

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

April 24, 1951

On the Original Camino Real

Nature lovers who are looking at this season of the year for the best places to see wild flowers should make the delightful trip to San Antonio Mission near Jolon. There are veritable carpets of lupin, poppies, yellow daisies, Indian paint brush, larkspur and many other varieties of spring flowers in bloom over a wide range of country, thickly studded with large and ancient oaks. The silence of the country, the freshness of the air and the perfume of the flowers, all combine to make one feel at peace with the world.

We left Monterey early on Thursday morning in company with Mrs. William Kneass, the curator of the Stevenson House, and Victor Mossop, an excellent guide with a fund of information about the early history of the country through which we planned to travel.

The River road, to the right of the Salinas River bridge, was the route we chose. Very soon after leaving the main highway one can still see traces of the old Hill Town crossing, for the tracks in the road which led to the crossing, are still to be seen if the motorist does not rush by.

Then Las Palmas ranch, the David Spence ranch, both to our right. On the latter property is the remains of an old adobe and nearby is the site of another adobe where Anastacio Garcia killed Under-sheriff Joaquin de la Torre and two citizen volunteers, Charles Layton and Jim Beckwith, when they went there from Monterey to arrest him for the murder of Lewis F. Belcher, the "Big Eagle of Monterey."

We were now on the original Camino Real which had been traveled in the early days by De Anza and other explorers and the Mission Fathers. Mr. Mossop pointed out the Guadalupe ranch to the right, which was later the home of Spence and then the Arguello family. The huge holdings of Juan Malarin, which had been granted to him in the early 1830s, adjoins that of Jose Maria Soberanes, granted to him in 1841. Soberanes later lost the 8,794 acres to Estrada.

We paused briefly at the Somavia School to look upon the camping site of the De Anza expedition. The spot has been identified many times in past years by the descendants of the men who made the trek.

The Lugo Rancho and then the Soberanes Rancho have preserved the adobe homes on each. The Soberanes grant was originally part of the ex-Mission Soledad property, and contained 113,000 acres. The Lugo Rancho was known in 1939 as the Paraje de Sanchez (Pasture of Sanchez). The Felicino Soberanes adobe, very near to the road as we traveled south, was pointed out by Mr. Mossop as the birthplace of Mrs. David Jacks. A bit further on and to the left was the Rancho Los Coches, 8,794 acres in 1841 when it was granted to Josefa Soberanes and confirmed in 1855 to Maria J. Soberanes.

Adjoining the Los Coches is the Arroyo Seco Rancho, which contained 16,523 acres when it was granted to Joaquin de la Torre in 1840. Later it was sold to Pedro Zabala who built an adobe residence on it.

The historic trail now led us out to the main highway where the first spot to be pointed out by our guide was Thompson gulch, noted as the setting for an early day stagecoach robbery. It was the route of Vasquez, the bandit, who crossed the river at this point to go on to his hideout at the Pinnacles.

Just beyond the State Park Commission's rock marker for San Antonio Mission we turned to the right. We had left the fertile Salinas Valley and its hundreds of irrigated farms with long straight rows of lettuce and other vegetables and masses of waving grain, for a hilly country where cattle roamed.

We were soon passing the San Hernabe Rancho, which had been granted to Jesus Molina and where the first adobe building in that part of the country had been built. David Leese was once the ranch manager, and it was there, we were told that his daughter, Grace Ten Eyke of Pacific Grove, was born. The Tom Doud ranch is immediately across the road. In 1885 this ranch also part of the San Bernabe, was owned by Francisco Garcia. His daughter married Henry Cocks, to whom the grant was confirmed in 1859. It was later sold to Juan B. Cooper and Cooper sold to Doud.

(More Tomorrow)