

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **The Name California**

The name California was first applied to the locality round about Bahia de la Paz in Lower California when the expedition under Don Hernando Cortez made an effort in 1535 to found a settlement on the peninsula, which at that time was supposed to be an island.

The district was referred to as "California" by Bernal Diaz de Castillo, an officer under Cortez and the historian of the expedition. Diaz was undoubtedly familiar with the novel entitled "Las Sergas de Esplandian," written by Garcia Ordenez de Montalvo which had been published in Spain, in 1510, and in which a mythical island on the right hand of the Indies was called "California."

When James D. Phelan, former mayor of San Francisco and a well known pioneer of California, built his home on his estate near Saratoga in the Santa Clara Valley, he built into the wall in the patio this legend as I have related it here, and it is read by all who visit the residence which is now part of the San Francisco Art Institute. Before the death of Mr. Phelan I visited there, saw the plaque and read the legend. The estate is known as Montalvo, in honor of the author.

For over 100 years all expeditions to California by the missionaries were made by sea. This western coast was so wild and little known, that on our eastern shores a great university, Harvard, was flourishing and a printing press was established and books were being distributed before the man was ever born who was to clarify the simple geography of the coast.

A young Italian, Eusebio Kino, in whom the urge to roam was so strong, was born in 1645. In 1663, while lying ill "with a mortal sickness", he promised his saint, Francisco Xavier, that if he recovered he would bring the heathen light and would journey west to the Indies. He recovered, and kept his promise. An interesting result of this early bargain was the founding by Kino in later years of one of the most perfect missions in the southwest, the exquisite San Xavier Del Bac (the Dove in the Desert) near Tucson, Arizona. This writer can testify to this statement for I have visited this mission many times and I urge anyone who should have the privilege of visiting Tucson to also visit the mission.

Kino had ten arduous years of study, as do all Jesuits of today, before he was allowed to set out upon his journeys. The Jesuits were the greatest travelers and the best geographers of their day. Kino went to the great universities of Innsbruck and Heidelberg and absorbed their knowledge, becoming consumed with a thirst to combine the conversion of the Indians to Christianity with accurate map making of the new world.

It was still many years before his ambitions were achieved. Not until 1698 did he actually prove that he could cross from the supposed mainland to the island of California by a land route. At least an almost land route with only the mighty Rio Colorado as a water hazard. On a historic day in October the friendly Indians helped him make a raft of logs and lest he wet his feet, they placed upon it a huge basket. In this Father Kino embarked, taking with him only a blanket and his rosary and ferried across the Colorado to set foot upon the shore of California.

At this time the river ran high in a different course and Father Kino found beautiful and fertile green valleys and a tribe of prosperous and amiable Indians. Due to the illness and timidity of the friend who accompanied him, he was unable to stay but a few days in California but in those few days, he climbed the highest peak he could find, and drew a map of the country around him. He was sure now that the island theory was a fallacy.

He was sure because of the little blue abalone shells the natives brought him from the coast because he had seen the sun rise over the gulf and because he found in these fertile valleys the source of supplies of the coast Indians, he knew, did not raise their own produce, it came from some inland source and no ocean was crossed in the delivery.