

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

October 21, 1958

Story of a Birthplace

Among my files on Padre Junipero Serra is a very important letter from the California Historical Society in San Francisco. It was written by Douglas S. Watson, chairman, Serra Birthplace Committee, and told this story :

"The birthday of Fray Junipero Serra at Petra on the Island of Mallorca, the founder of Mission San Carlos, on June 3, 1770, near which your present city has grown, will be officially presented to the City of San Francisco early in May of this year, the ceremony of presentation to take place at Palma, Mallorca.

"This gift of the Rotary Club of Mallorca was accepted March 14, 1932, by the mayor and board of supervisors of San Francisco; the California Historical Society, at the request of the donor, representing it in the arrangement just concluded.

"We have been asked to gather a collection of items which will show the results of Padre Serra's efforts and the evidences of his life work here in California. When completed this will be arranged as a permanent exhibit and will be installed in the Serra birthplace at Petra, Mallorca.

"The California Historical Society will give as a nucleus for this collection a series of unusual views of the California Missions made in 1850 and photographs made in 1900 and 1904 all modestly framed, and a number of books relating to Serra.

"Can you arrange to address items: a present-day view of Monterey, one of Carmel, and one of the restored mission? They should be simply framed, titled, and show the donor's name. The California Historical Society will greatly appreciate your cooperation in thus honoring the founder of California and hopes you will be able to join us in this undertaking."

The letter came to Col. Roger S. Fitch, the organizer and first president of the Monterey History and Art Assn. In a follow up letter, Douglas Watson, the committee chairman, thanks Colonel Fitch and the Monterey History and Art Assn. for the contributions sent and expresses appreciation to Mayor Heron of Carmel for the picture of Carmel-by-the-Sea. Of course, Harry Downie comes into the note for the most praise of all, although the old mission had just started on its program of restoration, which is about completed at this date.

Exactly 100 years before gold was discovered in California, a Franciscan monk left his Spanish village on the Island of Mallorca to teach Christianity in Mexico and finally California.

The man, Padre Junipero Serra; the date April 13, 1749, and the result, 21 missions on or near U.S. Highway 101 stretching from San Diego to Sonoma.

On August 28, 1784 Father Junipero Serra died at Carmel Mission. He had written in his notes: "On the solemn feast of Pentecost, June 3, 1770, this mission of San Carlos de Monterey was founded to the joy of the sea, and land expeditions. In a short time, the rejoicing was shared by the entire kingdom and eagerly celebrated in Mexico and Spain."

"The House in Mallorca;", by Ernest Ingold was published in 1950 for Paul Elder & Co. and printed by Taylor and Taylor, in a limited edition of 950 copies, of which we received No. 28. That copy is now in the California Room at the Monterey Library, presented in memory of William M. O'Donnell, a past president of the Monterey Peninsula Rotary Club.

Mr. Ingold writes: "A brief intriguing note came to me near the end of my term as president of the Rotary Club of San Francisco, (1948-49) from John Davidson, curator of the Junipero Serra Museum at San Diego.

"He asked: 'Does your organization hold title to the birthplace of Father Serra on the Island of Mallorca?'

"At the time there was shown at the San Francisco Public Library a collection of arts and crafts of Mallorca. Down one wall were seven photographs of an interesting old building with a card reading: 'Birthplace of Junipero Serra given by the Rotary Club of Mallorca to the City of San Francisco in 1932.' And below was the beribboned deed."

During the same time that this special exhibit was in California, it was shown in Colton Hall in Monterey and at the Carmel Art Gallery in Carmel. Mrs. Dina Moore Bowden, long time resident of Mallorca, although a native Californian, and member of the well-known Moore family of Oakland and Berkeley, was the sponsor of the exhibits during her visit to her native state.

From this starting point the story developed for Mr. Ingold and he wrote: "In its broadest sense it is a Rotary story, yet its implications reach far beyond the bounds of any single group."