

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Portola's Signature**

The Friends of the Bancroft Library have purchased a collection of Portola documents from 1769-1770, relating to the expedition which founded missions at San Diego and Monterey and the discovery of San Francisco Bay, at a cost of \$5,000.

Dr. George Hammond, director of the Bancroft Library at the University of California, tells the story of the acquisition in a letter to the Friends. Dr. Carina E. Castaneda of the University of Texas was the first person to inform Dr. Hammond of the existence of the valuable documents.

Dr. Hammond immediately recognized their importance as background material for the story of California. Dr. Castaneda briefly described them as dealing with Portola's first trip up the coast to California from San Diego, where a mission and presidio had been founded. The chief purpose of the expedition was to locate the famous Bay of Monterey.

Checking the collection at the Bancroft, not a single original Portola signature existed in all the Bancroft manuscripts, and furthermore, according to Charles E. Chapman's Catalog of California materials in Spain, there are none in the Archives of the Indies.

Fortunately, Dr. Hammond says, several exist in the Mexican National Archives. This means that records bearing Portola's signature are very scarce, possibly because he was in California for only one year, that he was a soldier, not a scribe, and that he obviously wrote very few reports or letters during that time. Those he did send went to his superiors in Mexico, where they were filed in the archives as routine accounts of a frontier colonizing expedition. Copies of some of these documents remained in Portola's possession, however, and it is these which the Friends have acquired and given to the Bancroft Library.

Dr. Hammond explains that these Portola papers fall into two groups: one relates to Portola's service as governor of the Californias; the second treats of his career as governor of the town of Pueblo, in Mexico, the important midway station between Mexico City and Vera Cruz.

Among these new papers is a copy of the act of taking possession of the land, in the name of God and King;

and Portola's explanation of what he would do to find the Bay of Monterey by land, and what Don Vicente Vila, who would go by sea, should do to cooperate with him. Vila, it was planned, would ascend the coast as far as the Bay of San Francisco (Drake's Bay), and was to find out, if he could, whether that harbor was deep enough for ships. Then he was to run down the coast in search of the Bay of Monterey, which was thought to be situated either north or south of the Point of Pines. Meanwhile, Portola was to make a similar exploration by land, and, if neither party could find Monterey, Vila was instructed to occupy the Port of San Francisco (Drake's Bay) or any other port he might discover that would be suitable for a settlement. Both men were to do what was best for the service of God and King.

The documents report on further activities of the expedition. By the first of October Portola's party, which left San Diego on July 14th, had reached the Point of Pines, but failed to recognize that they were on Monterey Bay, the object of their search. As a consequence, Portola called a council of his officers and the priests and it was agreed to rest six days to give the sick men and worn-out animals a chance to recover, and then resume the exploration. During this interval, Capt. Rivera y Moneada explored the coast southward, but came back and disappointedly reported that the Carmel River, instead of being a real river, was only a small arroyo; what should have been large lakes were merely inlet lagoons; and what should have been a great port was only a cove or inlet.

Clearly, therefore, this was not the bay that Vizcaino had lauded in 1602, or that Cabrera Bueno, a famous navigator in the Manila galleon service, had described in 1734. The logical conclusion was that Monterey Bay must be farther north. All agreed that they must push forward to find the elusive port, and so they set out northward on Oct. 7th. They were actually leaving Monterey Bay behind them.