

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Frontiers of New Spain

Among the greatest of the explorers of Western America we find the Spanish missionaries. Not only did they pioneer the settlements of New Spain, but also the lands of Alta and Baja California. Amazing records were kept particularly by the Jesuits in 1687 when in the Sonora Desert. The navigational expedition accounts of the Alta California coasts were not as detailed and exacting as the land expeditions and explorations, so Phillip III ordered a much more concise study and record of the entire coast of California.

Don Sebastian Vizcaino used the 1540 itinerary of Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo. Had more accurate latitude readings been made and recorded, California missions and presidios would have been founded much earlier and more than likely by others than Franciscan padres.

I have mentioned the Jesuits being in the Sonora Desert for two reasons: while in this area they kept marvelous diaries that became very valuable geographical and ethnological records, many of which were destroyed in the numerous Indian attacks. The Indians fought bitterly to defend against intruders. If the records survived this, they were then subject to destruction in the turmoil that followed the colonial period when Mexico was undergoing such terrible strife and the anticlerical movements destroyed even more.

We are fortunate that many of the documents were saved when they were moved elsewhere. Several different times in some of those Pina and Seri Indian attacks, destruction was so thorough that they ripped the throats out of the painted portraits. These exist today and are still adorning some 24 capilla walls in Eusebio Francisco Kino's Pimeria Alta –Northern Mexico parish.

Now reason number two: Had this man Padre Kino lived just a while longer he would have been the pioneer padre of Alta California many years before 1769.

Padre Eusebio Francisco Kino was an Italian by birth who became a Jesuit and chose to carry the flag of the Spanish conquistadores. Before Padre Kino had secured permission to head for the Sonora Desert, he was initiated into pioneering and exploring in Baja California. At this point I would like to mention that his

maps of both Alta and Baja California were very important, for he expressed satisfaction with the theory that Alta California was not an island. He often said that he would establish missions all the way to Mendocino. Imagine—had this happened, we would most likely be celebrating our tercentennial.

No doubt had Kino been permitted, he would have continued past the Colorado River and due north to Alta California; however, his desert work continued until his death in 1711. Other Jesuits, Padre Keller and Sedelmayr, followed and continued his work until 1767, when the Jesuits fell into political disfavor with their King Carlos III and the Franciscans were assigned to take over the established missions and explorations. So we have the beginning of the Franciscan era in the Pimeria Alta and soon afterward, Alta California.