

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

March 8, 1951

Father Kino Proves a Point

Gallant Father Kino! He it was who first tried to prove that California was not an island. At the age of 56 years, he had journeyed hundreds of miles alone, scrambled up the highest peaks and survived hardships which would destroy most of our young men today, to prove a geographical point.

The map he drew in 1698 was reproduced and without a credit line, in 1705, and then again in 1710. It aroused a storm of protest. In 1711 Herman Moll, cartographer of London, wrote indignantly that California was a course an island. "Why," he exclaims in print, "I have had in my office mariners who have sailed around it."

Perhaps no historical mistake so well illustrates the differences between our times and our facilities and those of the people of two and three centuries ago. Within twenty-four hours all the civilized world would be appraised of a new discovery.

The first physical proof came nearly fifty years after Father Kino's discovery. In 1746, Father Consag and his expedition sailed completely around the Gulf of California, thus proving beyond a doubt that there was no vermillion sea. Father Consag wrote a letter to his superior in Spain, making known his voyage and in 1747, Ferdinand VII of Spain issued a royal decree, "California no es isla." The letter from Consag and the royal decree are now in the great Bancroft Library at the University of California.

No one seems sure as to just how California received her name. It has been the subject of much debate. H.H. Bancroft the famous California historian, and a number of others seem to believe that the name comes from Kaliforno, which means either a high hill or native land.

There are others who insist that the early discoverers secured the name from the Indians who were accustomed to regain their health by baking in hot oven which they called "Calida Fornax", a sort of fore runner of our steam rooms. The heat of our deserts might have caused the odious comparison in the minds of the early explorers.

At any rate, the name seems to have originated with Cortes and his men and may have arisen from a

Romance of Chivalry, published in Spain in 1510 entitled, "Las Sergas de Esplandian, son of Amadis of Gaul." Written by Ordonez de Montalve, in this story the mythical hero was reported to have had a thrilling adventure on an island called "California."

The interesting part of this is that this legend preceded Cortes by a decade and it was doubtful this popular tale which inspired the name in the minds of the Spanish conquerors. This book, too, accounts for the legend of Queen Calafia and her beautiful but dangerous Amazons. Thus, both our name and our wildest fable, came from the fantasies of a Spanish dreamer.

To summarize briefly, from 1540 until approximately 1625 in old manuscript charts made for mariners and in a few excessively rare books, California was correctly mapped as a peninsula. Then, for about one hundred years, due to the stolen chart of Father Ascension, map makers drew it as an island. Father Kino's discovery proved that it was a peninsula to himself and a few others, but the definite physical proof did not reach the world until nearly 1750.

It was between the years 1769 and 1823 when 21 missions were established under the leadership of that remarkable man who is revered by all students of California history—Junipero Serra...and with those discoveries and this progress of civilization, our Island of Romance and Chivalry, then a bit of Mexico and last, a State in our Union.

"To Bancroft, to the Life of Father Kino, and to the Pomona College bulletin, we owe a debt of gratitude for much of the information contained in these articles.