

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Petra

We have found the life of Junipero Serra and the history of his birthplace, Petra, on the Island of Mallorca, an even more fascinating subject, if possible, from an historical as well as a human interest angle, after hearing so many entertaining comments and personal experiences there from Mrs. George Seitz, a returned traveler from this village. She has fallen so in love with Petra's charms that she is planning to return there next summer to spend several months enjoying its scenery and the delightful hospitality of the folks who live there. Mrs. Seitz has been the house guest of her friends of many years, Adm. and Mrs. R. Kelley Turner, in Monterey during the past few weeks.

Friar Junipero might have guided the growth of olive trees, as did his father and his father's father, but instead he guided the religion of the Indians in the New World. He was educated by the Franciscan monks after which he entered the order when he was 15 years old. Later, at 36 years of age, he started his pilgrimage, first landing at Vera Cruz. From there, it is said, he walked to Mexico City, which remained his base for many years. He finally reached his goal, California, a leader of a missionary expedition, establishing the first of this work in 1769 at San Diego de Alcalá.

Mrs. Seitz tells us that Friar Junipero's Petra is almost in the center of Mallorca, about 30 miles from Palma, the capital of the island. It takes about three hours to make the trip, but our informant chose to stay in Petra. The route leads one over mud roads lined with olive trees and cactus. No wonder there are so many olive trees and cactus in California.

In Petra the people have their own olive trees. They are never cut down: instead, walls and roads are built around them. These trees are the core of their lives. They use olive oil for every dish and the olive pits are their fuel for the winter. Some of them are 2,000 years old. Many times new trees have been grafted on old trunks. The groves are terraced with three trees in a row. During February and March the blossoms of the almond trees, another main industry in Petra, are a beautiful sight upon the hillsides.

Mrs. Seitz believes that the children of Petra are the most beautiful she has ever seen. They are entrancing

in their neatness and with their smiles. Half the people of the town wear black. If a woman's husband dies, she is in black forever. A black arm band marks a similar tragedy on a man's suit. It is little wonder she thinks that such a saintly man as Friar Junipero Serra came from Petra.

Amusing to Mrs. Seitz was the fact that Palma had no fire brigade and we suspect that Petra enjoyed the same condition, although we neglected to ask. The reason for this unusual conditions was the fact that all the buildings are of stone, the floors are beautifully polished marble, some pink, others white, and that there is very little wood used beneath the tile roofs. There is electricity in a few places but these wires are all exposed against inflammable materials and so the necessity for fire fighters and fire fighting is expendable. Also because the people on the island are so very clean the fire hazard is reduced. The streets are swept clean frequently, steps and doorways are spotless and the door knobs shine with newly polished luster every day.

There is an organization in Mallorca in which we in California should take an interest. It is called "Amigos de Father Junipero Serra, Petra, Mallorca, Espana." The membership fee is \$2.50 a year, all of which goes to the Serra memorial. In one corner of the membership card of Mrs. Seitz is the doorway of Father Serra's birthplace with the door wide open, and the picture on the other upper corner is a reprint of a drawing of the entrance and towers of Carmel Mission where Father Serra died and is buried. The first is dated 1713 and the latter 1784. Membership could be sent through Mrs. Diana Moore Bowden, Spindrift, Mallorca, Islas Baleares, Spain.

At a meeting of the Palma Rotary Club on December 31, 1931, President Eusebio Pascual Casasnovas outlined the Rotary project, which was to be the International Service project, that the Rotary Club of Mallorca should buy Father Serra's birthplace and present it to the far-distant City of San Francisco, "to erect an imperishable bridge of friendship between Spain and California". The conference of Rotary Clubs was to meet in May. But energetic Rotarians, undaunted by the shortness of time, planned to raise the money for the restoration of the home and complete the project by the day of the conference.

The secretary of the club announced that the offer was to be made through the California Historical Society and continued: "Although this purchase represents a

sacrifice to the club, it has been joyfully undertaken for that distant land of California.”