

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

July 3, 1968

Our Presidio of Monterey

We wonder how many of the local residents and how many of our tourists make the trip to Fort Mervine, to the Sloat and the Serra Monuments at the top of the hill within the borders of the Monterey Presidio and overlooking the Bay of Monterey?

Aside from the historical significance of the three markers, one is also on historical ground, for the Presidio itself is one of the earliest of such military outposts in the West. The route to the markers is through the Presidio gate directly from Pacific street and up the hill to the right.

It would be more inspiring to make the trip on foot—it is not far- and the view of the bay, of Monterey and the surrounding beaches and hills are well worth the effort.

Before entering the Presidio there are two granite markers. One is the huge cross enclosed in an iron fence, which marks the landing place of Father Serra and where the first Mass on Monterey soil was said by the founder of the California Mission chain. The second is a granite boulder which was placed there in 1949 and dedicated on June 3rd the memory of Gaspar de Portola, who on July 14, 1769, set out on a voyage of rediscovery.

He was unsuccessful at first, but after two attempts, the third proved successful and on June 3, 1770, Portola and Father Serra landed at Monterey accompanied by their military and religious followers. Portola was made the first governor of Alta California and Father Serra founded both the Royal Presidio Chapel and the Mission at Carmel. Father Serra died here on August 28th, 1784.

In 1891 Mrs. Jane Stanford, wife of the then Senator Stanford, who founded Leland Stanford University in memory of their son, caused a granite monument to be erected on an eminence fronting the Bay of Monterey, and close by that spot where Junipero Serra first landed and said Mass on June 3rd.

The statue represents Father Serra in full canonicals, with right hand held up in monitory gesture and left hand clasping a Bible to his left breast, the book marked "Scripta" and Serra" in small letters with a cross on the book.

At the spot where Father Junipero Serra landed and where the first Mass was celebrated the large Gothic cross was erected by the late James A. Murray, then a resident of New Monterey and the owner of the residence Casa Los Ollas, which had been built by the late Dr. Harry Tevis, since torn down to make way for one of the large sardine canneries on that location. Mr. Murray was the stepfather of Mr. Stuart Haldorn of Carmel.

The Sloat Monument is a bit further up the hill, within the government reservation, and is a memorial to Commander John Drake Sloat, who raised the first American Flag over the Old Custom House at Monterey on July 7th, 1846. His long life and patriotic career ended on November 28th, 1867, at the age of 86.

The Monterey monument to his memory was made possible through the devoted efforts of Major Edwin A. Sherman, and dedicated with elaborate ceremony on June 14th, 1910. Congress appropriated the sum of \$10,000 toward the monument, and this was the only monument outside of Washington, D.C., to receive aid from the federal government, commemorating the deeds of either an Army or Navy officer. The foundation, or base, is constructed of 66 granite blocks contributed by 35 counties, cities, organizations, and individuals.

The Presidio of Monterey was founded on June 3, 1770. Structures were shortly afterwards erected "by the side of an estero creek," also described as being "a gun shot from the beach and three times as far from shore," where San Carlos Church now stands.

Guns were mounted by the Spaniards on the hill overlooking the bay, where the present Presidio is now. In 1822 after Mexico obtained her independence from Spain, a fort was built by the Mexicans, and about the year 1843, Governor Micheltorena ordered a deep ditch dug on the site of the present fort. After the American occupation in 1846, a block house was built. The first name was Fort Stockton but was later changed to Fort Mervine, which name it now bears, but the blockhouse has been destroyed.

The present Presidio came into being in 1902. It was built under the supervision of the late General Edward H. Plummer.