing fee levied upon all comers. Strangely enough, this fee amounted to the exact sum the priest had upon him. He was obliged to pay it, but his mission was brought to naught, and he set out once again to raise some money. As the boat left Monterey, the priest heard sounds of fiesta on shore, and was sure that the people were making merry upon the money taken from him. In the sorrow of his heart, he lifted his hand and said, "May Monterey never show her fairest face to a stranger."

He was a sorely a wronged man and his curse was strong, lasting even to this day, so the old timers say. Whenever there is a big crowd of strangers in town, the weather is at its worst, fog, mist and winds greet the newcomer and convince him that Monterey is a most inhospitable place. And the old priest rejoices.

We will entitle this bit of history "God Willing": Let anyone who doubts the direct oversight of a Divine Onlooker in the affairs of earthly men consider the case of Otillo Torres. Otillo was truly a Walahine, called Spanish through courtesy. He was short and stocky and with no appreciable difference in size between head and neck, a true son of the soil, and more at home on the back of a horse than on his own feet.

One day down at the Sur, he went into a field to get his horse, saying to his friend, "Esta mañana, yo voy a Monterey", (Today I go to Monterey). His friend added, as all good sons of the church should, "Si Dios quiere, no quiere, yo voy a Monterey."

Such a direct challenge go the powers did not go unnoticed, for as Otillo the vaquero, started for his horse, it backed off from the bridle, and when after countless attempts, he finally got the bridle on and mounted the horse he was thrown to the ground. That was enough! Fat Otillo sank to his knees and with uplifted hands he exclaimed, "Si Dios quiere, yo voy a Monterey."

"Julia and Frank, A Tale of Conjugal Devotion,"...Julia was Irish and Frank was Italian, and neither could read nor write, but the heart of Julia was centered upon her Frank, much to the annoyance of the folks at the early Monterey post office.

They suffered when Frank went to the Springs at Tassajara for his rheumatism. In Julia's eyes, the clerks were responsible for the non-receipt of a letter giving the latest news of Frank's state of health, such a letter being written by some kindly soul at the springs.

The stage ran only every other day, but that was no excuse for not furnishing her a letter on demand. Every morning the clerk at the window would see Julia, as usual without a hat (we doubt if she owned one) but with a clean, white apron tied over her gingham one that had seen service about the fish sheds on the wharf.

Followed without fail this conversation,"

Julia: "I want a letter from my husband."

Clerk: "There is no letter here."

Julia: "Why isn't there?"

Clerk: "Well perhaps he didn't write."

Julia, with growing suspicion: "Why didn't he write?"

Clerk: "Perhaps he didn't feel like it."

Julia: "Do you think he is sick?"

Clerk: "No I guess not, but the stage did not come in today."

Julia, more suspiciously: "What day is today?"

Clerk: "This is Wednesday."

Julia, with an air of catching the clerk in a gross misstatement: "What day was yesterday?"

Clerk: "Yesterday was Tuesday."

Julia: "Tuesday!" (And now her air was one of utter unbelief, that of a person whose confidence was outraged.)

This sort of thing went on day after day until the clerk was ready to shriek at the sight of Julia's stolid figure, about as pervious as a block of granite, and with the air of one who is settled at that window for all times. But finally there would come a card from Frank, with the news that he was all right, and that he wanted his flannel shirt.

The clerk would read Julia her card, a service she received in the same stolid manner, and then would take the card in to Charlotte at the bakery to have her read it, and then in to Sparolini's where Mr. Sparolini would stop his work and read it. Thus having checked up on the accuracy of the various reading, she would to home for the day.

When you consider, that Frank spent two weeks at Tassajara, and went there every year, you may realize how the whole postal force fervently hoped that Frank would get well. How awful to contemplate what would happen if Frank should die, and the post office should still be responsible for news of his condition in whatever bourne he finally came to rest.

Well, Frank did finally die, and Julia, when next our informant saw her, had hennaed her hair, and wore red earrings and hat, and had taken up with a young man who had his eye on Frank's insurance. You never all tell, can you?