

DAWN OF CALIFORNIA

By Cecilia Jensen Carpenter

I Discovery

Out of the dark recesses of history's voluminous pocket come tales of the early settling of the California coast.

Even in the 16th century, the beckoning finger of gold was the prime factor leading to the discovery and exploration of California.

Led by fables of the Seven Cities of Cibola, (seven villages of the Zuni Indians, which highly colored reports by travelers pictured as built of gold) and the northern isle of the Amazon Queen, described as rich in pearls and gold, Cortes pushed his expeditions up the coast from Mexico and discovered the peninsula of Baja California.

After several other expeditions ending in failure to find the fabled cities of Cibola, Cortes, discouraged by opposition in both America and Spain, decided to return to his family in Spain. He left the colony at Santa Cruz in charge of Francisco de Ulloa with instructions that he make a voyage north later in another attempt to find the cities.

On July 8, 1539, three vessels embarked under Ulloa. Although they failed to find the Strait of Anian, the Seven Cities of Cibola and other fabled treasure points, since they were driven back by contrary winds and lack of provisions, Ulloa discovered that California was a peninsula rather than an island as had been supposed.

Three years later, Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza, who had been left in control of Mexico when Cortes shook the dust of the New World from his feet, placed two ships, the San Salvador and the frigate Victoria under the leadership of Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo "a navigator of great courage and honor and a thorough seaman," with instructions to explore beyond the point reached by Ulloa.

At midday of June 27, 1542, only 50 years after discovery of America by Columbus, the sails were unfurled and a start made from the port of Navidad, Mexico. Seven and a half months were spent on the voyage.

On Sunday, Sept. 17, 1542, they entered a "good port well inclosed" which they named San Miguel. This was the bay of San Diego, as it was renamed later by Sebastian Vizcaino.

The entrance into this bay on that date marks the discovery of Alta California.

(Next: Cabrillo's Voyage)

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IV

Naming of California (1)

The euphonic and romantic name of California continued in usage for the land discovered by Cabrillo in 1542, although in some of the early maps it is called *Islas Carolinas*; in honor of Carlos II of Spain, and Francis Drake called it New Albion.

Where the name California came from has been a mystery in which various theories have been advanced. Included in these are the theories that it was derived from the Latin *calida fornax* (hot oven) because of the hot, dry climate of Baja California; or *cala fornix* (vault) from an arch where Cortes landed; or *cal y forno* (lime kiln); or a mythical priest called Father Cal y Fornia.

None of these theories have sufficient evidence to bolster their claims.

The most acceptable explanation is that the name California evolved, through a series of writings and circumstances, from the ancient Berber city, *Kalafirene* in northern Africa.

This capital city of Barbary in the 11th century was of such ancient origin that its founding was attributed to giants. It rivaled in magnificence the great cities of the Mussulman world.

In the "Chanson of Roland", French epic poem dating about the 11th century, the Emperor Charlemagne laments for the death of his nephew, the young knight Roland. He cries "And now the Saxons will rebel against me, and the Hungarians, Bulgarians, and many others, the Romans, the Apulians, and those of Palermo, those of Africa, and those of Califerne."

It is believed that "Califerne" refers to the African city *Kalafirene* and that the "Chanson of Roland" was read by Ordenez de Montalvo, who sometime between 1492 and 1504, wrote "Las Sergas de Esplandian" as a sequel to the famous novel of chivalry, "Amadis de Gaula," by Vasco de Lobeira, Portuguese writer.

In this novel of chivalry appears for the first time the word California as the name of a wonderful island of Amazons, ruled over by a pagan queen, Calafia.

(Next: Naming California (2))

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XIII

San Francisco Bay Discovered

Pushing northward to find the elusive Monterey bay, Gaspar de Portala and his men, on Oct. 11, 1769, arrived at a point near Drake's bay where they were forced to the conclusion that Monterey bay had been left behind.

On Nov. 1, Sgt. Jose Francisco de Ortega with a few men, was sent to explore. The next day some of their party, sent out to hunt deer, came back in excitement to report discovery of a "great arm of the sea."

Ortega probably saw the Golden Gate and San Francisco bay first but to Portala, commander of the expedition, goes the credit for being the discoverer.

After a rest, and a feast on mussels, wild ducks and geese, they decided to return, and on reaching Carmel bay, set up a cross on the shore with a letter buried at the foot telling of the expedition to any ship that might arrive. They crossed Point Cypress peninsula and on the shore of Monterey bay, which they still failed to recognize, they placed another large cross and on the arm carved the words, "The land expedition is returning to San Diego for lack of provisions, today, Dec. 9, 1769."

Arriving at San Diego with the disheartening news that they had failed in their effort to establish a mission at Monterey, but had found a greater bay farther north, they were greeted with elation by Friar Junipera Serra.

"Our Father St. Francis has made known his port to us. We shall name it San Francisco in his honor, and we will build a mission there," he cried.

His elation was occasioned by the fact that when Jose de Galvez had dispatched the expeditions, he had named a mission for San Diego de Alcala, another in honor of San Carlos at Monterey and a third for San Buenaventura.

When Friar Serra asked him if there was to be no mission in honor of St. Francis, Galvez had replied "If St. Francis desires a mission, let him show us his harbor."

(Next: Friar Serra's Prayer)

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XIV

Friar Serra's Prayer

Two days after Portala's expedition had left San Diego for the trip north, Friar Junipera Serra, on July 16, 1769, founded the mission of San Diego.

A cross was set up facing the port, and in a bower of branches and reeds, mass was celebrated with Veni Creator being sung. Firearms were discharged for want of an organ, and the only incense was the smoke of muskets.

During the intervening eight months before Portala's return, the group at San Diego suffered illness and increasing trouble with the Indians. The new mission was on the verge of starvation and not one Indian neophyte had been secured.

Gov. Portala, who had been buoyed up on the long journey from San Francisco with the hope of cheering news at San Diego, quickly grasped the true situation and ordered all hands on board the San Carlos that the expedition might return to Old Mexico while it was still possible.

Dismayed, Friar Serra asked that they wait a little longer for the relief ship which Galvez had promised to send, but which through the long months of waiting they had given up as lost.

His request was granted, and March 20 was set as the day for sailing. On the preceding day, when hope had been abandoned, and the men were hastily packing what was worth taking, Friar Serra climbed to the top of Presidio Hill and supplicated the Lord to send the missing ship to starving San Diego.

All day long he watched the sea and prayed.

As the golden sun pulled its last rays over the horizon, a distant sail appeared against the sky. It disappeared again, but the sight was enough to send Friar Serra joyously back to camp with the news.

A short time later the promised ship sailed into the harbor bringing food, hope and encouragement to the little band of explorer-settlers, and opening the way for establishment of the string of 21 missions which brought civilization to the California coast.

(Next: Founding of Monterey)