

# American Mission Furniture And The Mallorca Connection

Mike Samuels

Researching for a feature on Spanish Mission Furniture, on page 16, I unearthed an amazing story...

During the colonising of America, Spanish missionaries played a large part in bringing education and peace to the land and many of these early settlers were actually from Mallorca.

## FATHER JUNÍPERO SERRA WAS ONE SUCH MINISTER...

Father Junipero Serra, a Franciscan padre and founder of the Mission system that anchored Spain's colonisation of California, was born Miguel Jose Serra in Petra, Mallorca, the son of peasant farmers.

Earnest, intelligent and deeply religious from an early age, he was schooled by Franciscans and sent to Lullian University in Palma, Mallorca

There stayed as a student, scholar, orator and professor of philosophy for 15 years.

His given name, Miguel Jose, made way for the adopted name of Junipero, after Brother Juniper, a companion and ardent disciple of St. Francis of Assisi, founder of the Franciscan Order and was ordained a priest shortly before Christmas, 1737.

At the age of 36, middle-aged by 18th century standards, Friar Serra turned his back on the comfort and routine of academic life to answer a call for missionaries in the New World.

In August, 1749, he set sail for Mexico accompanied by two of his university students, Fathers Francisco Palou and Juan Crespi. Arriving in Vera Cruz, he set out on foot for Mexico City, site of the College of San Fernando, the hub of Franciscan activities in the New World.

It was during this arduous trek, covering more than 260 miles, that Friar

## THE LIFE AND TIMES OF FATHER SERRA

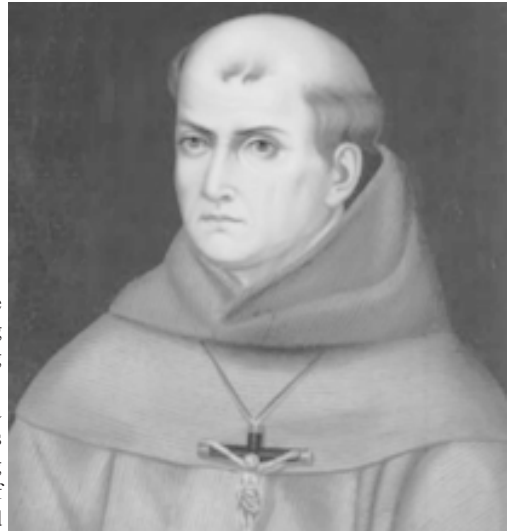
Serra's left foot and leg became infected from an insect bite, leaving him permanently lame and causing him pain and suffering all his life.

"By the time that Serra arrived in the New World," writes Theodore Maynard in *The Long Road of Father Serra*, "the period of military conquest was considered over, except for occasional flurries, and the conquest had passed to a new agency, that of the missionaries.

The missionaries of course had always accompanied every Spanish army, which looked upon itself as engaged in a crusade, but peace was now normal, and what remained to be done could be brought about more effectively by the cross rather than the sword."

Friar Serra stayed in Mexico for almost 20 years before undertaking the work for which he is remembered.

The call came unexpectedly in 1769, when he was instructed to join dragoon captain Gaspar de Portola on an expedition



soldiers were to head north to find Monterey Bay and secure its harbour.

Four separate parties left Baja, two by land, a distance of about 400 miles and two by sea.

All reached San Diego but at a terrible price. Twenty-four men aboard one of the vessels died of scurvy or plague, while many others arrived sick and disabled.

Most of the Indians who had joined the two land parties died or deserted. A relief ship carrying food and supplies from Baja was lost at sea.

Friar Serra, a member of the second land party, limped into San Diego suffering greatly from his swollen leg. Nevertheless,

on July 16, 1769, sixteen days after his arrival, he founded the first of California's twenty-one Missions, San Diego de Alcala.

The second Mission, San Carlos Borromeo, opened temporarily at Monterey, then permanently beside the Carmel River in 1771. Thereafter it became the headquarters of Mission operations in the state.

The third Mission, San Antonio de Padua, was not located in the Santa Barbara Channel area as originally planned, but near present day King City *Continued on Page 8...*



THE FIRST MISSION  
SAN DIEGO DE ALCALA 1769

to New California, what is today the state of California.

The plan was to establish Missions at three strategic points -- San Diego, the Monterey Bay area, and the Santa Barbara Channel area, each with a presidio or garrison for protection.

Although small in size, these outposts would represent Spain's claim to the region if challenged by England, Russia or another imperial power.

San Diego was to be the rendezvous point from which Portola and a small band of



# THE LIFE AND TIMES OF FATHER SERRA

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in Monterey County in 1771.

The "Channel" Mission, San Buenaventura, was finally built in 1782 — the last of the nine Missions to be erected during Friar Serra's lifetime.

The 21st and last Mission, San Francisco Solano, was built in Sonoma in 1823. Linking all the Missions was the famed El Camino Real, the "King's" or "Royal" Highway running from Loreto in Baja, California, to San Francisco. In part, it is the route followed today by Highway 101.

The Mission system endured for 65 years, all of them laden with challenges. As James D. Hart writes in *A Companion to California*: "Conversion of members of the



tribes who came to be called Mission Indians was slow."

But difficulties also came from poor supply lines, insufficient equipment and food, strained relations with

Mexico, and problems in converting and controlling the generally docile but sometimes hostile Indians."

Blessed with an even temper, good humour, and administrative skill, Friar Serra was the glue that held the system together during its early years.

Despite his austere habits, he used a board for a bed or slept on the ground, being only 5-ft., 2-in. he was a tireless worker with an unshakeable faith in his mission of saving souls, which he regarded as more important than "civilising" the natives to make them good subjects of the King of Spain.



He fought hard to limit the military's authority over the padres' conduct of Mission life.

He spoke out against a government plan that would have ended all ship-building in Baja and left the Missions entirely dependent on overland mule trains for their supplies.

He vigorously opposed early efforts by Spanish authorities to convert the Missions into pueblos or villages, the Mission Indians, he argued, were not yet ready for independent living or ownership of private property.

In 1822 Santa Barbara held nearly 122,000 acres with orchards, vineyards, many



TO THE MEMORY OF  
FRAY JUNIPERO SERRA. O.F.M.  
ON JULY 16, 1769 HE FOUNDED AND  
ESTABLISHED MISSION SAN DIEGO DE ALCALA  
HE THUS FORMED THE LINK BETWEEN HIS  
HOME CITY PETRA DE MALLORCA, SPAIN,  
WITH THE FIRST OF THE GREAT MISSIONS IN  
ALTA CALIFORNIA.  
PRESENTED TO THE CITIZENS OF PETRA DE  
MALLORCA, SPAIN BY THE CITIZENS OF  
SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA  
DURING THEIR BICENTENAL YEAR

horses, cattle, sheep, goats, and swine"

The missions themselves, usually built as a quadrangle, contained a church, workshops, living and dining quarters for priests, a library, and an infirmary with outbuildings for the Indian men, unmarried women were often locked in a dormitory, and an adjacent cemetery.

The buildings were architecturally attractive, even though they rarely had skilled builders.

They differed in design but all featured stuccoed adobe, tiled roofs, and covered



arcades.

Some contained a campanile, others a campanario (a wall with open insets for bells), Moorish-styled windows and pilasters and other adornments to enhance otherwise simple faces.

*Friar Serra died in his sleep at the Carmel Mission on Aug. 28, 1784, at the*

*age of 70.*

His body rests under the Mission altar alongside his Mallorca friend and former student, Friar Crespi, who died two years earlier after a distinguished life as a priest and explorer.

His other lifelong friend, Friar Palou, went on to write an invaluable biography of Friar Serra as well as an important history of the region, *Noticias de la Nuevo California*.

FATHER JUNIPERO SERRA  
SON OF MALLORCA

BEATIFIED BY  
POPE JOHN  
PAUL II  
SEPT. 25, 1988.



While we're in the Wild West...

The Lone Ranger and Tonto walked into a bar and sat down to drink a beer. After a few minutes, a big tall cowboy walked in and said, "Who owns the big white horse outside?"

The Lone Ranger said, "I do, Why?"  
The cowboy said, "I just thought you'd like to know that your horse is about dead outside!"

The Lone Ranger and Tonto rushed outside and sure enough Silver was about to die from heat exhaustion. The Lone Ranger got water and soon Silver was starting to feel a little better. The Lone Ranger turns to Tonto and said, "I want you to run around Silver and see if you can create enough of a breeze to help cool him down."

Tonto said, "Sure, Kemosabe" and begins running circles around Silver.

Unable to do anything except wait, the Lone Ranger returns to the bar to finish his drink.

A few minutes later, another cowboy struts into the bar and asks, "Who owns that big white horse outside?"

The Lone Ranger stands and claims, "I do, what's wrong with him this time?"

The cowboy looks him in the eye and says, "Nothing, but you left your Injun running."

One morning a man came into the church on crutches. He stopped in front of the holy water, put some on both legs, and then threw away his crutches.

An altar boy witnessed the scene and then ran into the rectory to tell the priest what he'd just seen.

"Son, you've just witnessed a miracle," the priest said. "Tell me, where is this man now?"

"Flat on his ass over by the holy water," said the boy.

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