

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The Presidio Chapel

In the Academy Scrapbook for November 1950 there is a very interesting and important article relating the history of the Monterey Roman Catholic Parish property, from 1839 until 1891. The Scrapbook is published monthly by the Academy of Church History, Fresno, California.

In the article are brought together a number of documents only one of which has previously been in print. They deal with the present Monterey church rectory property and cemetery.

"The chapel of the Royal Presidio was blessed by Father Lasuen January 25th, 1795, and immediately thereafter he sang its first solemn mass. Paula Magdalena Ignacia Arguello the last child whom Father Lasuen confirmed at Carmel was the first baptized in this church, the one that to this day serves the needs of Monterey ... (Carmel baptism 2016 and confirmation 1803).

In November 12, 1840, Father Jose Marie de Jesus Gonzalez wrote from Mission San Jose to the Commander General Alta California, Sir Mariano G. Vallejo, asking:

"I beg Your Excellency, if you consider it proper and if there be no inconvenience, to donate the said chapel forever to the above mentioned community (Monterey), issuing at the same time a document that would insure the donation and (giving) the corresponding order to the Commander of the said port, or whoever might be in charge to deliver the said chapel to the Reverend Father Minister at Monterey, who will accept it in my name, together with an exact inventory of the furnishings and whatever (else) might belong to it; and I think my successors will see that it is not only kept up, by making the necessary repairs, but also by beautifying it as much as possible for the honor of God and the service and benefit of this community which will, in gratitude, have the happiest memory of Your Excellency for the benefit you give to today.

"May God keep Your Excellency many years."

In a marginal note General Vallejo wrote: "Give the order to the Commander of the Monterey Company and a transcript to the Reverend Father for his knowledge."

The editor's note reads: "The foregoing is a free but accurate translation by the Reverend Silvano Baquedano of a document in the handwriting of General Enrique Cerruti, agent for H.H. Bancroft." The title of the document "Ca pilla de Monterey" is in the hand of General Vallejo. The transcript is the property of R.R. Emparan, grandson of General Vallejo.

On February 14, 1845, there was granted, so the article states: "to the Very Reverend Actual Father Minister Fray Antonio Surares del Real, a lot beside and to the west of the church of this village, measuring fifty-two Mexican varas in front and thirty deep (so that he may be able) to build a parish house which will accommodate the minister or cura of this district, and holding it but right to make the concession free, I, the incumbent Judge, do decree, grant as requested, and sign this to property establish the fact." The document was signed by Mariano Escobar, with his rubrica.

The rest of the property, now owned by the church, was acquired in American times by gift and purchase from private persons.

The Monterey Catholic Cemetery was solemnly blessed on July 31, 1839. It was known as "Campo Santo of the Presidio." The burial plot was 60 varas by 60 varas, having been set up under the auspices of Senor Don Juan Bautista Alvarado and the immediate supervision of Senor Don Davis Spence, Justice of the Peace this year and the first to fill said office in the capitol Monterey. He received permission to mark off a preferential plot for his family in the location most pleasing to himself, and to clean it up to his satisfaction so that it may always be recognized by his successors or by whom it may be granted to and to record this, I sign on the said day in the said month and year, Fr. J'e M'a del R. Z's del Real." The above quotation is from the Carmel Mission Book of Burials.