

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

October 7, 1959

### **Mission Benches**

Our Mission benches along the beach walk in Monterey have attracted the attention and appreciation of more visitors than one might realize, as a letter, recently received, proves. It is from the Lions Club of Bonsall, California, signed by the secretary of the club.

The letter reads as follows:

"Recently one of our members was visiting your city and was impressed with the display of "Mission benches" along the waterfront. Upon closer inspection he could not find a bench in honor of the Pala Mission. The fact that we are closely connected with Pala Mission and its rehabilitation set us to wondering if a bench could be placed in honor of this mission.

"The Pala mission is the only mission in Southern California still doing the work originally intended for the missions. Located on the Pala Indian Reservation on Highway 76 about 20 miles east of San Luis Rey Mission, it serves as a school for Indian children, workshop and house of worship for all.

"We would appreciate any help in placing a bench in honor of the Pala Mission in your bench display. If it is possible to place a bench we would like to know the approximate cost."

The Monterey benches, numbering twenty-one, in honor of the twenty-one original missions in the chain planned by Father Junipero Serra, were placed along the waterfront in 1956 by a beautification committee who collected funds for their cost from individuals and organizations in the community. The reason that Pala Mission does not appear, is because it was an "asistencia" of San Luis Rey, which means that it was a mission of a mission.

Asistencia of San Antonio de Pala came into being when the thriving Mission San Luis Rey felt the necessity of more easily serving the Indians of the outlying ranchos. Indians from the beautiful mountain enclosed valley, had helped to build San Luis Rey; soon they were growing enough grain in their home valley, to warrant the construction, in 1810, of a granary on this distant rancho, and in 1816 a chapel was added. Within two years the "asistencia" served a thousand Indians.

But Pala came late in Mission history, and its life under mission rule was short. The little chapel suffered the same fate as its larger and more pretentious neighbors; buildings and belongings were abused; the scattered Indians decreased in numbers.

Franciscans returned to San Luis Rey in 1892, and again took up their work with Pala Indians. The Los Angeles Landmarks League instigated restoration of Pala in 1901; the government established an Indian reservation in this valley in 1903, and the remaining Indians, with some of their old faith and fervor, fell in with plans to restore the chapel. Today, Pala, quaint and unspoiled, serves about 250 Indians of the reservation. It attracts few visitors except on the occasion of the celebration of Corpus Christi. However, it is unique and worth visiting, we can attest to this fact for we have been there.

Today Pala has no connection with its original parent church, the Mission San Luis Rey. Pala is now a parish church on an Indian reservation. Today and always, Pala enjoys the privilege of being the only remaining mission in all of California which is still being used by those for whom it was originally dedicated.

When the missions became secularized the Franciscan Fathers were completely removed from the parent mission, San Luis Rey, and all properties were sold. It was President Abraham Lincoln who returned San Luis Rey to the Catholic Church in March 1865 after it had suffered the ravages of many strange owners and decay. It has never been abandoned.

Pala came to life again in 1903 when the Cupeno Indians from Warner Hot Springs were evicted from their ancient Village - Cupa. They were brought to Pala to form the Reservation, some 3,438 acres at that time, along with the local San Luiseno Indians already there.