

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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August in Our History

It was on Aug. 16, 1775 that a Spanish royal decree established the capital of California at Monterey, with Felipe de Neve as governor.

Other August dates which have played an important part in California history are, first of all, the death of Father Junipero Serra, father-president of the missions of California, who died at Mission San Carlos Borromeo and there he lies buried in front of the altar.

Father Serra was born at Petra, on the island of Mallorca, Spain, Nov 24, 1713. He took the Franciscan habit at Palma, Sept. 14, 1730, and made his profession Sept. 15, 1731 when he took the name "Junipero" after a noted companion of St. Francis. He taught in the convent of Palma and Lucullan University, and on March 30, 1749, was assigned to the college of San Fernando in Mexico. He served in the Sierra Gorda missions from 1750 to 1759 then was assigned to the Apache missions on the Rio San Saba in Texas.

With the expulsion of the Jesuits from Mexico in 1767, the Franciscans were given jurisdiction over their former missions in Baja California. Serra becoming president on July 14, 1767. There he labored for two years, leaving in 1769 to found the missions in Alta California. He personally established six of these - San Diego de Alcalá, San Carlos Borromeo, San Antonio de Padua, San Luis Obispo de Tolosa, San Juan Capistrano, and San Buenaventura. "His laborious and exemplary life," his friend and biographer, Fr. Francisco Palou remarks, "is nothing but a beautiful field decked with every class of flowers of excellent virtues." (Phil Townsend Hanna's "California. Through Four Centuries.")

On the 9th day of August 1834, Gov. Jose Figueroa issued his famous "Reglamento Provisional para la Secularizacion de las Misiones de la Alta California," the first major printing undertaken by California's first printer, Agustin Zamorano, at Monterey, providing for the conversion of missions into pueblos: friars to be relieved of temporal duties; each head of a family to be given a lot 100 to 400 varas square; "ejedos", to be assigned for pueblos; half of livestock, chattels, seeds, etc., to be distributed pro rata; government to be in the

hands of "ayuntamientos"; mission libraries and church goods to remain in charge of the priests.

The first exploring expedition sent to California by the United States anchored in San Francisco Bay on Aug. 14, 1841. It comprised six vessels and six hundred men, including many scientists, and commanded by Lt. Charles Wilkes. Wilkes' reports are contained in his "Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition during Years 1838-1842." The reports were mainly scientific in character.

It was a great day in Monterey on Aug. 15, 1846. when The Californian made its appearance on the streets of the town. It was the first newspaper to be published in California, owned by Robert Semple and Walter Colton, and published weekly.

On Aug. 31, 1850. the Society of California Pioneers, with membership restricted to residents of, and arrivals in, California prior to Jan. 1, 1849, was organized in San Francisco. A second class of members, comprising United States citizens arriving between Jan. 1, 1849, and Jan. 1, 1850, later were admitted to the society, which was reorganized July 6, 1853. James Lick gave the lot of McAllister street to San Francisco for a building to house the society.