

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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San Antonio Mission

To travel El Camino Real in a fast car is one thing, but to travel the historic route with the intriguing purpose of discovering the history of the land and the people who owned the land in the early days of California, is another. We have had that fascinating experience a number of times.

In the last Peninsula Diary, we reviewed the trip from Monterey to the turnoff of the highway on the way to San Antonio Mission and Jolon. After passing the San Bernabe Rancho, we were still on the El Camino Real. We paused at the Toothacher stage station on the right. The Plasquett place was followed by the Cock's adobe and a stage station where a little old wooden store building is still in evidence. This place was later sold to Jim Lowe, so Victor Mossop had informed us. We passed the Avala ranch where we noted the white headstones in the tiny cemetery on the hill.

We turned off the main road to follow for a few miles the old trail of the mission fathers up Coches canyon. It was over this trail that the Indians carried the body of Father Sarria to his final resting place before the altar of San Antonio after his death at Mission Soledad, of want and hunger in 1835.

Other priests interred there are Father Buenaventura Sitjar, who was present at the founding; Padre Francisco Pujol who came to California in 1762 and died at the mission on March 1, 1801; Father Dorotio Ambris, pastor of San Antonio from 1853 to 1882, died Feb. 5, 1882; Padre Juan Bautista Sancho served the mission 26 years and died Feb. 11, 1830.

Several miles up Coches canyon we came upon a charming square adobe house, completely surrounded by an open porch over which very old grape vines grew, their huge trunks winding up the pillars which supported the overhanging roof. At the time of our first trip a few years ago, this old adobe was the headquarters of a state forest ranger, and the housewife took us inside to show us the very large sala, or living room, where in the old days the ranchers gathered from miles around to dance the nights away.

Returning to the main road, the Mission San Antonio de Padua de los Robles soon burst into view as we passed

the huge William Randolph Hearst ranch house, now in the possession of the U.S. Army.

It was on July 14, 1771, that Mission San Antonio was founded. But when the river dried up and irrigation had failed, the faithful Father Sitjar changed to another site, on the banks of the arroyo half a league farther up the Los Robles Valley. The approximate location of the first church and dwelling can be pointed out as the motorist leaves the beautiful, restored mission.

It is interesting to note that in 1805 San Antonio de Padua had a population of 1,298 and now 152 years later, there are only a few inhabitants- all brothers of the Franciscan order. It is set like a jewel at the head of a beautiful and unspoiled valley. No city has grown up there, as around it hovers the peace and beauty of ancient days. It was the third of the missions to be established by Father Junipero Serra, O. F. M.

After confiscation and sale, the mission was returned to the church by President Lincoln in 1862, but because of its isolation it had crumbled fast. The shell of the church remained, and in the early 1900s a new roof was provided and a few years later a fund of \$50,000 was given by the Hearst Mission Restoration Fund. The cloisters were rebuilt by the Franciscan Fathers. Harry Downie of Carmel was in charge of the restoration work and the decorations within the church as he has also been for Carmel and San Juan missions.