

Civilization Approaches Valley Explorers Seek Mythical Island



Fr. Junipero Serra, the father of the California Missions, and one of the foremost men to establish civilization in California. This replica was made in 1773 about the time that Mission San Diego de Alcalá was first started

— Union Title Insurance and Trust Company Historical Collection photo

CALIFORNIA From 1500 to 1770

(This is the third article in a series telling the history of El Cajon Valley. In this story is told those events regarding the naming and discovery of California.)

It may be said that the discovery of California was brought about through the imagination of a Spanish novelist! It was Garcí Ordóñez de Montalvo who penned his romance of chivalry, "Las Sergas de Esplandian" (The Exploits of Esplandian)—a tale of "impossible" experiences in imaginary lands and times.

In this novel is told a strange story of a band of Amazons ruled by Queen Calafia of the Island of California. The band is described as "Amazons, women of great strength and beauty, garbed in jewels, and who permitted no man to live amongst them." The author has even located the island—

"to the right (east) of the Indies, very near the quarter of the terrestrial paradise." With the exception of the distance, the tale was extremely accurate!

Although the entire story was a figure of Montalvo's imagination, so realistically did he write that the story is considered to have had an influence on the 16th century Spanish explorers. During the following 40 years, a steady stream of ships plied the Pacific Coast in search of this fabulous island and an imagined passage to the rich Indies. Even the mighty explorer, Cortez, must have been somewhat influenced by the story, when he named this land of ours California.

In 1515, just 23 years after Columbus was generally conceded the discovery of North America, it was Vasco Núñez Balboa who had the first look, by the civil-



JUAN RODRIGUEZ CARRILLO.

Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo is believed to be the first civilized man to set foot in the San Diego area, on September 28, 1542.

— Union Title Insurance and Trust Company Historical Collection photo.

ized world, at the vast Pacific. There followed Balboa, a number of venturesome explorers, who sought the mythical "Straits of Anian" (the long supposed passage to the East Indies) which Spain fondly hoped was all that separated this new world from the rich spice islands.

To Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo we give the honor of having set the first shod foot upon the soil of California. This was on September 28, 1542. He named the harbor (San Diego) San Miguel. This name and the harbor remained undisturbed for the next 60 years. On November 10, 1602, Sebastian Vizcaino's ship dropped anchor in the bay. Vizcaino had been commissioned by the Spanish government to make a detailed chart of the entire Pacific Coast in an effort to combat the pirates who raided their ships from hiding places along the uncharted coastline. He promptly renamed the bay "San Diego de Alcalá" (Spanish: Saint James of Alcalá) to honor the forthcoming November 12, the saint's feast day.

It is possible, while Vizcaino was visiting the harbor, that civilized man had his first glimpse of the El Cajon Valley. In this explorer's diary, the following entry was made: "The General (?) and Fr. Antonio de la Ascension with some soldiers went over the land to examine it, and all were pleased with the beautiful sky and climate."

Throughout the entire visit there was constant mention in the diary, of the native Indians which gives a good picture of the

considerable population which existed. Almost daily, Vizcaino tells of his men meeting different bands of savages, and constantly he mentions their appearance such as "clothed in animal skins" or "completely naked." This bears out the fact, mentioned earlier, that the native savages were a most primitive race.

The civilized world forgot San Diego for the next 167 years. Spain found it necessary to turn all her interests to the wars in which she had become involved, rather than to continue with the explorations in which she had been so active. It was not until Russia had begun to take advantage of Spain's accounts of her exploits into this new world, advancing down the west coast from Alaska, that she again became interested. There were other rumors that American colonies along the Atlantic Coast

had designs on the colonizing of this unsettled area, before their break with England.

Spain immediately decided to secure her rights of discovery. Almost within a matter of a few short months, the port of San Diego became the center of monumental events which lead to the eventual settlement of the State.

It was in the year 1769, just one hundred years before El Cajon came into the hands of the first American, from May through June, that the missionaries started arriving here from Mexico. All told, during this two-month period, there were three expeditions by sea and two by land. It was in the first land party that Father Junipero Serra arrived, later to be honored as the Father of California.

The privations, which these first settlers and men of God suffered,

is a story in its self. However, there is one incident which does crop up, and that is from the accounts of these first settlers which indirectly may have had bearing on the El Cajon Valley.

These accounts tell of the Indians from the "back country" who were most resentful of the intrusion of the white man. One source tells that these "unconverted Indians, supposedly from near the Jamacha," caused considerable concern with their "thievery and attacks." Such accounts certainly give the impression, that as early as the 1770's, there must have been a considerable number of expeditions in and around El Cajon Valley.

Thus, in these 270 years, El Cajon Valley, perhaps as yet unnamed, was near to the first civilization which arrived in the new Western World.