

Peninsula Diary May Hayes O'Donnell

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### **The Serra Family**

"It will, perhaps, be a matter of genuine interest to California readers, to learn something of the genealogy of the Serra family of Mallorca, one of whose members became the founder of the first famous California missions, and the apostle of our state" is the opening paragraph of a chapter in the book being currently written by Father Maynard Geiger, as stated in the recent issue of the Academy Scrapbook.

According to the author the Serras were, undoubtedly, among the conquerors of Mallorca when King Jaime I of Aragon conquered the island in 1229. In 1232 Ramon de Serra, a prominent official in Mallorca, was one of three leaders who urged the king to conquer the neighboring island of Minorca. Guollermo Serra, a native of Mallorca, and a contemporary of Columbus, was a bishop in Africa. Two Serras, Miguel and Antoni, were employed in the 16th century as stone masons on St. Peter's Church in Petra, where Father Junipero Serra was born and where the title to the house in which his birth took place is held in the name of the City of San Francisco. The deed to the house was given by the Rotary Club of Petra to San Francisco in 1932.

To list a few of the ancestors of Father Serra we will begin with Fray Rafael Serra, O.F.M, born in Inca, Mallorca in 1535, who became a provincial of his province. He died in 1610 in the "odor of sanctity." A Geronimo Serra was a professor at the Lullian University in Palma, in the 18th century. The Reverend Gabriel Serra was the pastor of Petra, in the middle of same century. In the Franciscan province of Mallorca alone, there were three other Serras' besides Junipero, contemporaries, a Francisco, Joseph and Juan. The author states that the names Serra occurs almost as often in the clergy lists of Mallorca as does the name Kelly in the United States.

In Mallorca today, the name is spelled Serra, as it is spelled in the United States today. In Junipero's time, however, it was more frequently spelled Sere. The final "e" was pronounced very short and sounded like a short "a". The entry of Junipero's baptism in the parish books spells his family name with the final "e" likewise the Lullian University records. At the Convento de San Francisco, in Palma, where Father Serra lived from 1731 until 1749, and his name is generally spelled Serra. In

his own letters, Junipero always spelled his family name as Serra. Father Geiger relates that on two occasions, however, once in Spain and once in Mexico, he wrote his name: Junipero Sierra.

Sierra, Serra, Serre are one and the same name. The first is Castillian, the second Catalonian, and the last old Mallorcan. It means a peaked and jagged mountain range, and by extension, a saw. Probably the original family were mountain people from Catalonia, hence the name Serra, state Father Geiger.

Junipero's grandparents on his father's side, were Miguel Serra and Juana Abraham; his maternal grandparents, Bartolomew Ferrer and Martina Forres. His father was Antonio Nadal (Noel) Serra, who had been baptized at St. Peter's parish church in Petra on Dec. 25, 1675 by Father Antoni Riutort. Junipero's mother, Margarita Rosa Ferrer, was born in Petra and baptized there on March 5, 1677 by Father Antoni Riera.

Serra's parents had been married, at the age of 31 and 29 respectively, at St. Peter's Church, Petra, on August 7, 1707. They were the parents of five children: Miguel, Juana Rosa Maria, both of whom died in infancy, the third was Miguel Joseph, who later took the name of Junipero, when he became a Franciscan, was born November 24, 1713 and baptized the same day. Two other children followed, Juana Maria, born January, 28, 1716, and Martina Maria, March 20, 1721, who died very young.

There is at the present day not a single Serra living in Petra. The last living relatives of the California missionary was the Reverend Benito Vadell Calvo, a diocesan, priest, who died as pastor of Santanyl, in 1839. It was this priest, a grandnephew of Junipero Serra, who bequeathed the painting of the Apostle of California to the city council of Petra, and which still hangs in the council chambers on this date.