

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Mission Restoration

The mound of ruins which has remained these many years at Mission de la Nuestra Senora de Soledad is rising again through the efforts of the Native Daughters of the Golden West. It is true that only the chapel has been restored, but it is hoped that the restoration work may continue until the church proper and the walls surrounding it again assume their ancient beauty and use.

The Grand Parlor of the Native Daughters has mailed announcements to members and interested friends to attend a re-dedicatory ceremony of Mission Nuestra Senora de la Soledad on Oct. 9, 1955, at Soledad, for the 164th anniversary of the founding by Fray Fermin Francisco de Lasuen and the 1955 restoration directed by Harry Downie for the Native Daughters and Bishop Aloysius J. Willinger. The dedication of the chapel will take place at 12 noon, when the Rt. Rev. Monsignor James Culleton will present his Excellency the Bishop of the Monterey-Fresno Diocese. Solemn High Mass will be celebrated at 12:15 with the Very Rev. David Temple, O.F.M., Provincial, of the Franciscan Province of Santa Barbara. officiating. The program and plaque dedication will take place at 1:15 p.m.

The ground - breaking ceremonies for this restoration took place on April 25 of this year, with the Native Daughters in attendance. Appropriately named Our Lady of Solitude, this mission was the only unrestored California Mission. The statewide organization of more than 18,000 women pledged to restore and preserve historical landmarks, especially the missions, undertook the giant task to restore Soledad. They succeeded in collecting \$30,000 to start the project.

Soledad is the 13th of California's famed mission chain of 21. It was founded by the president of the missions of Alta California, Father Fermin de Lasuen, on Oct. 9, 1791. 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.

Within the walls of the chapel are the graves of Governor Jose de Arrillaga and Padre Folorencio Ibanez.

It is planned to erect suitable markers commemorating the burials of these men who played such a great part in the making of California history.

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 writes 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."

The religious significance of the founding of Mission Soledad on Oct 9, 1791, is related in the diary kept by the founding father, Padre Fermin de Lausen. ". . . On this day, I with the assistance of the Rev. Fathers and Preachers Apostolic Father Buenaventura Sitjar, missionary of the Mission of San Antonio de Padua, and Father Diego Garcia destined for this mission, blessed water and the site and the great Cross which we planted and venerated. This place, then, is constituted a mission dedicated to the honor of the Most Sorrowful Mystery of Solitude of the Most Holy Mary, Our Lady . . ."

A little more than two months later, a baptism was administered "in the church of the mission," on Dec. 5, 1791. During the first year and a half the front wing of the quadrangle was constructed, and 115 entries had been made in the baptismal book. Soledad had an Indian population of 688 in 1805.

Secularization followed almost immediately after Father Sarria made his 1832 report and the saintly priest died on May 24, 1835, an ill and broken man. Grieving Indians bore his body to San Antonio de Padua for burial before the altar in that mission.

Although mission lands were confiscated and sold, to private citizens under Mexican rule, the American government returned them to the Catholic Church in 1858, under the presidency of Abraham Lincoln.