

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

June 1, 1950

Father Serra Honored With Fine Ceremonies in 1891

It was on June 3, 1891 that the statue to the memory of Padre Junipero Serra, the Franciscan friar, founder of the famous California Mission chain, was formally unveiled at Monterey. The event had been planned for that day because it was the anniversary of the landing of Don Gaspar de Portola and Father Serra on the shores of Monterey Bay.

That great event will again be celebrated by the History and Art Association at a Merienda in Memory Garden on Saturday and a theater party at the First Theatre on Friday evening.

In a newspaper of that day in 1891, there was printed the following description of the ceremonies which attended the unveiling:

"The pretty old town was elaborately decorated for the occasion. All along the principal streets pine and cypress boughs were interlaced and there was a goodly show of bunting. It was a great day for Monterey. People began to come to town from the surrounding country almost before dawn.

"The occasion was an interesting one to everybody, but to none so much as to the old Indian families that have lived in the vicinity almost since the time of Junipero himself. These people crowded the roads leading into Monterey. They came on foot, the women so muffled in shawls that only their great black eyes showed, they came on horseback, sometimes two on a single animal. Usually these two were a barefooted boy and an olive-skinned girl clinging behind her brother. They did not have saddles and in many cases not even as much as a bridle to hold onto.

"But the most picturesque of all were the family outfits, wagons containing everybody that could leave home from the wrinkled great-grandfather to the latest big-eyed baby.

"A great 'dead ox' wagon was generally the vehicle. Four horses or mules pulled it, and a tent-like structure sheltered the family from the warm sun, and from every rip and hole in this tent-like affair projected a head.

At Monterey and at Hotel Del Monte there was considerable commotion also over the event. A great many people – among them some of the pioneers from

San Francisco, San Jose and other California towns – had come down the night before and all were anxious to get to the scene early. So by 11 o'clock there was a crowd about the statue, which was hidden by a large American flag.

"The statue stands on a summit of the hill west of the inlet, where the old wooden cross marks the place where the first Mass was celebrated by the Carmelite Fathers in 1602. (The wooden cross fell into decay and in its place stands a granite cross enclosed in an iron fence, the gift of the late James A. Murray.)

"The knoll was soon crowded with people. The women, for the most part, sat around on the grass and enjoyed the glorious day. The men walked about, stopping now and then to look at the veiled status. About 11 o'clock the special train bringing the delegation from the Native Sons, the Young Men's Institute and the Pioneers, arrived.

"They were met at the depot by a procession headed by the Monterey Band. The fire companies of Watsonville and Monterey were there and made a pretty show with their new banners and red shirts. With the welcoming procession Very Reverend Angelo Casanova, V.F., pastor of the Royal Presidio Chapel of San Carolos, who was president of the day; Reverend Clementine Deymann, O.S.F., orator, and Judge Webb of Salinas, the Civic orator. The prettiest feature of the whole procession was the Watsonville Zouaves, composed of forty little girls in short red skirts and canvas leggings. Their elocutions were as gravely executed as if they had been a veteran guard.

"The procession formed at once on the arrival of the train and marched along the principal streets of the town. It was something after noon when the head of the parade reached the monument. The cowled friars and the pioneers mounted the platform. The Reverend President extended his arms silently and after a moment of absolute silence, he spoke: 'We are here to do honor to Father Junipero Serra. Mrs. Jane Stanford has presented us this monument and now it shall be seen.' Four baby hands pulled the flag aside. (The baby hands were those of Lady Maria Antonia Field and her brother, the late Stephen J. Field, great grandchildren of Esteban Munras, Spanish grandee of early Monterey).

"The banners dropped about the base of the statue and the figure of the hero priest glistened in the sun. The status represents the padre in the habit of a Franciscan

monk. The bow of a boat is shown and a great cross is in relief on the rough pedestal. The entire statue is of granite, the work of Peter Bisson Jr., of the firm of Bisson and Bisson of San Jose.”

To Mrs. Maria Antonio Thompson is due much of the credit for the information contained in this article and in the one which will follow tomorrow.