

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Mission Founder

Exactly 100 years before gold hypnotized and drew Americans westward, a Franciscan monk left his toy-sized Spanish village on the Island of Mallorca to teach Christianity in Mexico and finally in California. The man, Padre Junipero Serra; the date, April 13, 1749; and the result, 21 missions on or near U.S. Highway stretching from San Diego to Sonoma. Petra, Father Serra's birthplace is almost in the center of Mallorca, about 30 miles from Palma, the capital of the Island.

We have had a great pleasure within recent days to spend some delightful hours with Mrs. George Seitz, who, with her late husband, Cmdr. Seitz, has had many friends on the Peninsula. Recently Mrs. Seitz has been the house guest of Admiral and Mrs. R. Kelley Turner in Monterey, following several months spent in Mallorca. She is now in route to Honolulu to stay until after the Christmas holidays and then will return to Spain by way of a trip around the world. Her present ambition is to rent a villa at Petra and remain there for at least six months enjoying the scenery and the company of the delightful people who live there.

Mrs. Seitz describes Mallorca as being full of interest and says that she has not yet exhausted the lovely spots to go to in off moments between fiesta hours, and social life. She told us again about the occasion of the laying of the cornerstone for the museum near Father Serra's birthplace, about the plans of the residents of Petra to build a hostel there just for California tourists who come to visit the home of the founder of our chain of missions, about the celebration on Lincoln's birthday and of the beauty of the great Cathedral there.

Much of the pleasure of Mrs. Seitz's visit at Petra was due to the interest and enthusiasm of her friend, Mrs. Diana Moore Bowden, a native of San Francisco, who was a visitor to Monterey in April of 1949. She resides in "Spindrif-Portals Nous," her home on the coast of the Island of Mallorca.

There the Bowden family have resided since 1931, and there Mrs. Bowden takes an active part in all the community work of Petra. When she visited California and the Peninsula she described herself as "an unofficial courier along El Camino Real—the spiritual King's Highway between here and Mallorca," while here she

had a showing of mementos of Father Junipero Serra, pictures of Petra and the handwork of the women of the village, first in Carmel and then in Colton Hall in Monterey.

Mrs. Seitz described the Serra family home, one of many along the narrow clean street of Petra, as having the appearance of a poor peasant's house. Within is the cradle said to have held the sleeping Junipero Serra as a baby, the bed in which he was born, and the harness of his donkey. The house is thought to have been built about 700 years ago. There is a plaque on the outside near the doorway on which is the following inscription: "Birthplace of Father Junipero Serra given to the City of San Francisco by the Rotary Club of Mallorca in 1932." Mrs. Seitz reports with regret that the residents of Petra cannot understand why the people of San Francisco and California do not take more interest in the preservation of this shrine of which they are so proud. Any small financial donation or memento from the missions would be so appreciated and treasured.

An interesting feature of the Cathedral, always pointed out to the tourist, especially those from California, is the fact that all the California Missions were named for the saints who had been previously honored in the 21 chapels of the huge church attend by Padre Serra as a boy in Petra. For this, if for no other reason, the people of Petra feel that their community has a very special interest in California. They also are sure that their ancestors must have had some financial interest in Padre Serra's education and in his journey to the new world. If a visitor from California, make himself known in Petra he is doubly welcome and is thereafter during his stay considered a special guest.

Mrs. Seitz was surprised when she was invited to a celebration of Lincoln's birthday in this foreign land last February 12th. The reason for paying this honor to a President of the United States, she learned, was the fact that it was Lincoln who signed the document, during his term of office, which restored to the church the missions of California, after it had lost them during the Mexican rule.

Padre Serra's home is a shrine and his statue dominates the one public square in the center of town, we learned from Mrs. Seitz. The statue is a copy of that which California chose to place in National Statuary Hall in our Capital at Washington, D.C., along with David Starr King, educator.

Over the years Americans have paid their respects to this town, the birthplace of the man who started the California missions, but Father Junipero Serra never returned. He died August 28, 1784, age 70. At Carmel Mission in California.