

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

May 26, 1961

### **Planting An Oak Tree**

The Monterey Peninsula Garden Club is to be congratulated upon its winning of the award from the Richfield Oil Company for outstanding community service. The award will be an oak tree to be planted on state owned Portola-Serra Landing Place at the north end of Pacific Street near the entrance of the Monterey Presidio. This site was chosen because of historic importance and for the reason that the original oak under which Father Junipero Serra said Mass and Don Gaspar de Portola pronounced the claim of California for Spain, was there on June 3, 1770.

As Laura Bride Powers declared in her book "Old Monterey": "With such pageantry and color as Church and State could summon in the new land, Monterey was born, June 3, 1770. A large cross was set up on the side of the ravine, near the spot where the Carmelites had said Mass in 1602. Near it floated the Spanish standard."

On June 10, 1961, at 3 p.m. the Garden Club will plant the oak presented by the oil company as near to the site of the original tree as possible. Mrs. Norman Walker, the club's president, will preside over the planting ceremony and introduce Miss Margo M. Glidea, manager of the conservation department of Richfield, who will be present to make the presentation of the oak and a small wooden plaque to rest on the ground beneath it. All members of the Garden Club, the History and Art Assn., their friends and the interested public are invited to attend.

The Division of Beaches and Parks, Mr. Jess Chaffee, district superintendent, will prepare the site and assist in planting the tree on the historic site.

In Father Serra's own words, the historic ceremony on June 3, 1770, proceeded as follows:

"On the holy day of Pentecost, June 3, after having gathered all the officers of sea and land, and all the rest of the people by the side of the little ravine and oak where the Fathers of that other expedition (Viscaino) had held their celebration, an altar was erected, the bells hung up and rung, the hymn 'Veni Creator' was sung and the water blessed, and finally a cross erected and the royal standards set up. I then sang the first Mass which we suppose had been celebrated, here that

long ago; and we sang the 'Hail to Our Lady' before the image of our Most Illustrious Queen, which occupied the altar. After that I preached a sermon to the assembled people.

"After the service had been concluded with Te Deum, the officers performed the ceremony of taking formal possession of the land in the name of the King. We afterward ate our dinner together under the shade on the beach. The whole service had been accompanied by much thunder and powder, both on land and from the ship. To God alone be all the honor and glory."

There are two landmarks at the site of the Landing Place - one a huge granite cross, placed there in November of 1906 by the late James Murray (the step-father of Stuart Haldorn of Carmel whose home in New Monterey was for many years a show place on the beach. The inscription at the base of the cross reads: "Junipero Serra, 1770."

On June 3, 1949, another monument was added. A large granite boulder was placed there and upon its face a bronze tablet dedicating it to Don Gaspar de Portola. The boulder was placed and sponsored by the Monterey History and Art Assn., under whose auspices it was dedicated on Monterey's 179th birthday.

The original oak at the landing place finally blew down or was cut down and floated out into the bay. The late Father Ramon Mestres, pastor of San Carlos church, and the late Harry Greene, a pioneer businessman of Monterey, recovered the trunk and set it up in the rear garden of the Royal Presidio Chapel where it may be seen today.

Before the centennial celebration in 1949, the late Colonel Roger S. Fitch had a good-sized oak dug from his garden, on the Mesa and transplanted at the landing place, but alas, it is no longer there. We thank the Monterey Peninsula Garden Club for its selection of the Landing Place for its award for best community service.