

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

April 19, 1951

### **Just Around the Corner From Fremont Street**

It was in 1892 that Monsignor Ramon M. Mestres came to Monterey as the parish priest of San Carlos Borromeo de Monterey. He later became vicar general of the Monterey Fresno diocese. Father Mestres passed away August 5, 1930, leaving much that still attests to his devotion to the two churches under his care and to the historical heritage which has been left to the residents of the Monterey Peninsula.

When the chalk rock wall was constructed around the east side of the church which is known as the Royal Presidio Chapel. It was a happy thought of some one to place the small, simple shrine just around the corner from busy Fremont street. Its beauty and simplicity is a lasting memory for all who view it. There are always flowers there some in vases, some just placed by loving hands in cans, but we have yet to see anyone placing them there. The act is accomplished with such humility and love – no credit can be bestowed.

Harry Downie, who has been on the Peninsula for many years and who has been the moving spirit behind the restoration work at San Antonio, San Juan, Monterey and Carmel missions has told us that originally a 30 inch high bronze crucifix had been erected by Ralph Stackpole San Francisco sculptor for the shrine. It was never placed in the niche. The late Louis Hill, a resident of Pebble Beach and former owner of the Vasquez adobe in Monterey gave the first little carved wooden figure of "Our Lady" for the shrine. It was left untouched there for several years but gradually became mutilated by vandals and at last was taken into storage within the chapel.

Folks missed the little ancient looking figure within the niche and voiced their sorrow at its removal, so Harry Downie was commissioned to carve a new statue of "Our Lady." He copied the old one, with such exactness that her worshippers were pleased and thankful.

The original little wooden figure now sits in another shrine placed on the outside wall of the Carmel Mission and in her crown a bird returns each year to build a nest – we saw the evidence of building proceedings last week. "Our Lady" had been restored by Harry Downie who also carved in stone the two Coat of Arms which

flank the shrine on either side – those of the Franciscan and the Dominican orders.

In the baptistry of the Carmel Mission church is the original baptismal font restored to its original setting at the time the Mission was built. It is carved from [?] stone and divided into two sections, one for the baptismal water and the other with an outlet to allow the water to run back into the earth after the baptism.

The upper portion of this font was found by Mr. Downie several years ago beneath a deposit of rock and dirt on the cemetery side of the church. The base had been taken to Santa Cruz but was gladly returned and now the two sections are fitted perfectly together and are being used for the religious service once again.

The huge bronze Holy Water font at the entrance to the church is a perfect example of the work of an artisan of 1823 for that date and the name of Father Vicente de Sarria first prefect of California to whom the font was sent by order of Ferdinand IV of Spain.

The Stations of the Cross in the Carmel Mission came from either San Antonio or Soledad, according to Mr. Downie, Father Mestres believed they were originally in Soledad but Harry Downie read an inventory made in 1948, which noted that the possessions of San Antonio Mission when that church was abandoned had been stored in the sacristy at Soledad. Since Soledad also later became a ruin, it would be difficult to prove to which church the Stations of the Cross now in use at Carmel belonged.

This brief article reviewing a visit to Carmel Mission would not be complete without paying tributes to the Reverend Father Michael O'Connell under whose good graces and cooperation the restoration of the Mission has gone steadily forward. A great deal of the building has been financed through the generosity of the tourists and visitors who come to the Peninsula some especially to pay a visit to the grave of Father Junipero Serra who lies buried before the High Altar. The public, through their gifts have also made possible the returning of a great many of the original possessions of Father Serra and the Mission, now on display in the museum.