

THE FOUNDING OF THE PRESIDIO AND MISSION OF OUR FATHER SAINT FRANCIS

*Being Chapter 45 of Fray Francisco Palóu's Life of the Venerable
Padre Fray Junípero Serra, Written at the Mission of
San Francisco de Asis, and Newly Translated
from the Original Edition of 1787
by George Ezra Dane**

WHEN THE COMMANDER [Don Fernando de Rivera] received Señor Anza's letter, he sent orders from San Diego for Lieutenant [José Joaquin] Moraga to take all the people who had come from Sonora and to proceed toward the founding of the Presidio at this Port of our Father St. Francis. Lieutenant Moraga immediately made this known to all, so that they might be ready to leave on the 17th of June. A few days after the order was published the two packet-boats came into the Port of Monterey with provisions, equipment and instructions. The Captain of *El Principe* had orders to leave part of his cargo and to go down to San Diego with the rest; and the Venerable Prelate [Junípero Serra] determined to avail himself of this opportunity to go there also, as has already been related in Chapter 42.

The Commander and Captain of the packet-boat *San Carlos*, Naval Lieutenant Don Fernando de Quirós, had orders likewise to leave at Monterey what was consigned to that Presidio, and to go up to this Port with the remaining cargo, to assist in the founding. The Venerable Father President [Serra] decided that we two missionaries for the Mission of Our Father St. Francis [Fray Francisco Palóu and Fray Pedro Benito Cambon] should accompany the land expedition, for although Commander Rivera had not sent orders for the founding of the Missions, because the twelve soldiers intended as guard for the Missions were still at San Diego, still the delay could not be long, and once arrived at the Port with our equipment, we might proceed with the work as prudence should direct. In view of this decision, we loaded in the packet-boat *San Carlos* everything belonging to this Mission of our Father, leaving only the vestments and portable altar and the barest necessities for the journey of forty-two leagues, so that our expedition should not be too encumbered with baggage.

The said land expedition set forth from the Presidio of Monterey on the

*For consultation as to the proper rendition of terms having to do with Roman Catholic ritual the translator is indebted to Father Peter M. Dunne, of the University of San Francisco.

appointed day, the 17th of June of that year of '76. It was composed of the said Lieutenant Commander Don Joseph Moraga, a sergeant and sixteen leather-jacket soldiers, all married and with large families, seven colonists likewise married and with families, some workmen and servants of the foregoing, herdsmen and muleteers driving the Presidio cattle and the pack train with provisions and utensils necessary for the journey, for the rest of the goods were in the packet-boat that was about to sail. As for the Mission company: it mustered the two missionaries aforesaid, two servant boys for the Mission, two Indian neophytes from Old California, and another from the Mission San Carlos, to see if he might act as interpreter; but since the language was found to be quite distinct, he only served to tend the cows that were brought along to make a start toward larger herds. All the said expedition set out for this port.

Four days before we reached the Port, in the great plain called San Bernardino [the Santa Clara Valley], while the expedition was strung out at length, we descried in the distance a herd of large animals that looked like cattle, but we could not imagine where they belonged or from whence they had come. Some soldiers then went out to round them up, so that they should not stampede our tame cattle, but as the soldiers approached, they perceived that this was not a herd of cattle, but deer, or a species of deer, as large as the largest ox or bull, with horns similar in shape to those of the deer, but so large that they measured sixteen palms from tip to tip. The soldiers succeeded in killing three of them which they carried on mules to the next watering place, a half league or so away. They wanted to bring one in whole, but it was too much for a single mule to carry all the way, and it was only by shifting it from one mule to another that they managed to arrive with it and to give us the pleasure of seeing that monstrous animal with its great horns. I had the curiosity to measure them, and found that their width was indeed the four varas [11 feet] aforesaid. I noticed that beneath each eye there was an orifice, so that it seemed to have four eyes, but the two lower ones were empty and apparently served as tearducts. The soldiers who had pursued them told me that they always run in the direction of the wind. Doubtless this is because the great weight of their enormous horns and the way in which they spread out fan-like with their many points would either upset them or slow them down if they were to run against the wind. As it was, their speed was so great that of fifteen that were sighted, the soldiers with their good horses were able to catch only three. The meat was dried and furnished food for the people for several days, and lasted many of them to the Port. The meat is very savory and healthful and so fat that a sack and a half of lard and suet was obtained from the one that was brought in whole. These animals [elk] are called *ciervos* in order to differentiate them from the ordinary Spanish variety of deer, here called *venados*, which also exist in abundance and of large size in the vicinity of this Port, and the color of some of them approaches yellow or sorrel.

In the said plains of San Bernardino, about half way between the ports of Monterey and San Francisco, as also in the plains nearer to Monterey, there is another species of deer about the size of a three-year-old sheep. They are similar in appearance to the deer, except that they have short horns and also short legs like the sheep. They live in the plains where they go in herds of 100, 200, or more. They run all together over the plains so fast that they seem to fly. Whenever they see travelers, the herds always cross in front of them. The hunters manage to secure some by the plan of dividing the best mounted men and stationing them along the course where they wait while others start the herd and they frighten and drive them by turns, thus wearing them down without tiring the horses. As soon as they see one of them lagging behind, which is a sign of fatigue, they ride out, and when they succeed in cutting him off from the herd they are able to secure him. This they can do also when they get them into the hills, for unlike the deer, they are swift only in the level country. These animals [antelope] are called *berrendos* [piebalds] and there are many of them also in the southern Missions wherever the country is level; but the great *ciervos* have only been found from Monterey upward. This [fine hunting] greatly pleased the soldiers and the colonists of the expedition. Having rested for a day at the stopping place named for the Wounds of our Father St. Francis [Llagas Creek between Morgan Hill and San Martin], the expedition went on towards this Port.

On the 27th day of June we arrived in the vicinity of this Port and a camp was made composed of 15 bell-shaped tents on the shore of a large lagoon that empties into the arm of the bay which extends 15 leagues to the southeast. The purpose was to await here the arrival of the ship so that the site for the Presidio might be selected with reference to the best anchorage. As soon as the expedition halted, many peaceful Indians approached. They expressed pleasure at our arrival, and especially after they had experienced the friendliness with which we treated them and the little presents of glass beads and food that we gave to attract them. They visited us frequently, bringing such little presents as their poverty afforded—nothing more than mussels and wild grass seeds.

The day after the arrival a shelter of branches (*enramada*) was built and an altar set up in it, and there I said the first mass on the day of the Holy Apostles Sts. Peter and Paul and my fellow priest immediately said another and we continued saying mass every day of the whole month that we remained at that place. During that time, as the ship did not appear, we occupied ourselves in exploring the country and visiting the villages (*rancherías*) of the Indians, who all received us peacefully and expressed themselves glad of our arrival in their country. They conducted themselves politely, returning our visit—entire villages coming with their little presents for which we took occasion to compensate them with better things, of which they afterward became very fond.

By the survey that we made we found that we were on a peninsula, with no way to go in or out except between the south and the southeast, for on all other sides we were bounded by the sea. To the east of us is the arm of the sea that extends to the southeast, but as this is only three leagues wide, the land and mountain range on the other side can be seen very clearly. To the north is the other arm of the sea, and to the west and somewhat to the south the Great or Pacific Ocean and the roadstead of the Farallones, where the mouth and entrance of this Port is.

In view of the ship's delay, it was decided to begin cutting wood for the construction of the Presidio near the entrance of the Port, and for the Mission buildings in this same site of the lagoon on the level ground that lies to the westward. As we had been here a month and neither the ship nor the soldiers that Commander Rivera was to send with orders had arrived, the Lieutenant decided to leave us six soldiers as guard for this chosen Mission site and he moved with all the rest of the people near to the entrance of the Port, so that they might work while awaiting the arrival of the ship.

It entered the Port on the 18th August, its delay having been due to contrary winds which had forced it down to 32 degrees [north] latitude. With the aid of the sailors whom the master of the ship divided between the Presidio and the Mission, two structures were built at the Presidio, one for a chapel and another for a storeroom for provisions, and at the Mission one likewise for a chapel and another divided into living quarters for the fathers. The soldiers made their own houses at the Presidio and at the Mission as well, all of wood with roofs of tule thatch.

Formal possession of the Presidio was taken on the 17th of September, the day of the Impression of the Wounds of our Holy Father St. Francis, patron of the Presidio and of the Port. I sang the first mass that day, after blessing, venerating and raising the Holy Cross. When the service ended with the *Te Deum*, the *Señores* went through the ceremony of taking possession in the name of our Sovereign, amid much firing of cannon from ship and shore, and shooting of muskets by the troops.

Formal taking possession of the Mission was put off, waiting for the arrival of Commander Rivera's order, and meanwhile the commanders of the new Presidio and of the ship decided to send an expedition by sea to explore the large arm of water that extends northward from the entrance of the Port, and another [expedition] by land to explore the great river of Our Father St. Francis [the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers] which empties into the roadstead of the Farallones through the mouth of the Port. They set out then for the exploration, agreed as to the place where they might meet and from which the ship's launch might go up the great river, while the land expedition should follow it along the bank.

In the launch went the captain of the ship, Naval Lieutenant Don Fernando Quirós, with his first pilot, Don Joseph Cañizares; and my fellow father, Fray

Benito Cambon went with them to treat and communicate with the Indians. They sailed northward until they reached a point of land where the two expeditions were to meet and proceed with the exploration together. On the same day the Commander of the Presidio set out with the troops that he deemed necessary, and they marched southward, keeping in view of the large inlet or arm of the sea until they came to the end of it, a distance of about fifteen leagues. There they discovered a river of moderate size but with a considerable flow of water, and they named it for Our Lady of Guadalupe. Following up it for some distance to the southwest, they found a spot where it could be forded on horseback. When they were on the other side they saw that they would have to travel back again the whole fifteen leagues in order to reach a point opposite the Port, and from there they would still have to follow the coast on to the point stipulated as the place for meeting the sea expedition. Finding an opening between the hills, they decided to go through this pass as a short-cut to the meeting place, but it turned out to be quite the contrary, as it prevented either from seeing the other during the whole journey and the land expedition came out into a large valley far from the shore and much farther still from the agreed place of meeting.

Considering that if they were to go in search of the ship the time of meeting would pass before they could get there, [the Commander] determined to go into that broad plain [the San Joaquin valley], through which he noted that five rivers flowed, as he could tell by the lines of trees that he saw afar off, for he judged that these must indicate rivers which, winding in from different directions, all flowed in the direction of the Port. They went to the nearest of these lines of trees, and found that there was indeed a great river, bordered with large trees of different kinds. They followed up its bank, not daring to cross because of the size of the stream. They found along the banks several villages of Indians who all seemed peaceful and with whom they spoke, presenting them with gifts of trinkets, which they repaid with fish, and some of them accompanied the expedition up the river.

Having given these Indians to understand, by signs, that they wished to cross the river, they were told that at this point it was impossible—that they would have to try farther up. Thus they did, and they managed to cross it, though with great trouble and only by means of a ford shown them by the Indians who crossed with them. They traveled on over this broad plain which was unbroken by any hill and extended in all directions to the horizon where the sun rose and set as on the high seas. The land was uninhabited by Indians except along the river beds where alone they find water and wood as well as shelter from the excessive heat of those immense plains, fish, which abound in the rivers, and hunting for deer, of which there are so many that they seem like herds of cattle grazing near the river. Not only is the grass greener there, and water close at hand, but the deer also have the protection (when they find themselves pursued) of being able to jump into the river and swim to the

other side, although the Indians have no lack of tricks for catching them, and live for most of the year on this meat.

Finding it impractical to go on with the exploration of the other rivers or of this one which he crossed to see from whence it came, the Commander was satisfied with what he had seen and returned to this Presidio where he reported to us all that I have told above, and said that it seemed to him the river must come from the great Tulares and from the other bodies of water that have been found to the eastward, back of the Missions of San Antonio and San Luis.

The sea expedition sailed directly to the point where they were to meet the land expedition, but after waiting long past the agreed time without any sign of it, they explored the shore and treated with the Indians who lived in the villages and among the tule marshes, all of whom were friendly and exchanged their presents of fish for ours of trinkets and biscuit. They sailed about the large round bay [San Pablo], which is about ten leagues wide and is frequented by young whales. They reached the mouth of the great river which is a quarter of a league in width, and they found nearby a large port [Suisun Bay] which they named for the Assumption of Our Lady, and which is quite as splendid and as sheltered as that of San Diego. They could see nearby the high mountains of Our Father St. Francis [Mount Diablo and the Coast Range], and judging by the latitude they had reached by sailing northward nearly all the way, it appeared to them that the range must terminate at Cape Mendocino.

In their survey of the western shore they found several small inlets, and among them a very wide one [Petaluma creek?] that extended inland farther than they could see. They began to suspect that it might connect with the Great or Pacific Ocean through the Port of Bodega, and hence that the whole of Point Reyes might be an island. They commenced to explore this large inlet which they named for Our Lady of Mercy. After sailing up it to the westward for a whole day and a night they finally reached its end and were convinced that all this hidden inland sea has no communication with the Pacific except by the mouth where the Fort and Presidio are. This mouth or entrance is not over half a league wide and one league long, with strong tidal currents that draw the sea in toward the east and empty out to the west into the roadstead of the Farallones. These islands lie west of the Port's mouth, which is in 37° 56' north latitude. From Point Reyes, which bounds the said roadstead of the Farallones, to the entrance of the Port there are good anchorages where vessels may wait to go in on the tide. It has been found to be the same on the south side, where Mussel Point [Punta de Almejas, now Point San Pedro] forms the opposite arm of the roadstead to Point Reyes, though it does not extend out as far as the latter. At the said Mussel Point and at the entrance to the Port there are some large sand dunes which look from the sea like high hills, and at the foot of these there are also good anchorages, for ships have anchored there, and frigates have entered the Port between the two groups of the Farallones, and between the northern group and Point Reyes, which is about eight leagues distant from the entrance to the Port.

After completing the survey, the launch returned to the Port, and the two commanders exchanged their reports of all that they had seen and observed, so that an account might be given to His Excellency. As it was then time for the ship to return to San Blas, and the orders of Commander Rivera for the founding of the Mission of Our Father St. Francis had not arrived, they resolved nevertheless that formal possession should be taken and the Mission started, which was done on the 9th of October.

The site was first blessed, the Holy Cross was raised and the image of Our Father St. Francis was carried in procession on a platform and afterward placed on an altar. I then sang the first mass and preached on Our Holy Father as the Patron of the Mission, the founding of which all the people of the Presidio, the ship and the Mission attended, firing a salute at each stage of the service.

The Indians saw none of the services, for toward the middle of August they had left this peninsula and gone on tule rafts, some to the uninhabited islands in the Port, others to the other side of the strait. This sudden move was caused by a surprise attack made upon them by their greatest enemies, the Salson nation. These latter live some six leagues to the southeast near the arm of the sea. Setting fire to the villages, they killed and wounded many, and we could not help them for we knew nothing about it until they left for the other shore, and though we did all that we could to hold them, we were unable to succeed.

This departure of the natives delayed the work of conversion, for they did not put in an appearance again until the last of March of the year '77, as little by little they began to lose the fear of their enemies and to gain confidence in us. Thus they began to frequent the Mission, attracted by trinkets and presents of food, and the first baptisms were performed on St. John the Baptist's day of that year '77, and gradually they were converted and the number of Christians increased so that the Venerable Father President [Junípero Serra] before he died saw 394 baptized, and the teaching of the catechism still goes on.

The natives of this place and of the Port are somewhat swarthy and sun-burnt, while those from the other side of the bay (some of whom have moved near to the Mission and have been baptized) are of lighter complexion and stouter. All of them, men and women, have the custom of cutting their hair frequently, especially when some relative dies or when they suffer some affliction, and in such cases they put handfuls of ashes on their heads, their faces, and other parts of their bodies, as almost all the conquered races do. It is not the same as to the cutting of the hair, however, for those of the southern settlements seem to be vain of it, both men and women, and the latter make large, well-combed braids of it when it is long enough, and the men of theirs make a sort of turban that serves them in lieu of a purse to carry on their heads the beads and other baubles that are given them.

In none of the Missions along the whole extent of two hundred leagues from this Mission to that of San Diego has any idolatry been found among the



MISSION OF SAN FRANCISCO DE ASIS

Drawn in 1826 by William Smyth, Admiralty Mate, of the Beechey Expedition.

This view appeared originally in Forbes's *History of California*, 1839; redrawn it served as an illustration for Dwinelle's *Colonial History of San Francisco*, 1866.

Indians, but only a simple negative unbelief, so that they have not the slightest difficulty in believing any of the mysteries. They have been found to have only a few superstitions and empty ceremonies and among the old men a few tellers of tall tales who claim to cause rain, make the acorns grow, bring the whales, the fish, etc. But they are easily exposed and the Indians themselves convinced that they are imposters who say what they do only to get the presents that are given them. Whenever they fall sick they attribute it to the baleful influence of some enemy, and they insist on burning all who die unconverted, differing in this from the southern Indians who bury their dead, many of the villages, principally those of the Santa Barbara Channel, having their cemeteries nearby for the purpose.

The Indians of this Port live on the seeds of the wild grasses which it falls to the lot of the women to gather when they are in season. These they grind and make flour for their porridge (*atole*). Among the seeds they gather is a black variety and from its flour they make a sort of dumpling, ball-shaped and the size of an orange, which are very rich and savory, like toasted almonds. They also derive sustenance from fish of many kinds, all very healthful, that they catch on the coasts of both [inland and outer] seas, and from the various mussels and other shellfish that always abound. They hunt deer, rabbits, geese, ducks, quail and thrush. When a whale chances to strand on the shore they always make the most of it and celebrate the occasion with a great feast, for they are extremely fond of whale meat, which is all fat and blubber. They cut it in strips, roast it underground and hang it in the trees, and when they want to eat cut off a piece and eat it together with their other foods. They do likewise with the sea-lion, of which they are no less fond than of the whale, for it also is all fat.

They have acorns, too, that they grind and make into their porridge or balls. In the nearby mountains and ravines there are also hazelnuts such as we have in Spain, and on the sand-hills and dunes many strawberries are found, larger than the Spanish variety. These ripen in May and June, as do the wild blackberries. In all the fields and hillsides there is also an abundance of wild onion or soap-root (*amole*), the size of our onion, with a long, round head. Batches of these are covered with earth, a fire is kept burning over them three or four days and when they are well done they are taken out and eaten, and are as sweet and tasty as preserves. Another variety of this plant is not eaten, for it is not sweet, but it serves as soap, making a lather and taking out spots the same as soap of Castile.

The Indians have little need of this, however, as they have no other clothing than that provided by nature. Thus they go about like so many Adamites, without the least blush of shame (that is, the men), and to protect themselves from the cold that prevails the year round at this Mission, especially in the mornings, they smear themselves with mud, saying that it keeps them warm, and when the sun comes out they wash it off. The women dress with some mod-

esty, even to the little girls. They wear for this purpose an apron that they make of tules or of sedge, which does not hang below the knee. A similar one is worn behind, both hanging from a belt so that they form a sort of skirt, which gives them quite an appearance of decency. They also wear similar garments over their shoulders to protect them somewhat from the cold.

Their marriage takes place without more ceremony than the consent of the two parties, and it lasts until they quarrel and separate, joining each with another man or woman, and the children generally following the mother. They have no other expression for the dissolution of a marriage than to say, "I cast him aside" or "I threw her over." Notwithstanding this there are many married couples, both young and old, who live together in the most perfect union and peacefulness, loving their children dearly, as the children do their parents. They take no account of relationship by marriage, but rather incline to take to wife their sisters-in-law and even their mothers-in-law. The custom that they observe is that he who takes a woman takes all her sisters with her, and thus they have many wives but there is no evidence of any jealousy among them, and the elder looks upon the children of her sisters, the second and third wives, with the same love that she bears toward her own, and they all live together in the same house.

At this Mission, on one occasion, we baptized three infants born within two weeks, all children of one Indian by three wives who were sisters. As if this were not enough, he had also taken his mother-in-law to wife. But by the will of God he was converted, and his four wives also, and he kept only the eldest sister who had been his first wife, while the others after their baptism were married according to the Roman ritual to other converts. By this example, and by means of our sermons and our teaching, they are being persuaded to forsake polygamy and are being brought into our Holy Catholic Faith. All the converts live in the precincts of the Mission (*baxo de campana*), going twice a day to church to recite the catechism, and supporting their communal life by the crops of wheat, corn, beans, etc., that they raise. We also have the fruits of Castile—peaches of different kinds, pomegranates, etc.—for the trees that we planted at the founding of the Mission are already bearing. All of the community dress in the clothing that the fathers procured from Mexico at the expense of the *Señor Síndico* [treasurer of the Franciscan College of San Fernando in Mexico City] and by the generosity of several benefactors. And it is well worthy of note that although prior to baptism they had not the slightest modesty, no sooner have they been baptized than there comes over them such a sense of shame that if it becomes necessary to change their drawers or loin cloths because they are too small, they hide and will not show themselves before each other or much less before the father. All that has been said as to the natives of this Port and its environs is true also, with little variation, of those of the other Missions, the differences of language notwithstanding.