

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

April 25, 1951

### **Set Like a Jewel**

To travel the El Camino Real in a fast car is one thing but to travel that historic route with the intriguing purpose of discovering its history and the history of the land and the people who owned that land in the early days of California, is another. We had that fascinating experience last week.

In yesterday's Diary we reviewed the trip from Monterey to the turn off the highway on the way to San Antonio Mission and Jolon. After passing the San Bernabe rancho, we were still on the old Camino Real. We paused at the Toothache Stage Station on the right. Mrs. Alfred G. Perry, who with Mr. Perry recently celebrated her golden wedding anniversary in New Monterey, spent her girlhood in an old adobe home still standing by the roadside. Her name was Bravo and her mother was a Garcia, Mr. Mossop related.

The Plasquett place was followed by the Cock's adobe and a stage station where a little old wooden store building is still in evidence. This place was later sold to Jim Lowe. We passed the Avila ranch where we noted the white headstones in the tiny cemetery on the hill.

We turned off the main road to follow for a few miles the old trail of the mission fathers up Coches Canyon. It was over this trail that the Indians carried the body of Father Sarria to his final resting place before the altar of San Antonio after his death at Mission Soledad of want and hunger in 1835.

Other priests interred there are Father Buenaventura Sitjar, who was present at the founding; Padre Francisco Pujol who came to California in 1762 and died at the mission on March 1, 1801; Father Doroteo Abris, pastor of San Antonio from 1853 to 1882, died Feb. 5, 1882; Padre Juan Bautista Sancho served the mission 26 years and died Feb. 11, 1830.

Several miles up Coches Canyon we came upon a charming square adobe house, completely surrounded by an open porch over which very old grape vines grow, their huge trunks winding up the pillars which supported the overhanging roof. It is now the headquarters of a state forest ranger, and the housewife permitted us to see the very large sala, or living room, where in the old days the ranchers gathered from miles around to dance the nights away.

Returning to the main road, the Mission San Antonio de Padua de los Robles soon burst into view as we passed the huge William Randolph Hearst Milpitas ranch house, and we got our first view of all the gorgeous wild flowers which carpet the valley.

It was on July 14, 1771, that Mission San Antonio was founded. But when the river dried up and irrigation had failed, the faithful Father Sitjar changed to another site, on the banks of the arroyo half a league farther up the Los Robles Valley. The approximate location of the first church and dwelling was pointed out to us by our guide as we rode away from the beautiful mission as it appears today after restoration.

It is interesting to note that in 1805 San Antonio de Padua had a population of 1,296 and now, 146 years later, there are 33 inhabitants – all brothers of the Franciscan Order. It is set like a jewel at the head of a beautiful and unspoiled valley. No city has grown up there as around it hovers the peace and beauty of ancient days. It was the third of the missions to be established by Father Junipero Serra, O.F.M.

After confiscation and sale, the mission was returned to the church by President Lincoln in 1862, but because of its isolation it had crumbled fast. The shell of the church remained, and in the early 1900s a new roof was provided and a few years later a fund of \$50,000 was given by the Hearst Mission Restoration Fund. The cloisters were rebuilt by the Franciscans Fathers. It is now used as a training school for candidates to the Franciscan Brotherhood of the Province of Santa Barbara. Harry Downie of Carmel was in charge of the restoration work and the decorations within the church as he has been at both Carmel and San Juan missions. Father Gregory is the priest in charge.

(More Tomorrow)