

Dominguez Homesite is State Landmark, Shrine

By R. C. GILLINGHAM

In concluding the stories of the Rancho San Pedro, it is appropriate that some mention be made concerning the status of the Dominguez homesite. Located on Alameda Blvd. two miles south of Compton, the original residence and surrounding grounds are a monument to rancho life and activities more than a century ago.

It will be recalled that Don Manuel Dominguez built his home in 1826 just under the brow of Dominguez Hill, to which he brought his bride, Maria Encarnacion de Cota, the following year. The day for the thick adobe walls was secured from pits in the Gardena area, and the heavy timbers were hauled by ox-cart from the mountains north of San Gabriel Mission. The original home consisted of just four rooms, but in 1839 a second story was added and a wide, U-shaped structure of some 15 rooms.

IN THE WILL of Maria Encarnacion, the homesite was included in a tract of 200 acres which was bequeathed to the three daughters who were then unmarried. This tract remained in joint ownership over 40 years, being inherited by the surviving daughters.

In 1824, with the object of maintaining the old home and also putting the grounds to a worthy use, the immediate area of slightly over 17 acres was donated to the Congregation of Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, more commonly known as the Claretian Fathers.

On Oct. 23, 1924, this tract was formally transferred to the Claretian Order by James Watson, eldest son of Dona Dolores Dominguez Watson, the latter having died just one month previously. The Very Rev. Andrew Resa, C.M.F., was the Superior in charge, and Dona Maria de los Reyes Dominguez de Francis, the last surviving sister, was present at the ceremony.

UPON THIS SITE other buildings now house the Dominguez Memorial Seminary. At first established as a Catholic school for young boys aspiring to the priesthood, in later years the Seminary provided advanced training for missionary service. With the school term which began in September, 1938, a Junior Seminary only is maintained.

In addition to religious instruction, the curriculum covers a period of five years and provides academic training for some 90 youth of high school age who are candidates for admission into the Claretian Order.

The Dominguez home itself has been preserved intact, facing westward toward a central plaza and the buildings of the Seminary. After repairs made necessary by the earthquake of 1933, the original adobe walls were cemented and stuccoed, and the entire building covered with a tile roof. The old walls, 18 inches thick, may readily be noticed at the doorways in the central part of the home, in addition to the barred windows and shutters. The bars on the windows were installed by Manuel Dominguez to provide further protection for his wife and daughters when he was away from home for extended periods during his long public career.

TWO ROOMS OF the original house have been set aside as a shrine in memory of the Dominguez family. The parlor has been converted into a small chapel with an altar and other religious decorations typical of the devout Catholic household. The adjacent room to the south was the master bedroom where Don Manuel died in 1862, and which now contains the bed with its canopy, pictures, and mementos of the family. The other rooms of the home are used for various purposes in the conduct of Seminary activities.

The Seminary building across the plaza to the west includes a beautifully appointed chapel, used daily by the students, who are in charge of ten instructors, all ordained priests of the Claretian Order.

Beneath the altar, in a subterranean crypt, is a shrine dedicated to Dr. Gregorio Del Amo and his wife, Susana Dominguez Del Amo, whose remains lie buried beneath the floor. This is a special tribute to the Del Amo branch of the

Dominguez family, who provided the funds for the first Seminary building in memory of Dr. Del Amo, their home on Dun Manuel Dominguez and his wife. After the death of Westchester Place in Los Angeles also was given to the Claretians.

SINCE THE original transfer of the Dominguez homesite, additional land was deeded to the Claretian Order, west of the electric car-line, the town area now comprising over 70 acres. A combined classroom and dormitory building has been erected on the western portion of the tract, being connected with the main homesite by a covered bridge across the tracks. On April 25, 1945, the Manuel Dominguez homesite

was designated as State Landmark No. 152 by Senate Bill 1034, a permanent bronze plaque was placed at the entrance.

During the period of more than 30 years since the founding of Dominguez Memorial Seminary, considerable work has been done by the Claretian Fathers and lay brothers in landscaping the surrounding grounds. Most of the original gardens, orchard, and barbecue facilities have been retained and these, together with an outdoor spring, provide a distinct touch of Old Spain.

IMMEDIATELY to the north of the Seminary area is the

large temporary home of George and Maria Victoria Dominguez Carmon built in 1867. This structure is still in good condition, having been occupied for many years by Mrs. Victoria Caldwell, one of the Carmon daughters. Part of the change has been made in the house and grounds in many years.

One gains the impression that its usefulness is past, but that this part of the estate is being preserved as a family heirloom.

The general atmosphere is a reminder of the easy-going rancho days of more than a century past, which is quite in contrast with the modern auto-trails plant a few yards to the north, and with the rush of

traffic on Alameda Blvd. THE DOMINGUEZ home site thus represents an interesting mixture of the old and the new in California, and one hopes that it will remain that way. A visit there makes one feel again the romance of Spanish California, and brings a pang of regret that the old rancho days are gone forever. Today the old homesite, apart from its current dedication to religious training, stands as a landmark along the road of tremendous progress in the modern development of Los Angeles County. At the same time, it serves as a lasting monument to a famous rancho and to a distinguished pioneer family.

Float Committee Names New Decorations Chief

Two North Torrance women, Mrs. Margaret Clark and Mrs. Juan Gerardi, have been named co-chairmen of the float decorations committee by officials of the city's Tournament of Roses committee.

The two ladies will replace Mrs. Victor F. Benstead Jr. who told the committee she would be unable to continue as the decorations chairman, a post she filled last year.

Mrs. Clark is president of the North Torrance Fuchsia Society and the North Torrance Civic Improvement Club, and Mrs. Gerardi is treasurer of the N.T.R.A. and a member of the city's new civil defense and disaster commission.

Selection of the North Torrance women to succeed Mrs. Benstead was praised by Chamber President Fred Hill, who pointed out that the city's entry is among the best exposure in the parade and that any success must depend on the ability of the decorators.

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