

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Soledad Mission

The mound of ruins which remains of Mission de la Nuestra Senora de Soledad soon will rise again to a portion of its former glory through the efforts of the Native Daughters of the Golden West. Groundbreaking ceremonies for the restoration of the chapel are to take place on April 25 at 1 o'clock in the afternoon.

Appropriately named for Our Lady of Solitude, the mission is the only existing unrestored California mission. The statewide organization of more than 18,000 California-born women pledged to preserve and restore historical landmarks, especially the missions.

For a number of years Mrs. Raymond M. Giannini of San Francisco, past grand president of the order, has served as chairman for the Mission Soledad restoration fund. Last year the convention held in Santa Cruz voted to augment the funds raised by the parlors throughout the state with surplus monies of the state organization. Mrs. Clyde Dyke of Pacific Grove, the president in 1953, visited 210 parlors during her term of office, telling the membership of the restoration plans, and thus adding greatly to the \$30,000 the grand parlor has to spend on the chapel at the mission, which will be the first project.

Soledad is the 13th of California's famed mission chain of 21. It was founded by the then president of the missions of Alta California; Father Fermin de Lasuen, on October 9, 1791. Although not a pretentious establishment, it served as an important link and contributed greatly toward the development of the Salinas Valley area until enforcement of the Mexican secularization act in 1834. The ruins are situated 30 miles south of Monterey, not far from the town of Soledad. The graves of Gov. Jose de Arrillaga and Padre Florencio Ibanez are located within the walls of the chapel. The Native Daughters plan to erect suitable markers commemorating the burials.

Arrillaga was born in Spain. He was governor at Monterey of Alta California in 1806. He died at Soledad at the age of 64 years in 1814. Bancroft reports in his history of California that Arrillaga "was a model governor so far as the performance of routine duties was concerned, of most excellent private character, and an efficient and honest officer."

Authenticity will be followed in the restoration as far as possible, with Harry Downie of Carmel, curator of the Catholic diocese of Monterey and Fresno, in charge.

Grand President, Miss Doris M. Gerrish of Sacramento, will officiate in the groundbreaking ceremonies. Monsignor Michael Sullivan, vicar general of the diocese of Monterey and Fresno, will bless the site and the rebuilding project.

"The historic missions of California form one of her greatest assets, for it was through them and their Franciscan founders that the first seed of Christianity was planted in the state," asserts the Most Rev. A. J. Willinger C.S.S.R.D.D. of the Monterey-Fresno diocese.

Bishop Willinger made the above statement while being interviewed recently regarding plans for restoration of Soledad Mission by the Native Daughters. Since coming to the diocese Bishop Willinger has been credited with the authorized restoration work at Mission San Antonia de Padua, San Miguel, San Luis Obispo and Carmel. He plans to direct his attention to San Juan Bautista upon completion of the Soledad project.

Bishop Willinger, a native of Baltimore and a member of the Congregation of the Holy Redeemer, was educated at St. Mary's college, in Pennsylvania, and Mt. St. Alphonsus House of Studies, Esopus, N. Y. He was ordained in 1911 and became a missionary in the United States and then went to Puerto Rico where he remained until 1929.

During his service in Puerto Rico, he became interested in the missions of the Spanish-Americans and made a study of Spanish architecture. "The missions in the tropics vary from those of California in that they were constructed of stone and mortar in contrast to the adobe walls of the California missions," the bishop remarked.