

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Accepting Serra's House

With the acceptance of the gift of Father Serra's birth place in Petra on the Island of Mallorca by the City of San Francisco from the Rotary Club Of Palma, the capital of the Island, the California Historical Society, acting as the representative of the Mallorca club, instituted an appeal for funds. They modestly suggested a dollar each from those who would help. A call was also issued for suitable historical relics.

From Carmel came items of historical value. There was a silver reliquary with bits of Serra's stole (taken from his grave in the mission church in 1820); an adobe brick from the building in which he died in 1784 at the Mission San Carlos Borromeo del Rio Carmelo, a floor tile from his room; a section of one of the original beams of the mission; a piece of carved sandstone and one of the original roof tiles.

All of the original relics were exhibited at the Courvoisier Galleries in San Francisco in April 1932. The public schools observed the event by talks on the life and the work of the missionary.

The great day was set for May 12, 1932, with the Gov. of California, James Rolph Jr., declaring it "Serra Day, when the Rotary Club of Mallorca, Spain, will present to the City of San Francisco the house in Petra in which Junipero Serra was born."

A few days before the act of public presentation in Mallorca came the actual act of transfer before the notary, who made out the deed transferring the title from the Rotarians who held it, to the city of San Francisco. This deed he signed and sealed, and the witnesses did likewise. Then he read the act of the Board of Supervisors of San Francisco by which title was accepted.

The great ceremony, however, was yet to come in Petra. Fiesta time reigned in primitive Petra over a period of three days. Every inch of the village was overflowing with townspeople and guests, some in native costumes. In the afternoon of the closing of the Rotary Clubs' district convention, the visiting dignitaries arrived — the civil authorities, the Rotary officials and the official representative of the city of San Francisco, Juan Cervera Cebrian.

It was two years later that the house was marked, in a colorful ceremony with a memorial tablet. It bore the Rotary Wheel at the top, and proclaimed: "In this house was born Father Junipero Serra, colonizer and evangelist of California; 24 November 1713-28 August 1784, the Rotary Club of Mallorca acquired and restored this house and gave it to the city of Sari Francisco, California."

San Francisco through the years has almost forgotten that they own this historic little stone building in far off Petra, the birthplace of Father Junipero Serra, who more than 200 years ago reared the magnificent mission structures along the coast of California.

In September of this year San Francisco officially accepted the offer of the Society of California Pioneers to finance the task of paying the small tax on the building and mending the roof. In fact, San Francisco agreed to assume full responsibility for restoration and upkeep of the 245-year-old structure off the coast of Spain, which was donated to the City of San Francisco by the "Rotary Club of the Mallorca.

The city has paid the taxes which amount to about \$8 a year but has been faced with the problem of funds for repairs. The Society hopes to raise \$1,000 to build a covered walkway between the Serra house and a museum built by Petra on an adjoining piece of land, as well as supply the \$400 annual maintenance costs.