

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

May 19, 1960

An 1876 Look at Carmel Coast

We have just picked up the little "Hand Book of Monterey and Vicinity," published in Monterey in 1876 as a "complete guide book for tourists, campers and visitors." We hope it will be amusing to our readers to repeat what a writer thought of the Peninsula and the coast south of Carmel 84 years ago.

"The valley of the Carmello River affords attractions to lovers of nature such as few places in the State can furnish. The passing traveler – be he artist or antiquary, geologist or "grizzly shooting," piscator or pedestrian, "prospector" or pleasure seeker – may here find something to his taste. The road from Monterey passes the old Cuartel, and branches off to the right, having on one side a woody ravine and low, flat, level lands, studded, park-like, with live oaks; on the other, the well wooded, pine-feathered hills. Half way up the steep hill, we command a magnificent view of Monterey, Santa Cruz, Castroville and Salinas Valley, with Fremont Peak and the Gabilan for a background.

"Reaching the summit, and looking to the right, through a pretty wooded glen, the eye rests upon the ocean. A shady road, up hill and down dale, with ever changing views, all beautiful, until the hill overlooking the Carmel vale is reached, and there we have a sight worthy of Eden in its happiest days.

"Descend the hill, turn to the right, and we have reached the ruins of the old Mission. Hardly a pleasing sight to any one possessing the bump of veneration even in the smallest degree. A few ruined, broken adobes encircle a dreary, desolate, semi-roofed building, beautiful even in decay – all that is left of the second Mission in California, and one that in its day must have been a grand edifice, for it bears unmistakable evidence of an accurate knowledge of architecture, blended with a bold conception in its detail and skillful workmanship, considering the material at hand." This description is a far cry from the Mission as it appears today, for which we owe a deep debt of thanks to Harry Downie who has been a combination of architect, designer, artist, workman and all around historian for the restoration of the church where the venerable Father Junipero Serra, founder of the chain of California Missions, died and is buried in front of the high altar.

In this Mission soil were raised the first potatoes cultivated in California, the start of which was brought to the Mission by La Perouse, a French count, in September 1786. Count Jean Francois Galoup de la Perouse was the first friendly foreign visitor of distinction to visit California. Perouse, commanding the French frigates Boussole and Astrolabe, remained in California but ten days and saw only that part of it in the immediate vicinity of Monterey. He provided an interesting and informative account of his observations – in his "Voyages de la Perouse autour du Monde" in Paris in 1797, an English translation appearing in London in 1799.

In 1771, an inventory of stock showed the Mission to be possessed of 19 head of cattle, 10 mules, and four horses. In 1825 it owned 87,600 head of cattle, 60,000 sheep, 2,000 calves, 1,800 horses, and 365 yoke of oxen, a large amount of merchandise and \$4,00 in specie.