

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Lantern Festival

"Lanterns at Monterey" could very well be the title of Father Junipero Serra's description of the founding of Monterey and of the first Corpus Christi celebration in Alta California, as related in his letter to Galvez, dated July 2, 1770. This letter was written to the Visitador General, Don Joseph de Galvez, from the newly established Mission of San Carlos de Monterey, and came to light during the researches made by Douglas Watson and Thomas Workman Temple II, in 1932 and first recounted in the California Historical Quarterly.

The letters throw more light upon the first days of the settlement of Monterey Serra's opening words relating to the uniting of the land and sea forces, bear welcome news to the man who inspired the occupation of California and who, by order of His Majesty Don Carlos III, King of Spain, organized and dispatched the land and sea expedition to take possession of the "Famoso Puerto de Monterey."

The success of the "Santa Expedicion" in establishing a foothold at San Diego and Monterey, precarious though it may have been, did serve to ward off the threats of Russian invasion. Thus it was of grave importance to Galvez whose interest in it was paternal; and naturally so, for it was his original conception, and he was the moving force behind it. At the suggestion of Galvez, Serra had entered full heartedly into the plan. The reputations of these men were clearly involved. The happy culmination of the great plan as penned by Serra was therefore more than a report; it was a justification of their joint endeavors.

Part of the latter follows:

"Most Illustrious Senor Don Jose de Galvez:

"My Very Venerable and Dear Senor:

"I suppose by this time Your Illustrious Lordship has received the welcome and joyful news of the uniting of both of your expeditions by sea and land at this Famoso Puerto de Monterey on the thirty-first day of May, and of our having performed and solemnized on Sunday the third day of June the Feast of the Holy Ghost, and touching ceremony of the first Mass, blessing and erecting of the Most Holy Cross, and raising and planting of the standards of Our Catholic Monarch,

whom God prosper; also of our having taken formal possession of this Province...

"To me it seemed a difficult and almost impossible task, when three days before the ceremony I was struck with the thought which came on the heels of my desire; for we had not, nor did it seem possible that we could procure the wherewithal to carry it out. I, who still slept aboard El Principe, not having as yet a place of shelter ashore, for only the warehouse of the Presidio was being constructed, as ours was left for later, suddenly realized that we had very few candles, and there was such a great wind that together with the lack of shelter we might well be left without candles at the most solemn part of the ceremony. We could not avail ourselves of any other substitute for them except the lantern in the ship's cabin...

"A monstrance we had, but whatever else we lacked, if the angels did not bring it, at least we found what seemed like a gift from heaven. The men having opened a large box on board which appeared to be the medicines for which they were searching, found that it contained instead, shining new lanterns, of which no one had any knowledge. Rejoicing at this find and already well pleased, a sailor spoke up and said that he had seen a similar box below; and that if the first one had been packed with lanterns, the other might well be also. It was ordered brought up at once, and in effect it was found filled with them.

"This happened on the eve of the festivities. And although it was reported on land to have been an accidental discovery, there came at once this message, "Hands off those lanterns, they don't belong to the Mission!"

It was claimed that one box belonged to El Principe and the other to the San Carlos, wrote Father Serra.

However, this experience did not dishearten. Father Serra thought he might still avail himself of them as a loan. In short he claimed that they did not seem to belong to a ship, because they were made with sockets for poles on which to carry them, and everyone knows, so he wrote, that processions are not a part of a ship's routine. Don Juan Perez said that at San Blas he had discussed at length the matter of lanterns, on the occasion of his having asked that one of the two in his stateroom be repaired, if not with glass, at least with mica. The boxes of lanterns were not mentioned to him and he added he could only imagine that they had been

put on board at Cape San Lucas, having been mistaken for church ornaments.

Father Serra writes: "Of those lanterns which can be carried on high or on poles, there are six nice large ones, and three very fine hand lanterns. Two of the latter having wax candles were placed at each side of the monstrance; the other six on poles stuck in the ground were ranged about the side of the altar; and upon it we put the six large silver candlesticks from Loreto with another one to which we added several small ones.

"Don Juan Perez lent tallow candles for the large lanterns and for the candle holders set in poles. These all remained lit during the High Mass, Sermon and Procession, without the least breath of wind to disturb them. The men from the ship formed the temporary church under the roof of the half-completed warehouse by placing the flags of the various nations about, and forming a canopy of them, with such beauty that even I was inspired with devotion. The circle or square around which the procession was to march, was swept clean and adorned with green branches so as to form aisles. There was pealing of bells, thunder of cannon, and hymn of praise. Everything went off just as though we were being paid for it (as is wont to be said), for indeed 'One never carries one's victuals in a torn bag,' especially in matters pertaining to Divine Worship."