

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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187th Anniversary

Much interest is being shown in the 187th anniversary celebration of the founding of Monterey, a simple ceremony commemorating not merely the beginning of the Spanish regime here, but actually the paving of the way for the later American occupation.

It was a significant matter in American history that it was Spain and not England or Russia that occupied California. Spain's occupation of this territory came at the close of the era of discovery and conquest of a weakening power. It was only a few decades later that Mexico threw off the Spanish yoke and brought California under the weak Mexican control, the entire Pacific Southwest then being left practically defenseless in the path of destiny of any of the more virile powers.

Had it been Russia, no one knows what the story would have been. Had it been England, in all probability this great territory would be a dominion today. The way for the American occupation was made simpler and easier when the weakening Spanish empire was extended over California, soon to yield to the almost powerless and loosely knit Mexican control. And yet this occupation preceded the Declaration of Independence by six years.

Another historical fact is that if Sebastian Vizcaino, a Spanish merchant, had succeeded in establishing the colony he expected to at Monterey when he visited here in Nov. 1602, Monterey would antedate Jamestown, Va., by one year. He wanted to fish for pearls as he ventured along the California coast. It was he who named the River El Carmelo in honor of the Carmelite friars who had accompanied the expedition. He also named Monterey Bay in honor of the viceroy, the Count de Monte Rey. The expedition spent 18 days in Monterey.

This territory is the only part of America that has yielded once to revolution, again to conquest, a new flag being substituted each time, old Monterey the capital in each instance.

Spanish conquistadors and priests settled and pacified this coast, Mexican politicians superseded them, American pioneers, and empire builders of the period of "manifest destiny" brought the control of the federal government to the Pacific southwest.

It has been said that it is a tale of different races and different civilizations. If Consul Larkin had been an Englishman and if President Polk had not felt the pressure of "manifest destiny", that tale might be told in a different way to school children in California today, and California might now be the fairest of British dominions rather than the proudest of American states. Think of that, when you see the flag floating over the Customs House.

Although we celebrate the anniversary of Monterey's June 3 birthday on June 1st, in honor of 187 years ago when Father Serra and Portola sailed into Monterey Bay, celebrated Mass and declared the country a possession of Spain, it was Don Juan Cabrillo, a Portuguese navigator who first saw Monterey on June 27th, 1542. He set sail from Natividad on the west coast of Spain and arrived in Monterey on Nov. 17, 1542. He named it "Bay of Pines." He also, named the Sierra Nevada mountains, the Santa Cruz island chain and the Santa Lucia mountains. Cabrillo died on San Miguel Island from the effects of an infected broken arm. He lies buried there but his grave has never been found.