

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Pilgrims March On Old Trail

When we first came to Monterey to reside, Father Ramon Mestres, pastor of the Royal Presidio Chapel, now better known as San Carlos Church, was alive and was also deeply interested in keeping alive the traditions of Old Monterey. I remember the charming custom of the annual pilgrimage over the mountain and along the canyon trail to Carmel Mission, repeating the Stations of the Cross as the pilgrims marched along through the forest. For many years there was one of the crude crosses under the oak tree at Soledad Drive and Munras Avenue, but that vestige of the pilgrimage finally disappeared also.

It must have been delightful, every foot of it, that ancient trail from Monterey to Carmel Mission. Parts of it remained clear and unspoiled until the early 1930s, but now its course cannot be found - entirely gone, like many other bequests of the Spanish-California era.

Junipero Serra probably trod that gracious path many times, as he passed through the fields and pines from Monterey Bay to his best-loved mission. Indeed, the father himself may have been the one who first marked it out. It was very direct, really; by far the shortest and easiest way to follow afoot. All the early padres were skilled at trail and road establishing; it was part of their missionary labors. And since this whole region was particularly dear to the heart of the founder of the faith in California, he no doubt walked over these hills many and many a time.

Mrs. Lucia Shepardson wrote in her "Monterey Trails" published in 1935 by the Monterey Press: "Later, when Monterey was established, the travel became considerable, since everyone went to church those days, and the only place for public worship was at Carmel; the present Mission at Monterey was the Presidio Chapel. The trail followed the general line of the present highway for perhaps half a mile toward the long Carmel hill (which has been cut down twice since those days).

"No roads, no houses, only the unspoiled countryside. At the foot of the slope it swung off to the right, through what is now the Monte Regio tract - a much easier rise than the present busy highway. It entered the pine forest, and rambled to the crest of the hill, the

stillness broken only by the song of the birds. This is the bit, the only bit, that was left in 1935. Forgotten by all save a few, unused, nearly blotted out by the thick carpet of pine needles, yet it remained, to remind the rare stroller how beguiling all of it once was."

From this point on, where three roads with their roaring traffic converge, where heavy fills and grading have completely changed the face of the scenery, it is hardly possible to believe that a little grass-bordered path once wandered through virgin pine and oak forest. But it did. And many were the legends and tales that grew up around it, even after it had become a road.