

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Monterey's Royal Presidio Chapel**

Kurt Baer writes in his "Architecture of California Missions" of the Royal Presidio Chapel in Monterey, also known as San Carlos church: "The most elaborate, of the church facades, that of the Capilla Real at Monterey was yet a far cry from Mexican originals. This chapel was never a mission church; it was a chapel erected for the governor and the soldiers of the Presidio of Monterey. Much of the refinement of the details can be attributed to the workmanship. The work was very probably executed under the direction of Manuel Estevan Ruiz who also supervised the building of San Carlos Church, Carmel.

"Ruiz came to California in 1791. It is strange that although the Monterey and the Carmel churches appear to have been constructed under his supervision and were built about the same time (Carmel was completed in 1797), they are very different in appearance."

The author thinks that probably Fathers Serra and Crespi planned the Carmel church. Possibly the design was chosen because the Monterey church was politically important since Monterey was the provincial capital of the governors and the officials. The design had been used earlier in Mexico City, Pueblo and other major cities for the cathedrals. Since the church was a government building, approval of the plan had to be obtained from Mexico.

We wonder how many residents of the Monterey Peninsula, how many of our architects, ever wander down near the El Estero to look at or to study the architecture of the Presidio Chapel. Our author of "Architectural Styles of the Missions" has this to say of the Monterey church: "The plan of the facade decoration of the Capilla Real is characteristically bisymmetrical, with a gracefully curving pediment that towers, like an espanada, over the roof ridge of the nave. The doorway is topped by an arch in simple Roman style. . . . The nitch for the carved relief of the Virgin of Guadalupe is capped by the typical fluted or scalloped shell, here inverted. The date of the facade is 1794. It is a good example of the fusion of the baroque with neo classic."

Baer reports that the original ceiling of the Carmel Mission was the most unusual in California. The nave

was partitioned into bays of almost equal size by pilasters somewhat doric in style. From these piers, which continued the curve, sprang stone arches. This catenated arch structure was not evident from the outside, since a low-pitched cable roof covered it. Actually, the walls of the nave curve outward somewhat near the top, resulting in an almost elliptical inside ceiling. The roof collapsed in 1852.

We can imagine nothing more fascinating and entertaining than to be able to start out on a vagabonding trip along the mission trail with this book, "Architecture of California Missions" of Baer's with photographs by Hugo Rudinger, spending much time at each mission sitting in the sun and reading what the author and artist have discovered about each mission which makes it different from the other 18 original churches. Four of the missions have completely disappeared through the "ravages of time and nature and deprecation of man."