

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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More Mission Gardens

Obtaining a dependable supply of water or just plain moisture was the most difficult problem of the early padres who came to California to build the chain of missions along the coast. Floods destroyed sowings along the riverbanks, while plants a little further away from the streams died during the long, rainless summer. But gradually water was distributed to fields and gardens and piped to patio fountains by irrigation systems, some of which included many miles of ditches, flumes, and aqueducts across deep ravines.

After Father Font's suffering with scurvy, which was cured by the vegetables at Mission San Carlos, the Indians changed their attitude and began to eat the fresh fruit and vegetables. Before this demonstration they had refused to eat Spanish food believing this to be the cause of the sickness.

San Luis Rey must have been a most impressive establishment for the French traveler Auguste Duhaut-Cilly described it in 1827 as a glittering white palace surrounded by gardens and orchards. A wide stairway reminded him of Versailles, and he was delighted by two beautiful fountains with quaint gargoyle heads that gushed water into pools in which the Indian women washed their clothes.

Father Altamira, who, in 1823, founded Mission San Francisco Salano (Sonoma), "the last bead of Padre Serra's rosary," used willow slips to enclose the garden and the extensive orchard and vineyard. He named this region the Valley of the Moon - a title later used by Jack London - because at the winter solstice the moon appeared and disappeared seven times behind the hill before finally floating clear in the sky.

At mission San Antonio de Padua may be seen a few of the original pear trees, as well as olives transplanted from the old orchard about 1845 by Father Doroteo Ambris, a Mexican-Indian priest, who also created a delightful old-fashioned garden and a collection of Indian herbs.

According to Father Ambris' notes, parsley roots were at that time a specific cure for bladder trouble, "balsamillo" (California fuchsia) for spleen, cascara for rheumatism or poisoning. Rosemary leaves boiled in red wines were supposed to cure consumption, epilepsy,

and weak eyes, A felon (inflammation of a finger or toe) could be cured or healed by the application of poison-oakleaves, and insanity relieved by a poultice of boiled laurel leaves, olive oil, and spices applied to the head. Sage and salvia were useful to prevent insomnia, squash seed for tapeworm, "yerba de pasmo" for wounds, including tetanus, "yerba de la golondrina" for coughs, dropsy, jaundice, and snake bite.

Mission Dolores in San Francisco (San Francisco de Asis) once had beautiful gardens, but they disappeared. In 1916 the Rev. John W. Sullivan attempted to restore them. He planted rhododendrons, azaleas, dahlias, and Castilian roses in the old cemetery which adjoins the mission church. In this "Campo Santo" were buried 5,000 Indians, numerous Spanish soldiers and officials, including Gov. Arguello, and even Casey and Cora, hanged by Vigilantes.

The east garden at Santa Barbara mission contains 400 varieties of cacti and succulents. This garden also contains the remains of important people of Spanish days, as well as some 4,000 Indian neophytes. Numerous distinguished plants include an olive tree set out in 1919 by King Albert of Belgium and a weeping willow brought as a slip from Lafayette's garden.

During the 1930's, the Civilian Conservation Corps recreated the mission settlement of La Purisima Concepcion, repairing fountains and a cistern, reproducing the garden, and planting. Now most of the missions and the gardens have been restored, Soledad is the last, but the Native Daughters of the Golden West Have been working on this and have already rebuilt the small chapel.

The Monterey History and art Assn. has just received as a gift a book entitled "Wild Gardens of Old California," by Charles Francis Saunders, published in 1927 by Wallace Herberd in Santa Barbara. It is a presentation of Padre Crespi and how he went on a journey; of David Douglas, the Scot, and how he introduced the wildflowers of old California into England and "seeds of hope for the dim and distant future." The late Edward Borein made the etchings to illustrate the book and Ralph Hoffmann wrote the foreword. The book had once been presented to Monseigneur Mestres, pastor of the Royal Presidio Chapel in Monterey, in 1929.