

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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The Story Of The Bells

Several times in Peninsula Diary we have written about the El Camino Real bells and the need for their replacement and restoration, now we are happy to report that the California Historical Society is working on this historic project, with excellent results.

Public interest in the project undertaken by the committee for El Camino Real to restore the 450 replica mission bell guideposts which once designated the state's first main highway, is indicated by increasing support for the program by private and public interests. Members of the California Historical Society committee have reported that the search for original El Camino bell sign posts has uncovered many which had disappeared since they were first placed on the highway 56 years ago.

Some have been found serving as flower pots or decorative pieces in private homes. All those found will be cleaned for replacement on El Camino Real and private contributions are being solicited to defray the cost of casting new bells to complete the original total. The Historical Society is one of several organizations cooperating in this worthy effort.

Doing a bit of research on our own concerning the mission bells, we find that probably even the very earliest of the missionaries beginning in 1697, brought with them bells from across the sea. The voice of these bells must have been a powerful aid to the mission fathers in gaining attention and interest of the Indians.

Eleven of the missions had distinct bell towers. This figure does not include the unique tower at Pala, which was only an asistencia church. The Mission Santa Cruz, which is now only a memory, had a tower and nine bells, which cost \$3900. The largest bell was at San Fernando. Five bells were at Santa Inez. San Gabriel had four of the original six bells. There are two very old bells at Santa Barbara. In many of these missions these interesting old bells may still be seen, and their voices still are heard after nearly 200 years of service.

The mission bells of Santa Ysabel in the back country, apparently are the most ancient of all the bells in California. There was never a mission at Santa Ysabel. Probably nothing more than an asistencia ever existed there, and a brush "ramada" apparently was the closest

approach to a church structure. The great bells hang in the open on a rough cross-beam, as they have done for more than a century.

One of them unquestionably brought from the Jesuit mission of Loreta in Lower California. It bears the inscription of "N.S. de Loreta, 1723." This undoubtedly is the abbreviation for "Nuestra Senora de Loreta." The bells was cast almost 40 years before the first Franciscan entered California, and undoubtedly was used by the Jesuits when they controlled the missions of Lower California, which were established about 100 years before Alta California was invaded by the Franciscans. The bell of Santa Ysabel now is more than two centuries old.

This little chapel and the bells of Santa Ysabel are on the east side of the road between Santa Ysabel and Warner's Hot Springs, about a mile from the former place and about 200 yards from the road.

The old bell of San Miguel Chapel in Santa Fe, N.M., is undoubtedly the oldest bell in America. It was cast in Spain in 1356 and brought to Santa Fe about the year 1712 by Nicholas Ortiz Nino Ladron de Guevara. It was first used in Ortiz Chapel in Santa Fe. When this chapel was abandoned and torn down, the bell and some paintings were stored. Later they were brought to the parish church and used. In 1848, Simon Delgado, who was then owner of the old San Miguel Church, secured possession of both bell and paintings as heir of the Ortiz and Sandoval families and had them taken to the old church, where they still remain.