

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

December 12, 1951

Red Tape And Father Serra

In June of 1950 we wrote in the Peninsula Diary an account of the unveiling of a monument to the memory of Father Junipero Serra, the Franciscan friar who founded the California Mission chain. At that time we did not know that there existed at the Presidio of Monterey the original document which permitted Mrs. Jane Stanford to erect the memorial on the hill at the Presidio of Monterey, overlooking the actual landing place.

The document, accompanied by a photostatic form of Mrs. Stanford's request for permission to place the memorial is now in the possession of the Monterey Public Library.

On May 17, 1890, Mrs. Stanford wrote to the Honorable Renfield Proctor Secretary of War "My Dear Sir While in California last year, I made a trip to Monterey and my attention was called to a large white wooden cross, situated in an obscure spot. On questioning I learned that this cross was to mark the landing place of Father Junipero Serra who came to California to work among the Indians. During his lifetime he founded 12 different missions in California and was a successful worker for the Master. This cross marked the spot where the boat landed that brought him from the ship.

I conceived the idea of erecting something more enduring and more instructive to his memory. The spot is at the base of an eminence, where still stand the ruins of the old fort built at the time when General Fremont was stationed there. Only a little of the adobe wall still remains to mark the spot.

"I have now being made a large statue of the missionary representing him stepping from a small boat, an exact reproduction of that in which he landed. It will rest on a granite foundation depicting the land and water dashing against it. I really think when it is finished it will be a unique and beautiful monument.

"To carry out the idea of historical accuracy, I desire it should stand on the spot, which now are the ruins of the Fort, and at the foot of the eminence, the wooden cross will remain.

"The land belongs to the United States government. I now ask of you the necessary permission to commence

the foundations and granting the use of the site. With high esteem, I remain, respectfully, Jane L. Stanford."

The Stanford address was given on the letter as 1701 K. street, Washington, D.C.

It took, evidently, from May 17 until July 9, 1890, to decide in Washington if Monterey was to receive the honor of having a Serra Memorial on the hill overlooking Monterey Bay. Under the heading: Document 12, Headquarters of the Army, Washington, July 9, 1890, the following letter was written:

"Respectfully submitted to the Secretary of War, with the recommendation that permission be given to erect the monument to Father Junipero Serra on the site of the old Fort at Monterey, California, as requested by Mrs. Stanford.

"It can readily be so placed as not to interfere with any batteries which it may be found expedient to erect at that point at any future time. It will only be exposed to the remote chance of destruction in the improbable event of such batteries being subjected to the fire of an enemy."

The notification was signed by the Major General, Commanding Office – J.M. Schofield, War Department, July 15, 1890, stating the request of Mrs. Stanford is approved. The Honorable Renfield Proctor, Secretary of War, signed the document, which is dated as "Rec'd by H Q A July 17, 1890. The following day, July 18 the Headquarters of the Army at Washington, added this notation: By the Major General Commanding to the Adjutant General for the Necessary Communication Signed by the Assistant Adjutant General. Copy of this War Dept. letter of July 15, 1890 to the Chief of Engineers and in the . . . Divisions, Pacific, July 19, '90."

As Mrs. Stanford explains in her letter to the War Department the statue would not replace the wooden cross at the actual landing place on the west side of Pacific Street to the left of the Monterey Presidio gate, but at the top of the hill near the site of the old fort, where it now stands.

On June 3, 1891, all the necessary "red tape" had been gone through, permission was granted by those in charge and the status was formally unveiled. That day was the anniversary of the landing of Father Serra and Don Gaspar de Portola on the shores of Monterey Bay. That day is still celebrated by the Monterey History and Art Association at a Merienda in Memory Garden.