

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Early Day Mission Priests

The succession of priests in charge of the Monterey-Carmel missions from 1850 through 1860 is an interesting item appearing a few years ago in the Central California Register and recently presented to me.

Carmel Mission was made a pueblo and a parish in or before 1835; the Monterey church was at first served from Carmel. Prior to April, 1840, the pastor, Fray Jose Maria del Refugio Zuares del Real, had moved his residence to Monterey, which then had a much larger population. The earliest mention of Monterey as a parish is dated Nov. 2, 1849.

The succession of pastors and rectors at Monterey is as follows:

1. Rev. Doroteo Ambris, Monterey diocesan priest, 1846-1849.
2. Fray Ignacio Ramirez de Arellano, O.P., 1849-1850.
3. Rev. Doroteo Ambris again, 1850-1851.
4. M. L'Abbe Jean Baptiste Loubes a priest of the archdiocese of Paris, 1851.
5. Fray Ignacio Ramirez (again), 1851-1853.
6. Fray Sadoe Vilarrasa, O.P., 1853-1855.
7. Rev. Francisco Foretnik, missionary apostolic, 1854-1855.
8. Rev. Cajetan Sorrentini, priest of Rome and missionary apostolic, 1855-1856.
9. Rev. Juan B. Comelias, Monterey and Los Angeles, diocesan priest, 1856-1864.

During the period 1850-1853, Carmel was operated as a separate parish. Fray Anaciete Lestrade C.SS.CC., was the priest in charge of Carmel in 1850-1851, followed by Fray Sadoe Vilarrasa O.P., 1851-1853.

The years 1846-1856 were a period of adjustment. Father Jose del Real left for Mission Santa Clara in 1846. He was the last Franciscan Missionary in charge of the pueblo parish of San Carlos (Monterey-Carmel). A couple of the priests deserve special mention.

Rev. Doroteo Ambris, a priest of the diocese of Monterey, was a Mexican Indian who came from Mexico in 1841 as a seminarian with Bishop Garcia Diego. He was ordained Jan. 1, 1846. He also ministered to San Antonio Mission.

It is said that Priest Valley was named for him because he was encountered there in an Indian camp by an expedition of Americans before the U.S. occupation.

Fray Ignacio Ramirez de Arellano, O.P., his successor at Monterey, belonged to the Dominican missionaries of Lower California and had been their president. The circumstances which brought him to Monterey are unique.

Both Upper and Lower California were occupied by United States military forces during the Mexican War when Father Ramirez was pastor at La Paz. All the leading people at this port, including its civil servants and Padre Ramirez, welcomed the U.S. naval units and were more than content to accept the new government.

They were given the same assurances as were given the people of Upper California and were quite content with them. They even stood by the United States when Mexican forces attempted to regain La Paz.

Father Ignacio will be forever remembered in Monterey history for two things. Lt. Col. Henry S. Burton, a Protestant, who had been military governor of Lower California, fell in love with Maria del Amparo Ruiz, who had been evacuated from La Paz. On July 9, 1849 at Monterey, he married the young lady in the presence of a protestant military chaplain. Father Ramirez assisted at the ceremony and gave them his blessing.

This drew most severe censure from Father Gonzales Rubio, the administrator of the diocese and no satisfactory explanation from the culprit. The Protestant chaplain also was at fault for having acted contrary to orders given by Mason, the military governor, concerning the marriage of Catholics.

His order made it plain that Catholics could be married only in accordance with the rules of their church. Father Ignacio was recalled to Mexico by his superiors in 1853, but not for this reason. The ceremony was the first mixed marriage known to have occurred in Central California.