

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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On the King's Highway

The 30,000 members and friends of the Native Daughters of the Golden West are planning a restoration of Mission Soledad. Today Soledad is the only mission in the chain of twenty-one missions which is completely unrestored. Soledad, situated 30 miles south of Monterey, not far from the town of Soledad, presents a sad appearance indeed.

As a measure of service and devotion the Native Daughters of the Golden West have pledged themselves to underwrite \$30,000 for the restoration of this historic and holy landmark. Construction, it has been promised, will be authentic and portray in its simple austerity the true mission spirit and beauty.

To achieve this purpose, a resolution was adopted at the 1950 Grand Parlor session requesting that one dollar per member voluntary contribution be made – with the balance of the required funds to be solicited through public subscription. Through their combined efforts the Native Daughters of the Golden West have accumulated over one-third of their goal, \$10,350.00 as of May 15, 1952 and additional pledges have been promised. Thirty parlors in the state have already contributed 100 percent to the restoration fund.

Interested and experienced persons in restoration work have been counselled by the committee and their advice has been to start partial restoration of the Chapel before beginning the entire program. It is anticipated that the Native Daughters will be able to break ground for the restoration after the first 1952 fall rains.

One of the primary interests and foundation stones of the Native Daughters of the Golden West is the restoration and preservation of outstanding historical landmarks of California. Among the greatest, in the opinion of the members of the Grand Parlor of Native Daughters, are the missions which served as the first outposts of Christianity and civilization along the coast.

The first California mission, established at San Diego in 1769 by Father Junipero Serra, is known as the Mother mission. San Diego de Alcalá was the beginning of the chain of missions, 21 in all, established by the Franciscan Fathers. San Francisco Solano at Sonoma was the last, founded in 1823. Spaced a day's journey apart,

they became the stop-over for the weary traveler, where comfort, food and shelter were freely offered. Eventually, through constant travel between the missions, this road became the recognized highway of official travel and was named El Camino Real, "The Kings Highway."

Each mission had its herd of cattle, its fields and produce gardens. The Indians were instructed in religion and taught by the padres the various arts and crafts of those days; thus they learned weaving, masonry, how to build irrigation systems, the trades of carpenters and blacksmiths. The missions eventually became self-sustaining though they did receive clothing, furniture, implements and tools from New Spain in exchange for their surplus meal, wine, oil, hemp, hides and tallow.

Mission Nuestra de la Soledad (named "Our Lady of Solitude") was the thirteenth in the chain of missions, founded by Father Fermin de Lasuen, October 9th, 1791. While not a large and pretentious structure, it served as an important link and contributed greatly to the Salinas Valley area until the Secularization Act of 1834.

The early years of its existence were difficult, but gradually the faithful labors of the Fathers surmounted the many handicaps until Soledad became quite prosperous. History tells us of the devoted service of such outstanding priests as Fathers Diego, Garcia, Jose Espi, Florencio Ibanez and Vinsente Francisco de Sarria.

Several important personages are buried at Soledad. Governor Arrillaga, the first Spanish Governor of California, passed away at Soledad in July 1814, and was buried in the center of the original church. Father Ibanez followed his friend in death four years later, November 1818, and was buried in the church beneath the sanctuary next to the altar steps. It is planned in the restoration that suitable markers should be erected over these graves.

Soledad Mission buildings have disappeared through the years and only some of the foundations now remain where once stood an important mission in a fertile valley selected under the administration of Father Lasuen.