

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Mission Architecture**

A very attractive and excellent book, "Architecture of the California Missions," has recently arrived on our desk and we are looking forward to the great use we may make of it in the days to come. The text is by Kurt Baer and the many photographs are by Hugo Rudinger.

The book is published by the University of California Press in 1958, the regents of the university gave it their blessing, Rita Carroll designed it and it was printed in the United States of America. It is on the Library of Congress catalog Card Number: 58-11931, all of which makes it very important as an addition of the collection of Californians.

The preface, written in Santa Barbara in February 1957, by Kurt Baer, relates: "Certainly there are few buildings in the United States more picturesque and of greater interest than the missions of California.

"Their romantic history, the often-exciting story of their founding, their golden age, their decline, and now their virtual renaissance - all this has been told many times."

This new book: "Architecture of the California Missions," concerns itself with the interpretation of stylistic sources in the remote past of classical Rome and the Moors of Spain and in the primitive and the baroque in Mexico, and especially with these manifestations in the California buildings. It does not list the missions in the order of their founding or even in geographical location, but the author has grouped them according to the architectural style.

The author regrets that unfortunately the available archival documents giving information on plans and detail drawings - if these ever existed - have been lost .... The building padres and their masons and helpers left no drawings of their plans or elevations. The earliest known sketches date from between 1840 and 1850, and not all of these are completely reliable.

There is only one mission - in Santa Barbara - which never lost its status as a Franciscan church. Several of the mission churches have completely disappeared - not even a semblance of a ruin remaining. Of others only a few fragments of adobe brick walls here and there. The one ruined mission that stands isolated and is being gradually restored is that known as Soledad, and the

Native Daughters of the Golden West are responsible for this restoration.

The following paragraph we quote from "Architecture of California Missions":

"The almost obliterated pile that remained for nearly one hundred years, Nuestra Senora de la Soledad, is at this writing being restored. The chapel, not the larger mission church, has been rebuilt and refurnished with appropriate pictures and decorations. Yet the exterior of the small building lacks the character of the original because of too accurately engineering corners and roof lines. Where in the original there were subtle deviations of lines from the true vertical or the horizontal, and where wall services were pleasingly uneven.

We know that Harry Downie of the Carmel Mission restoration will resent this criticism and we are confident that with age these features of the recent restoration will correct themselves. The building stands so isolated, by the old ruins that its newness is very obvious and set apart from the old.

The author goes on to compliment: "The restoration work at Carmel Mission, though deviating here and there for the purposes of expediency, has been generally very good."

Capt. George Vancouver, when he visited Carmel in 1792, commented on its attractiveness and workability, and he also noted that at Santa Clara he had been shown "a ponderous black stone, that was intended to be so appropriated as soon as persons capable of working it could be procured." The stone was probably a kind of basalt. This stone was commonly used for grinding stones, but it was rarely used in mission construction because of its extreme hardness and heaviness.

Another bit of interesting information regarding our missions in this vicinity is: "In the mission church at Carmel there is greater evidence of Indian, hence nonprofessional, work in the church than in Monterey." The baroque designs are described. However, the workmanship, if it is that of neophyte Indians, represents great technical advances made by them under professional direction within a short span of years. The Carmel church is, we have noted, for all its restoration, very similar to many village churches in Mexico.