

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

December 19, 1951

### **Don't Blame Me**

When Alexander Taylor finished the translation of Governor Figueroa's manifesto to the Mexican government in Monterey in 1855, his dedication was: "To the Californians of the present day, this memorial of the past is inscribed by the translator." Nowhere does Taylor's name appear, but it has been the opinion of the historians who have made a study of the early California documents that without a doubt this early Monterey druggist was the translator of the manifesto which is entitled "Missions of California."

Figueroa opens this discussion of the question of the secularization of the missions in California with the following explanation to the Mexican Republic: "The display which was made throughout the whole of the Republic, in regard to the attempt to colonize the territories of the Californias, and the result which followed the expedition taken by Senors Don Jose Maria Hajar and Don Jose Maria Padres for that purpose, oblige me to lay before the public a brief but exact notice of the facts as they occurred.. As the enterprise did not result as the directors intended, it is sought to attribute to me the blame of the miscarriage, when it is exclusively due to their want of calculation, bad combinations, and underhanded management."

Figueroa goes on to explain that when he arrived in Monterey as political chief of Upper California in January of 1833, the territory was in complete anarchy, from which it had not yet recovered when he made his report. The supreme government highly disapproved of the conduct of Lieutenant Colonel Don Jose Maria de Echandela, the governor in 1813 when the law was passed which projected the secularization of the missions; and Don Jose Maria Padres, the Adjutant Inspector, who in 1830, manifested a great interest in bettering conditions of the Indians.

Expressing their disapproval the Mexican government, commanded Figueroa, if he found the edict of secularization in operation, that he should order it suspended, replacing the missions in their ancient condition, but "not the less to report whether or not in a state to be secularized, in order the undertake it with due circumspection; and not the less to go on gradually dividing the lands of the missions among the neophytes,

in order insensibly to convert them into private property."

In the opinion of Governor Figueroa, as written in his manifesto, Padres sowed the germ of the Mexican revolution in California which appeared after he had been recalled to Mexico, and which owed its origin to the project of the secularizing of the missions.

In July of 1853 Figueroa received notification from the office of the First Secretary of State in Mexico, that Don Jose Maria Hajar was being sent from Mexico to relieve him from the duties of political chief of the territory. Figueroa had resigned because of serious ill health.

A series of letters follows as translated from the original manifesto. In one of these official letters Figueroa learns that Hajar will arrive in Monterey with a "multitude of families as colonists, at the expense of the government." Although neither the government nor Senor Hajar relied on the local authorities in this enterprise, it appeared to Figueroa prudent to make some preparation for their establishment. He made a trip "to the frontier, as far as Fort Ross, the establishment of the Russians nearest to us." He examined the country and selected the position which seemed to him best for planting a colony. He also "established on the same frontier a post for the protection of the same colony and returned to wait for it at the capitol (Monterey)."

On July 25th, 1834 Figueroa received an express from the government, coming overland from Mexico, with a supreme order that he was not to deliver the command to Senor Hajar and that he must continue in discharge of the government of Californians.

On the same day came the first communications from Senor Hajar from the Port of San Diego. On the 25th the corvette-of-war "Morelos" arrived at the port of Monterey, bringing Don Jose Maria Padres, several employees, and the rest of the colony.

(More Tomorrow)