

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **The Royal Highway**

El Camino Real or the Royal Road was the first highway to enter Tucson, Arizona, for the men who came to California from Mexico many years ago. This road also led out of Alamos, in the state of Sonora and its route was pointed out to us on our recent visit there. Over this the Spaniards traveled many tedious miles from Vera Cruz to Mexico City, then westward to Guadalajara, Mazatlan, Culucan, Magdalena and finally Tucson, and on to California.

During our recent motor trip out of Mexico by way of Nogales, we visited Tubac once more. It was at this presidio established in 1752, that Captain Juan Bautista de Anza was sent in 1761. Four years later he met a young Franciscan priest, Padre Francisco Tomas Garces, who was traveling the Royal Road to San Xavier del Bac Mission, and that meeting brought about the extension of El Camino Real to San Francisco, an adventure which they shared. On January 8, 1774, permission was granted by the Viceroy in Mexico City to de Anza and Padre Garces to search out a land route to the Pacific ocean, and the long hard trip began.

Father Kino is probably one of the most revered of all Arizona's historic personages. It was Padre Eusebio Francisco Kino who had the vision to develop the first of the future state's livestock and agricultural program, to build missions and to chart the unknown lands. A monument in his memory was placed in Tucson's City Hall Park a number of years ago. He died in the little town of Magdalena in Mexico on March 15, 1711, where he went to dedicate a new chapel to his patron saint.

One of the most beautiful missions in existence today we think, in either California or Mexico, is San Xavier del Bac near Tucson on the Papago Indian reservation. It was founded by Padre Kino and consecrated in 1797. The Spaniards and Mexicans who worshipped there through the centuries had their own poetic name for it: "La Paloma Blanca a del Desierta" (The White Dove of the Desert).

Another must in travels from Tucson to Mexico is a stop at Tumacacori National Monument, 18 miles north of Nogales on Highway 89. It was established to preserve the ruins of Mission San Jose de Tumacacori, one of the

chain of missions established by the Jesuit missionary, Padre Kino. He first visited this Indian village in 1691. After the Jesuits were expelled, the Franciscans took over and it is believed that the construction of the present church was begun in 1800.

By 1850 reports describe the mission as being abandoned. The National Park Service has now arrested the progress of wind and weather in the destruction of the mission and visitors are now able to see the mission almost as it was before being abandoned. There is also a museum building where the visitor may receive a good background in local history and ways of mission life. The diorama exhibits are exceptionally good.

We cannot leave Tucson without mention of a bit of modern history – an educational project in natural history, the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum. It is the only one of its kind west of the Mississippi River. Its exhibits in botany, zoology, geology and anthropology were opened in September of 1952. It is dramatically located in the Tucson mountains, where you may see palo verde and mesquite trees, cacti, and, looking closely, tiny desert plants and wheeling, whistling birds.

The museum is as natural as though there were no buildings but just wild open country. There are a group of cages where there is a collection of living desert animals, including "George Mountain Lion" whose byline in the Arizona Daily Star reads like this: "Research Associate in Human Behavior at the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum."

There is also a Small Animal Room where creatures ranging from centipedes, scorpions and similar desert dwellers to highly interesting rodents, lizards and snakes extant. We once saw a mother snake and six newborn babies there.

The museum's physical plant was provided by the Board of Supervisors and the Park and Recreation Committee of Pima County. The National Park Service erected the building in 1937 at a cost of \$350,000, and turned it over to the county. It is supported entirely by private contributions and memberships. Its creation was made possible by capital grants of over \$100,000 from the Charles Lathrop Pack Foundation and the American Nature Association of Washington, D.C.

The most popular attraction in this desert museum is George Mountain Lion, probably the only animal columnist in existence. His feature article has been carried in the Tucson Star for a couple of years and is

one of its most looked for special features. The ghost writer for George certainly understands animals, and human beings also, for his comments and interviews with the tourists are very clever and amusing.