

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

April 18, 1950

La Perouse Cypress

During the tenth anniversary celebration of the Pacific Grove Museum held December 3rd and 4th, 1909, a stone was placed at the foot of a tree naming it "The La Perouse Cypress," with the late Harry A. Greene acting as master of ceremonies. La Perouse was in command of the first scientific expedition sent out by any European power. He cast anchor in Monterey Bay 164 years ago, on September 14, 1786.

Jean Francois de Galaup de la Perouse adopted the name "La Perouse" from his family estate, the name now so widely honored by the scientific world. He was born near Albi, Languedoc, France, August 22nd, 1741, and joined the royal navy at a very early age. In the American war with England he distinguished himself on several occasions, and in 1785 he was chosen commander of the expedition sent out by the French government to make scientific exploration in remote parts of the globe. The expedition sailed from Brest in August 1785. After doubling Cape Horn, La Perouse explored the western coast of America as far north as 60 degrees off the coast of Alaska, opposite Mr. St. Elias where he landed on June 23, 1786. Here he met such severe storms that it was deemed best to turn southward, and 69 days later he landed at Monterey, where he was received by the Spanish officials and entertained at the Presidio which was then within the walls near the San Carlos church. He also visited Carmel Mission and became acquainted with its work.

During his brief stay, La Perouse and his staff of scientists made careful observations of the geographical, biological and other scientific facts concerning the region.

His journal was sent back to France, together with various collections, including seeds, dried plants and shells from Monterey Bay region. Then the expedition continued on to the Hawaiian Islands, Japan, the Philippines and many islands of the Pacific before reaching Australia. It would be impossible to estimate the great contributions of this expedition to geological and other sciences.

The last letter of the ill-fated commander was dated February 7, 1788 from Botany Bay, near Sidney. Sailing from this port, no more was heard from the expedition

until 1826, when it was learned by the English Captain Dillon, that the expedition had been wrecked in a storm on a coral reef off Vanikora, an island lying north of the New Hebrides and all on board were lost in 1788. In 1798 a few relics of his party were found there.

When the expedition sailed past the headlands of this peninsula the ancient cypress forest was one of the few objects to attract the attention of this group of scientists. The "Sand verbena" or *Abroria umbellata*, was the first plant from California to receive a scientific name, and it was first seen by members of the La Perouse expedition and specimens sent back to France from the Monterey beach.

On the date of the anniversary of the Pacific Grove Museum in 1909, Harry Greene gave the cypress tree which was planted in memory of the great scientist, La Perouse. The tree had to be cut down when the new building and the garage were built a number of years ago, and the plate had disappeared even before that time. A portrait of La Perouse was given by Mr. T.J. Richardson and Miss Mary McCord presented a drawing of the Sand verbena. An oak was also planted in the grounds, honoring Miss M.E.B. Norton, curator emeritus and botanist.

Officers of the museum in 1909 were Dr. Harold Heath, president; J.P. Pryor, vice president; C.S. Harris, financial secretary; E.E. Prusia, treasurer; Miss Laura Duncan, acting curator, Miss Jeanette Murray, corresponding secretary and librarian, and Miss Virginia Strong, recording secretary.

In addition to Dr. Heath and J.P. Pryor, other directors were F.G. Nagle, Prof. Josiah Keep, Dr. E.K. Abbott, Rev. J.H.N. Williams, D.D. and A.E. Bunker. Others prominent on the Peninsula in those years when the museum was young and taking an active interest in its development were Dr. W.V. Grimes, Mrs. H.B. Chase, Mrs. F.W. Ellis, Silas Mack, J.K. Oliver, Dr. E.K. Abbott, Mrs. J.A. Pell, Mrs. William Adam, Mrs. B.C. Winston and Mrs. A.E. Bunker.

Mervin Henshaw, curator of the museum in Pacific Grove, has returned from Santa Barbara where he attended a meeting of the Pacific Division of the American Malacological Union which met there April 7, 8, and 9. There were about 55 members present who were interested in shelled animals. An important paper was read at one of the sessions by Mr. Andrew Sorenson of Pacific Grove, a former high school teacher

who is a world authority on the over 1,000 shelled animals and who is a world authority on the subject.

Mr. Henshaw spent a day touring the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History and studying the displays there.