

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **The Serra Oak**

In the Daily Review published in Pacific Grove on Nov. 16, 1906, we have come across this article: "The new granite cross which is to mark the landing place of Father Junipero Serra at Monterey has arrived." Further search of newspapers and clippings has given us an interesting story concerning this monument which stands to the left of the entrance to the Monterey Presidio facing Pacific street.

"The foundation for the cross was laid several months ago and during the past few days workmen have been engaged in preparing it for the cross. The cross is of granite and is 10 feet in length. The base is also of granite and is 4 feet in height. The inscription at the base reads: 'Junipero Serra 1770.' The letters are chiseled out in bold relief and are polished."

Previous to the new cross, an old wooden cross marked the landing place of Father Serra and Don Gaspar de Portola on June 3, 1770, a date which the Monterey History and Art Assn. observes each year in honor of Monterey's birthday. This cross was removed when the granite cross was expected.

Several years ago Mrs. Louisa Archer Dahlgren of Monterey and Jamesburg loaned me a small booklet in which a poem, "The Passing of an Oak" is printed. At the time of the landing of Father Serra on the shore of Monterey there was a large oak tree there and it was under this tree, that Father Serra recited the first mass. The granite cross now marks the spot.

The oak tree is described in the foreword of the book. The poem was written by Mary Sullivan Spence, the publisher was Paul Elder & Co. of San Francisco and Mrs. James A. Murray had 12 copies made for private distribution in 1909. The printing was by Tomoye Press under the direction of John Henry Nash, now one of the best-known designers and printers in the country. As a frontispiece, Isabel Hunter, a prominent water-color artist of that day, made a special painting of the old oak, with the roofs of Old Monterey and the blue bay in the background, for each of the 12 /copies. The covers were of hand-tooled leather.

Mary Sullivan Spence was an aunt of the late Noel Sullivan of Carmel Valley and the sister of Judge Sullivan, who was the father of Noel Sullivan. Mrs.

Spence was the wife of Rudolph Spence, grandson of David and Adelaide Estrada Spence, prominent in the history of Monterey in the middle 1800's and the son of David Stewart Spence and a descendant of the Malarin family of Monterey.

Portions of the oak were rescued by the late Harry Greene and Father Ramon Mestres and placed at the rear of the Royal Presidio Chapel (San Carlos Church), where it may be seen by all those, who wish to make a pilgrimage to pay homage to it.