

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

March 22, 1957

### **Soledad Mission**

Today we wish to pay tribute, most deserved, to Harry Downe and to the Native Daughters of the Golden West for the work they have accomplished in the restoration of Mission Nuestra Senora de la Soledad. Soledad Mission near the town of Soledad on the old River road.

For years on end natives and tourists – historians and the curious have visited the ruins in this beautiful setting near the great highway, but sufficiently off the beaten path to preserve the tranquility of former days when the mission was in use and the inhabitants of the peaceful valley attended services there.

Today there is a reproduction of the original mission church built on the foundation of the last church, accomplished through the generosity and interest of the grand parlor of the Native Daughters of the Golden West, who were responsible for the (?) and Harry Downe the restorer who supervised the actual restoration of the small (?) of the mission buildings built in 1783.

Sixteen years ago, only a partial ruin remained of what was once a thriving mission. Although restoration seemed a hopeless task, the impossible has been accomplished through untiring efforts.

On Oct. 9, 1955, we attended the rededication of the rebuilt chapel with the appropriate ceremonies. This structure completed the first phase of the project to rebuild the pioneer missionary establishment as it stood a century ago. Each NDGW parlor in California has a committee responsible for the promotion of this historical restoration.

The most impressive object in the chapel is the statue of Our Lady, carved by Harry Downe, and dressed in the same manner as the original. The garments were made from a dress belonging to Mr. Downe's mother. The handsome black mantilla was given by Miss Aria Antonia Field, a member of the restoration committee. Mr. Downe also made the altar and carved the decorations on it.

Six silver candlesticks, typical of the period, were obtained in Mexico and are the gift of Sallie R. Thaler, grand secretary of the Native Daughters, in memory of her mother, Sarah Rutherford. A chalice, (?), and enameled tumbler were presented on Oct. 14, 1956,

when State Highway Plaque No. 233 was dedicated, marking the site of the mission. These articles of solid silver were made in Mexico and are the gift of Thumbler Bros. silversmiths of San Francisco. The tumbler, which was used as a font for holy water in the blessing of the plaque, was given by Dr. Elliott A. P. Evans, director of the University of California at Santa Barbara and dates back to the mission. Dr. Evans formerly taught in Sunset School, Carmel.

The Mission of Our Lady of Soledad had its inception on Oct. (?), 1789, when Viceroy Revillagigedo directed that it be established in the valley called Soledad.

In 1832, Alfred Robinson visited Soledad Mission and declared "It was near sundown when we arrived and dismounted at the door of La Soledad, the gloomiest bleakest and most abject looking spot in all California. Although the Mission presents a very unpromising aspect to the traveler from the gloominess of its exterior, its interior presents a striking contrast. A pious old man controls its concerns and pours out to his guests with free hospitality the abundance thereof. His charities, his goodness, the meekness of character are proverbial and to have known the old Padre Sarria was a happiness indeed."

A bequest of \$2,000 was listed in the will of the late Mary Louise Arehart for the building fund of Junipero Parlor, Monterey. Mrs. Arehart was the recording secretary of the order at the time of her death on Dec. (?), 1956. She was a past president of the order and had held office as deputy and supervising district deputy grand president.