

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The Voice of the Bells

Claude T. Faw of Carmel has sent us a July copy of "The Highway Magazine" published in Middletown, O., by the Armco Drainage and Metal Products, Inc., in which the editors have featured California and the West.

The two page feature in the center of the magazine was written by Mr. Faw under the title "The Mission Bells" and illustrated with six handsome black and white photographs of historic spots in California. Another article deals with "Roads, Past and Present" by Deane and David Heller, in which the authors tell of the principal old Spanish trails developed between Mexico City and what is now the United States whose beginnings date back to 1519.

The illustrations accompanying "The Mission Bells" are two of the El Camino Real Bells—one marking Mission San Gabriel Archangel and the other in Carmel giving the distance to Mission San Carlos Borromeo as one mile and to San Carlos de Monterey, four miles. Mission San Diego de Alcalá, Mission San Juan Capistrano and Mission San Carlos Borromeo are pictured as other scenic structures. The sixth photograph is of today's El Camino Real, the old Spanish highway in California, as it parallels U.S. Highway 101, linking the state's 21 missions.

Mr. Faw wrote: "Between 1769 and 1823, Spanish Padres established the chain of missions, over a 700-mile route from San Diego to Sonoma. In time the road, El Camino Real, became lost, but in the early days of the 20th century several California organizations spearheaded by Mrs. Armithee S.C. Forbes set out to mark the old highway with Mission Bell guide posts.

"The first of these bells was installed by Mrs. Forbes in the Los Angeles area. Today, about 150 of the bells are still in existence. The California Mission Trails Association and the Automobile Clubs of California are now carrying on a program to restore and maintain the markers."

Doing a bit of research on our own concerning the Mission Bells, we find that probably even the very earliest of the missionaries, beginning in 1697, brought with them bells from across the sea. The voice of these bells must have been a powerful aid to the Mission

Fathers in gaining the attention and interest of the Indians.

Eleven of the Missions had distinct bell towers. This does not include the unique tower at Pala, which was only an asistencia church. The Mission at Santa Cruz, which is now only a memory, had a tower and nine bells, which cost \$3,900. The largest bell was at San Fernando. Five bells were at Santa Inez. San Gabriel has four of the original six bells. There are two very old bells at Santa Barbara. In many of the Missions these interesting old bells may be seen, and their voices still heard after nearly 200 years of service.

The Mission Bells of Santa Ysabel in the back country of San Diego County, are apparently the most ancient of all the bells in California. There was never a Mission at Santa Ysabel. Probably nothing more than an asistencia ever existed there, and a brush "ramada" was apparently the closest approach to a church structure. The great bells hang in the open on a rough cross-beam as they have done for more than a century.

One of them was unquestionably brought from the Jesuit Mission of Loreto in Lower California. It bears the inscription of "N.S. de Loreto, 1723." This undoubtedly is the abbreviation for "Nuestra Senora de Loreto" or "Our Lady of Loreto." The bell was cast almost 40 years before the first Franciscan entered California, and was undoubtedly used by the Jesuits when they controlled the Missions of Lower California, which were established about 100 years before Alta California was invaded by the Franciscans. The bell of Santa Ysabel now is more than two centuries old.

This little chapel and the bells of Santa Ysabel are on the east side of the road between Santa Ysabel and Warner's Hot Springs, about a mile from the former place and about 200 yards from the road.