

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Tall Trees Influenced Vizcaino

Tall trees may have swung the early capital of California to Monterey according to a letter from Sebastian Vizcaino, written here on December 28, 1602. It tells that Vizcaino had been ordered, by the Count de Monte-Rey to explore the harbors of the "South Seas" from Acapulco to Cape Mendocino, having been sent out with supplies for eleven months.

He had left Acapulco on May 5 of that year and the difficulties had been so great that some of the men had died and the provisions and munitions were too low to permit him to go on to Cape Mendocino.

Those of us who are always digging up history in the making (especially was this true in the centennial years), may have wondered why Monterey was chosen as the first capital of this province of New Spain. San Diego, the first settlement, was blessed with a natural harbor, was in much closer touch with the Viceroy's court in Mexico City and seemingly might have been the logical choice.

However, Vizcaino was sure that Monterey Bay which he had named in honor of the Viceroy, was the ideal place to afford safe anchorage for warships to protect the Manila galleons. Pine trees grew down to the water's edge and there were also forests of oak.

Thus, he said, it was the place for repairing galleons which had suffered from storms or attacks by buccaneers. Tall, straight tree's, suitable for masts for ships "of even a thousand tons burden," had virtually waded out to sea to meet the damaged ships.

It would be a great satisfaction if history delvers could clear up one point for us. It may be minor, but it certainly would be interesting, to know why Monterrey, Mexico, named for the same Viceroy, is spelled with double "r". A pamphlet I read while there a number of years ago, said it was founded by Count de Monterey, written with one "r".