

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

August 25, 1950

A Local Pilgrimage

Twenty-four years ago, on Sunday, August 27, 1926, the first Serra Pilgrimage was held under the guidance of the late Ramon M. Mestres, pastor of San Carlos Borromeo de Monterey, and vicar-general of the Monterey-Fresno diocese. It is indeed to be pitied that the 28th anniversary of that religious ceremony should not be held this year. It was a beautiful and impressive experience to join the group of followers in the pilgrimage from Monterey to the Carmel Mission, stopping along the way at Stations of the Cross, and at last coming through the canyon facing the Mission and to enter the church for services, just as Father Serra and his followers had done more than a century and a half ago.

Over the rise of the Carmel hill, through pine woods fresh and pungent with dewy mists, down the last slope toward the sea, 125 pilgrims trudged from the Presidio gate to the Mission San Carlos del Rio Carmelo, those 24 years ago, there to honor the memory of Father Serra, according to reports written at that time.

The pilgrimage, together with the mass and roll call of missions that followed it, came as one of the concluding events of the Serra Pilgrimage Fiesta of Monterey Peninsula, and bringing to a close four days of music and dancing, a brilliant costume contest, a search for a buried treasure, a parade unrivaled anywhere, a pageant – drama, a display of cowboy skill of California and the dexterity of bull-fighters of Spain, and, once again, the Pilgrimage and roll call of the 21 missions of California.

The Pilgrimage started for Carmel shortly before 9 o'clock in the morning from the spot where Father Serra first set foot on the shores of Monterey Bay in 1770. From this point the Pilgrims wound over the hill, following the trail blazed 180 years ago by the Franciscan priest and his party.

In advance of the column a Spanish cavalier rode on horseback. It was the best touch of all, according to the reporter. His bright red costume was a vivid sight against the dull green background of the pine woods.

Next came the two acolytes carrying the same candles that Serra received from Spain. Between the two striding figures walked a third man, bearing a cross. The

three were followed by a group of vested choristers from the Watsonville orphanage. Then came the robed figure of Monsignor Mestres, clasped in his hands the little wooden cross, fastened with rawhide thongs, which in the distant past was carried from mission to mission by Serra himself. The last time I saw Father Mestres make the pilgrimage he was too ill to walk the entire distance and a horse was provided for part of the journey.

Along the line of march stops were made at the 14 Stations of the Cross. At the Serra Shrine in Carmel Woods, Father Mestres told the band of pilgrims the reason for his coming to California. While a student at the University of Barcelona, he said he first heard of the heroic Junipero Serra, and heard of him from the lips of a young student. At that time there was no mention of the presidente of the California Missions in the history books.

The account so inspired Father Mestres, he stated in the woods that morning that he accepted the first chance he had to come to the land where Father Serra lived and died.

As the half-mile long line of pilgrims reached its goal, the ancient bells in the belfry of Carmel Mission sounded. Mass was said by the successor of Serra from the same altar which Serra founded.

Serra was "a man of great learning, a man of great piety, a man of great love of God and a man of great love of humanity," Father Mestres said. "He was a hero," who, had he chosen, might have been great in a number of various pursuits. He might have been a great artist, a great scholar, a great soldier, for in his makeup lay the prerequisites of all three."

Mass concluded, as many as possible entered the chapel which contains the sarcophagus of Father Serra, the work of the late Joe Mora, and which was unveiled in 1924, at the first Serra Pilgrimage. There the roll call of missions was heard, each representative laying a handful of flowers on the feet of the status of Serra which reclines on the tomb.

The 11th Cavalry gave splendid cooperation to this fete, as they did to every fete during their long residence here at the Presidio of Monterey. "No more convincing argument in favor of the days of 'manana' could have been brought before the people than the bands of Spanish musician who went singing and strumming wherever there were crowds to hear. They played after

midnight on the streets, while couples swayed to their music. They played on the sidewalks early in the morning. And all day long they strolled along the streets of the town," wrote John B. Terry in his account of the event.

Louis Hill, who passed away a few years ago and whose Pebble Beach gardens are still a joy to see, generously provided for the costume contest and the Treasure Hunt.

Father Serra passed away at Carmel Mission on August 28th 1784, the 166th anniversary of which will be solemnized on Monday.