

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

June 21, 1957

### **Portola's Trek**

Today we will continue with the description of the contents of the original Portola documents which have recently been acquired by the Friends of the Bancroft Library and presented to the library at the University of California in Berkeley.

Dr. George Hammond, the library's director, has sent a review of the report of Portola as contained in the documents bearing his signature, to the Friends of Bancroft Library, which we are privileged to repeat here for the information of those interested in the study of Californiana.

Portola reported that the party left the Point of Pines without recognizing the Bay of Monterey on Oct. 7. After a month they reached the present site of San Francisco. They at once recognized the Farallones, from Cabrera Bueno's description, as well as Point Reyes and San Francisco Bay (then called Drake's Bay). During these explorations they stumbled on the great estuary that we now know as San Francisco Bay. and tried to get around it to find the celebrated Port of Monterey. From San Francisco they went south around the southern arm of the bay. where a small party of soldiers was sent up the east shore to explore, being given four days for this mission, while the rest of the party went into camp to await their discoveries.

In the discussion following the return of the soldiers, all agreed that they should go back to the Point of Pines to search, for Monterey Bay, for it must surely be near there. If help did not come by sea the expedition would be forced to return to San Diego to save the men from starvation.

For two weeks Portola and his men plodded back from San Francisco Bay toward the Point of Pines, arriving there on Nov. 26. Here Capt. Rivera was again sent out to explore the elusive Monterey Bay at the point where the Santa Lucia Mountains come down to the sea. Again, he failed to recognize it. When this was considered in the next junta, Dec. 7 and 8, and the supply boats had still not been sighted, all agreed that they should return to San Diego, there to report to the Viceroy.

And so it was done, the start being made on Dec. 10, 1769. The first night they went only to "a swamp near

the Point of Pines and the bay, which, it was thought, might have been the Port of Monterey." But though their words had the correct substance, the men were not able to fit the port to the landscape or to the descriptions of earlier explorers. Discouraged and almost without food they made their way back to San Diego, which they reached on Jan 24, 1770.

The situation at San Diego was no better. Many of the soldiers and sailors had died of scurvy, and the entire colony was nearly without food. The relief ship long expected had not come and no one could be sure when it would. To bring partial relief, Capt. Rivera was sent to Baja California with 28 of the men, both to relieve the colony from the responsibility of feeding so many and to take reports of the expedition to the Viceroy.

Portola and the others remained in San Diego, in obedience to orders. When, on March 23. the San Antonio did come with supplies, Portola went back to found on June 3. 1770, the Mission and Presidio of Monterey. The identity of which they finally reconciled in their minds with the estuary at the Point of Pines. Portola's mission in California had now been completed and, since he had been ordered to return when this was fulfilled, he set sail. He died in his old home in Spain in 1786.

Dr. Hammond writes of the documents: "Once in a while a document may burst like a skyrocket on the historical scene, bringing some entirely new fact or event to light or revolutionizing the interpretation of some chapter in history. Such occurrences are extremely rare, however, and most good history must be written from the painstaking accumulation of just such particulars and corroborative evidence, such factual and valuable details as these new Portola documents provide. Not like a rocket, but like the steady glow of a lantern, they illuminate the difficult problems faced by Portola and his officers and cast additional light on the career of California's founder and first governor.