

# NOTICIAS del PUERTO de MONTEREY

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*Ruins of Mission San Carlos Borromeo Mission in Carmel about 1880.*

## REBUILDER OF MISSIONS: Henry John "Harry" Downie 1903-1980

Harry Downie was personally responsible for the restoration of the Carmel Mission and provided leadership for renewing old mission buildings throughout California. From his coming to the Monterey Peninsula in 1931 to his death March 10, 1980, he was in charge of rebuilding the Mission Basilica San Carlos Borromeo as well as supervising and consulting in the reconstruction of seven of the northern California missions. He was sought as restoration consultant for these because he was, as editors of *Sunset* magazine reported, "a walking encyclopedia of California fact and lore."

Born on August 25, 1903, in the shadow of the Mission Dolores of San Francisco, Downie found there his love for the California missions and his interest in the life of Fr. Junipero Serra, their founder. He came to know the Carmel mission early in life as he spent many vacations with his family on the Monterey Peninsula. When he was twelve years old he made a model of the facade of the Carmel Mission which is to be seen today



in the Downie Museum. This museum, dedicated on October 11, 1980, is housed in the small temporary priest's house built in 1919 at the doors of the Carmel mission church by Fr. Raymond Mestres, rector of the Monterey Parish which at that time included Carmel. This museum contains an outstanding collection of Downie memorabilia including a restored version of the workshop where he planned the authentic restoration of one of the most beautiful mission churches in California.

Apprenticed in 1919 to A. T. Hunt, a firm of cabinet makers which specialized in the renovation and reproduction of Spanish furniture, Downie there developed his techniques of carving and coloration which he first used in the restoration of the statues in the Mission Dolores. When, in 1931, he decided to set up his own firm in Santa Barbara, he stopped on his way south to visit Msgr. Philip Scher, the Monterey pastor with whom he had become acquainted on his previous visits to the peninsula. Staying for a time in Monterey to repair some broken and chipped statues for Msgr. Scher, one job led to another until he had repaired and restored enough old statues and paintings to start a small museum in the Monterey rectory. He then began to restore objects in the Carmel mission which had been reroofed and rededicated in 1884 when Fr. Angelo Delfino Casanova was the Monterey rector. Years later Downie was to remark, "I came here for a month and I've been here 35 years." Eventually he was to give 49 years of his life to the Carmel mission, alongside the walls of which he was buried after he died in active service as the mission Curator.

Before he settled down in Carmel Downie went around the world as ship cabinetmaker on a Dollar Line Steamer. On that trip he took time off in Spain to seek out records of the Franciscan mission to California and to visit the birthplace of Serra in Petra, Mallorca. He continued to be an untiring student of sources which gave him an insight into the history of the California missions, making many trips to Mexico to read and make copies of the annual reports of the missions in Nueva California. He collected this material together with original European and American publications, including many first editions, bearing upon the settlement of the Franciscan missionaries in California. This valuable collection is now available to students of California history in the newly built addition to the Carmel mission, the Downie Library, and may be used by application to the present Curator, Richard Joseph Menn. On the ground in Carmel he relied on careful excavation to trace the foundations of the buildings that were described in the reports. As a result of his care in investigation he found, with a bit of the disintegrated wood fibre in place, the foundation stones placed around the cross that Fr. Serra erected in 1770 before the first chapel was built on the site. In further careful excavation of the whole area of the mission compound he was able to trace the outlines of the foundations of all seven of the churches which were built there between the time that the first stake and tule chapel was constructed in 1770 and the stone walled permanent church was built in 1797.

When Downie came to Carmel only the church remained, surrounded by waist high walls of broken adobe bricks, the original walls having stood through all the years of desolation caused by the secularization of the missions. The foundations of all the buildings around the mission close were uncovered by Downie who then supervised the rebuilding on those original foundation locations of the Padre's quarters, including Serra's cell, the present chapel which is connected with the new priest's quarters, and the classrooms of the Junipero Serra School. In 1940 he made a model of the way that he would like to complete the church and mission complex, and by 1960 he had succeeded in raising the buildings according to his plan and model. The model now stands





*The Carmel Mission among ruined walls when Harry Downie arrived there in 1931.*

*The Church has the "gothic type" steep shingled roof placed on it in 1884 by Fr. Casanova. Downie was to remove the roof and replace it with a lower tile roof duplicating the original.*

*In the foreground is the Sarcophogas Room built by Fr. Mestres in 1924. This room still stands.*

displayed in the room which is first entered by the 200,000 tourists who visit the Carmel mission each year.

In the restoration of the church Downie removed the steep 'gothic style' roof placed there in 1884, replacing it with an arched ceiling and low pitched tile covered roof as when originally built, using tiles hand made in the old manner in Decoto, California, near the Mission San Jose. Adobe bricks were made on the site in Carmel from the excavated material, thus the walls of the reconstructed buildings were built of the original adobe material. One part of the adobe wall of the chapel, facing onto the present parking area, has been left unplastered to show the adobe bricks. This is one of the few stretches of wall that stood through the years of desolation which followed the destruction of the mission after secularization. This is believed to be the oldest standing stretch of wall in California.

In 1943 Downie supervised the opening of the grave of Fr. Serra when his bones were identified as a part of the proceedings which are under way for the possible canonization of the founder of the California missions. The books of the library, the oldest in California, created by Fr. Serra and his successor, Fr. Fermin Francisco de Lasuen, were collected by Downie from all over the state where they had been scattered at the time of the secularization of the missions. Two hundred and twenty nine of the books listed in the inventories between 1771 and 1842 have now been returned to Carmel and are housed in the library room reproduced in its original form in the rebuilt Padres' quarters.





*Harry Downie repairing  
a statue at the Carmel Mission  
soon after his arrival there in 1931.*

Many of the statues, paintings, crosses, candlesticks, vessels, and vestments from the Carmel mission were preserved in the Monterey parish. These have now been returned to Carmel and are housed in the Sarcophagus Chapel there. This sarcophagus, created by Jo Mora and dedicated in 1924 under the rectorship of Fr. Mestres, is one of the finest pieces of such sculpture in America. By the recumbent bronze figure of Serra there stand the lifesize figures of his three fellow Franciscans from Spain, Frs. Crespi, Palou and Lasuen. Another bronze figure of Serra stands today in the Statuary Hall of the nation's capital building to represent the State of California there. With a model of the Carmel mission in the left hand and a cross held high in the right, the figure well represents the contribution which Junipero Serra made to the foundation of the state's civilization.

Downie carved several statues which are now in the Carmel church, and restored some of the ancient ones which had been partially destroyed. In this latter group in the Belem Chapel, is the statue of the Virgin of Bethlehem, the figure sent to Nueva California from Mexico City in 1796 by Don Jose de Galvez, the Visitador General of New Spain. It was brought to Monterey by Gaspar de Portola on his first expedition to the Monterey Bay, and when it was returned to Galvez in Mexico City he sent it to stand in the new Carmel Mission. In 1956 Downie carved the magnificent reredos of the present Carmel church, including in it some of the original statues which had been preserved in Monterey and carving others to match.

Downie's activities were not limited to Carmel, for his interest included all the California missions. In 1948 he supervised the reconstruction of the Mission San Antonio de Padua where he found only the church standing with twelve arches of burnt brick beside it. He assisted at about the same time in the restoration of the buildings at the Mission San Luis Obispo and San Buenaventura. In 1952 he was active in San Juan

Bautista, making a model for the guidance of the restorers of the mission there, which model is now in the Downie Museum at the Carmel mission. After the Soledad mission had been given an unacceptable restoration by the state, Downie found "the walls bumpy and the interior a mish-mash assemblage of plastic statues and modern pews." When the state agreed to plaster over its work on the walls, the Native Daughters of the Golden West financed Harry's work as he created the interior furnishings and carved statues of St. John and the Blessed Virgin which now stand there.

His statue of Santa Clara de Asis was presented to the University of Santa Clara for the University Chapel, and he assisted in the refurbishing of the Mission Dolores in San Francisco. He worked on the restoration of the Presidio Chapel in Monterey, first in 1942 and again in 1970, when the bishop made it the cathedral of the diocese. He served as consultant in the restoration of numerous historical buildings in Monterey, including Fremont House, Colton Hall and the Osio Adobe, as well as others in Salinas and San Juan Bautista. At the time of his death he was acting as consultant in the restoration of the Mission San Jose in Fremont.

The activity of this Franciscan Brother of the Tertiary Order, the lay order, in the restoring and revitalizing of the buildings of the Spanish period in California has not gone unacknowledged. In recognition of his contribution to the perpetuation of the Spanish-American history in California, and especially for his restoration of the Basilica Mission San Carlos Borromeo, Harry Downie was made a Knight Commander of Isabella la Catolica by the Spanish Government in 1948, a Knight of St. Gregory the Great by Pope Pius XII in 1954, and a Knight of Castle Belvedere by King Juan Carlos of Spain in 1976. He was honored in 1949 by the Academy of Franciscan History for his "significant contribution" to the study of American Franciscan History and in 1954 was made a "Distinguished Member of the Association of the Friends of Fray Junipero Serra de Petra, Isla de Mallorca." In 1968 he received the Award of Merit of the California Historical Society for his work in restoring missions and in 1971 was awarded the Connover Memorial Award of the Guild of Religious Architecture for his contribution to religious architecture in California.

The City of San Francisco presented Downie with a Key to the City as an outstanding citizen of the community in 1964, and in 1968 he received the title "Man of the Year" from the Monterey Peninsula Chamber of Commerce. Previously, in 1955, at a dinner held at the Naval Post Graduate School, the citizens of Monterey Peninsula and Msgr. Michael O'Connell, the rector of the new Carmel parish who had worked with Harry in bringing the Carmel mission to its former state of grandeur, had paid tribute to Harry Downie. The commemorative scroll which was presented to Downie at that time expresses well the debt that is owed to him for his vision and his labors for the rebuilding of one mission and for the many that felt his touch:

"The community of Monterey Peninsula delights in phrasing its gratitude for the imaginative understanding and able services you have given in the restoration of the Mission San Carlos Borromeo. Founded by Father Junipero Serra and his colleagues the mission long neglected has again come to life and persuasive power because of your vision and your labors. It stands again in this troubled world a house of light shining with the love of Christ among souls along the uncertain paths of life."

Sydney Temple  
Author of *The Carmel Mission:  
From Founding to Rebuilding*  
(1980)



## OUR WELL-DRESSED HISTORY

As Monterey was preparing to host a Constitutional Convention with an eye toward California statehood, Henry David Thoreau retreated to Walden Pond on the other side of the country and uttered the often quoted dictum: "Beware the enterprise that requires new clothes." The Monterey History and Art Association indeed has cause to rejoice that few, historically, have subscribed to this. We have fallen heir, over the past 50 years, to have many beautiful, elegant, sturdy, and intriguing items that were once someone's "new clothes." These constitute what is a large and important collection that is being inventoried, catalogued, and carefully stored. At important Association events, such as the Adobe Tour, the Antique Show, and our annual dinners, it is possible to give our members and visitors a brief display of garments suitable to the occasions. They portray the most personal kind of history, showing what the people who developed Monterey wore at periods of its growth.

Our discovery of two mid-19th century calico costumes and an early chintz, typifying what the first American women might have worn in our heritage homes, has sparked the costume display for this year's Adobe Tour which will be held April 24th. The theme selected is "Women in the Adobes." Complementing the costumes will be demonstrations of handwork and textile techniques of the time, presented by members of the Carmel Craft Guild, who will show spinning, weaving, and dying methods; by the Embroiderers Guild; and by the Quilters Guild. All are local chapters of national organizations devoted to their specialities. It will be the first time these groups have worked together to demonstrate the talents in our area. In addition, we will have a member of the Lace Guild of Northern California, Margo Silverman, to display her own collection, demonstrate bobbin lace making, and help us learn to distinguish what is and is not handmade. Margo now lives in Carmel Valley and will add an exciting dimension to this Textile Fair. Weavings, coverlets, and quilts belonging to our Association will decorate the Friendship Room at the House of Four Winds. One corner will feature an early kitchen display.



*Costume Display, Monterey History and Art Association's Antique Show and Sale, 1979*

The oldest treasures we have date from about 1780 when Monterey was the Spanish capital of Alta California. They are a man's white satin embroidered vest, a lady's robe d'anglais of silk damask, with a pink embroidered petticoat and a pair of dainty white satin shoes—all of French design and workmanship. They ably evoke a story told of Don Pedro Fages and his wife, Eulalia. Both were of noble Catalan families and dressed luxuriously in the latest European styles. In 1783 Don Pedro was appointed governor of the new Spanish province and came to Monterey to assume his office. Eulalia was reluctant to venture into the barbarous north from her more comfortable home in Mexico but at last agreed to accompany her husband. As they traveled she was feted at every mission along the way, but at every stop her concern grew at the nakedness of the Indians. She began to give away pieces of her own wardrobe, and then of Don Pedro's. At Carmel he finally managed to stop her by mentioning that tailors and modistes were not to be had in this part of the world and that what they had would have to last a very long time. Meanwhile, the happy natives strutted proudly at the mouth of the Carmel river, dressed in sartorial splendor that would have impressed any court in the world.

There is no evidence that *our* 18th century satin and damask treasures ever belonged to Don Pedro or Dona Eulalia, although a book of early costumes has sketches of them wearing outfits exactly like ours. Moreover, the excellent condition of ours testifies that no Indian ever wore them. However, the mystery of their origin and why they are now in Monterey prompted more research. Someone suggested we see Mrs. Arthur Sinclair. She recognized them as clothes given to her by her friend, Mollie Bankes. They had been the wedding outfits of Mollie's great, great grandparents who were married in Paris in 1780. Fleeing the French Revolution they reached Ireland where their grandson, a Mr. Hewett became a wealthy linen mill owner. Mollie, his granddaughter, and her parents came to the United States when Molly was nine. She became part of Monterey's history in two connections. She was an officer in the Salvation Army, and her first assignment was to work with the Chinese people who lived in a tiny village near Pacific Grove. This led to her life as a missionary to China for the next 20 years and to final retirement in Monterey.

Not all of our Association's costumes lead to one story, let alone two, as did our 1780 treasures. Often there are no documents or points of reference. A case in point: one red velvet dress has a full skirt and two tops, one for daytime with a high neck and long tight sleeves. The other has a low neckline and short sleeves with bits of black Spanish lace still clinging to the fabric making it easy to imagine that this dress may have once belonged to Senorita Maria Bonifacio. A romantic 'though tragic, heroine of early days, she may or may not have worn the dress in connection with her ill-fated romance. All we do know is that she had her portrait painted wearing a red velvet dress, but as she was dying she ordered that the picture be cut from its frame and buried with her. So the story goes.

*To be continued in next issue . . .*



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