

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Acquiring Serra's Birthplace

For over one century the modest house in Petra, Mallorca, where the founder of California Missions was born had been neglected, to the point of nearly disappearing. In 1932 a few men of good will, faithful to the memory of the seraphic Fray Junipero Serra, led by Jaime Oliver town physician of Petra, devoted their energies and historical knowledge to search for the lost treasure and finally succeeded in locating it two blocks distant from the old convent where the Franciscan father had been ordained. They solicited the aid of the Palma Rotary Club, which, cheerfully accepted the idea and provided funds to acquire the property to be donated in the City and County of San Francisco, after restoring it to its original state.

Because the district assembly of Rotary has just met here, because Father Serra died at Carmel Mission on 28th this month, and because Willard Wheeler recently wrote an article for The Herald from Petra, I am sure further details of the restoration and presentation will be of interest.

It was decided in Petra to celebrate the solemn act of presentation on May 12, 1932, at Petra, in the presence of the civil, military and judicial authorities of the island, with the concurrence of several Rotary Clubs of Spain and of a delegate of the City and County of San Francisco. At 5 p.m. the Rotarians arrived in Petra. The town was decorated with myrtle, flags and greenery, according to a report of the ceremonies prepared by J.C. Cebrian.

The fronts of many buildings were beautifully adorned, some showing pictures and allegories of the famous Franciscan missionary. The visitors were received in the Town Hall, by the Governor, the General in Command, the President of the Diputacion, the Mayor of Palma, and three City Supervisors and other civil authorities of the Island of Mallorca. The procession made its way, preceded by bands of music, to the house of Fray Junipero Serra, situated in the Calle de Barracar Alta, No. 6.

The streets through which the visitors passed were literally crowded with people among whom stood a number of girls wearing the graceful costumes of eighteenth century Majorcan peasants.

On arrival at the Serra home, the President of the Palma Rotary Club took the keys as token of the property, at that moment transferred to the California city, and handed them over to Mr. Cebrian, who was the first to enter, according to his writings. The whole company then went to the courtyard where the act of presentation was completed.

After reading a letter from James Rolph Jr., then mayor of San Francisco, appointing Mr. Juan Cebrian to be his representative at the ceremony, the President of the Rotary Club of Palma announced that Mr. Cebrian, a man of Spanish birth, had been a resident of California for 60 years. He gave to Golden Gate Park (with Eusebio J. Molera), a monument of Cervantes with the figure of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, symbols of the Spanish race, and also gave gifts to various libraries in California of Spanish books. His family and descendants have long been associated with Northern California business and culture.

Subsequently, Mr. Cebrian and Mr. Pascual, President of the Palma Rotary, signed the document handing over the house, cheers being heard for Petra, California, Spain, and the International Rotary.

Mr. Cebrian spoke: "In the name of the City of San Francisco I have taken possession of this valued historic monument, with its entrance key; and I have made the donations of views of missions and books, which California has sent to form the commencement of the Serra Museum, which we hope will increase and acquire special importance of an international character."

In the evening, while a fete in the square was proceeding, an artistic coach, representing the famous Petra missionary surrounded by Indians that he civilized, was taken through the principal streets and received by the crowds with great enthusiasm.

Through the efforts of the Serra Birthplace Committee of the California Historical Society a collection of prints, photographs, materials and books showing Fray Junipero's work in California was gathered to form the nucleus of a permanent exhibit in the Serra Birthplace Museum in Petra, Mallorca. The expense of framing, boxing and shipping the collection was borne by the Society and a number of its members. On April 16, 1932, the prints and photographs, framed in California redwood, were exhibited to the members of the Society and their friends in Courvoisier's galleries in San

Francisco. More than 250 persons examined the collection during the day.

Included in the list of donors of materials, prints, books, photographs and money to defray the cost of preparing the shipment, were: the city Council of Carmel, Harry Downie, Monterey Chamber of Commerce and Monterey History and Art Association.