

FRANCISCO PALÓU

1776



About the same time Father Santa María was inviting San Francisco Bay Indians onboard the *San Carlos*, Captain Juan Bautista de Anza was beginning his second overland expedition from Sonora to California. Born in Mexico of Spanish parents, Anza had dreamt since boyhood of exploring Alta California, that mysterious region to the north. Whereas his earlier expedition of 1774 had been exploratory, the expedition of 1776 was colonizing; this time Anza's party consisted of thirty-four families (including the first non-Indian women and children to see Alta California) and more than a thousand mules, horses, and cattle. Their goal, set forth by Viceroy Bucareli, was to establish and populate two new missions and a *presidio* at San Francisco Bay. Alta California had such an unsavory reputation that Bucareli had to promise to pay for the colonists' clothing, food, and supplies for years to come, and still only Sonora's poorest families had volunteered. Bucareli sent married soldiers because he hoped it would decrease the troublingly high number of rapes at the missions.

Their 500-mile route followed the Gila River through present-day Arizona, forded the Colorado River, and crossed the desert to Mission San Gabriel Arcángel (nine miles from where the *pueblo* of Los Angeles would be founded in 1781). As was customary on such

expeditions, the colonists made do with the plainest of rations while Captain Anza dined on sausage, wine, cheese, and chocolate. Despite the length and danger of the trip, the 240-member party arrived at San Gabriel in January 1776 numbering 244, as several women had given birth on the trail. Anza's route, clearly more feasible than Portolá's coastal one, would be used by subsequent caravans in the 1820s.

While resting at Mission San Gabriel, they received news of an Indian attack on Mission San Diego two months earlier that had left a *padre* and two soldiers dead. The violence at San Diego was one example of a dozen similar rebellions that sooner or later arose at almost every mission in California. Due to superior Spanish weapons and the inability of dissimilar tribes to unite, the uprisings tended to be localized and short-lived. (One exception came in 1781 when members of the Yuma tribe destroyed two missions along the Colorado River and killed thirty-four Spaniards, effectively closing Anza's trail for forty years.) Indian resistance more commonly came in the form of desertion, raids on mission livestock, and noncooperation.

Gobernador Rivera was marching to San Diego to reclaim the mission, and Anza agreed to accompany him, bringing along twenty of his San Francisco-bound colonists. On the way, Rivera—sixty-five-years old, bitterly jealous of young Anza, and unconvinced of the need for new missions—tried to dissuade him from continuing on to San Francisco Bay, pleading, "Why do you want to go there and tire yourselves out, when I have already told you that I have carefully examined all that region, and have reported to the viceroy that there is nothing there for the purpose in mind?" They arrived in San Diego along with two supply ships from San Blas and another battalion of soldiers from Mexico. Together they overwhelmed the insurgent Ipai and Tipai Indians.

Shrugging off Rivera's warnings, Anza proceeded up the coast, reaching Monterey in March 1776. Word had spread of the expedition's arrival, and a large group of *padres*, soldiers, and Indians gathered to watch Anza's colorful menagerie (men, women, children, and animals) troop in. The colonists overflowed the *presidio* and had

to erect tents in the *plaza*. Although Mission San Carlos was hardly prosperous, Serra managed to feed and outfit the expedition, delighted that his proposed missions on San Francisco Bay were finally materializing. He also sent along two *padres*—including Father Francisco Palóu—to man the first mission. It was not Palóu's first visit to the Bay Area; he had traveled there with Rivera in 1774 and decided San Francisquito Creek (near present-day Palo Alto) would be an ideal site for a mission.

On June 27, 1776, the expedition reached the sandy, northernmost tip of the San Francisco peninsula where Anza, scouting ahead, had selected a site for the new *presidio*. About three miles to the southeast, they started building Mission San Francisco de Asís near a small creek they named Laguna de Nuestra Señora de los Dolores, soon spawning the nickname Mission Dolores. (In later years, the area's fog and cold weather would cause Palóu to regret they had not chosen his earlier suggested site near sunny San Francisquito Creek.) Formal establishment was delayed for several months due to the tardiness of the supply ship *San Carlos* and Rivera's refusal to issue the proper orders. By the autumn of 1776, while on the other side of the continent American revolutionaries warred with Great Britain for independence, Spain finally secured a military and religious presence (feeble, to be sure) in San Francisco Bay. The colonists split up—some remained in Monterey, others settled at the San Francisco *presidio*, and a few moved to San José, Alta California's first Spanish *pueblo*, founded a year later.

Palóu's description of the founding of San Francisco's mission and *presidio* appeared in his 1787 biography of Junípero Serra. Like Crespí, Palóu had fallen under Serra's spell while a young philosophy student in Majorca. It marked the beginning of an intense friendship that would last nearly forty-five years and span two continents. "From the year 1740 when [Serra] received me as one of his students, until the year 1784 when death separated us, I was the object of his very special affection, an affection we always mutually shared, more than if we had been brothers in the flesh," wrote Palóu. In fact, he

spent most of his adult life following Serra from place to place and chronicling his exploits. Palóu headed Mission San Francisco de Asís for its first eight years and took over as president-general of the Alta California missions for a short time after Serra's death in 1784. Three years later, Palóu wrote California's first published biography, *Relación Histórica de la Vida y Apostólicas Tareas del Venerable Padre Fray Junípero Serra*. Written expressly to help procure Serra's beatification, it contains anecdote after gushing anecdote demonstrating Serra's courage, kindness, and saintliness (including several miracles attributed to him). Much of Serra's subsequent fame stemmed from Palóu's loving, detailed biography. Palóu died soon after the book's publication, having spent nearly forty years of his life in the New World. The following selection from Palou's *Relación Histórica* recounts the founding of Mission Dolores in the summer and autumn of 1776.

FRANCISCO PALÓU

*Account of the founding of
Mission Dolores*

*J*une 23, 1776. 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 fanlike with their many points would either



Francisco Palóu (ca. 1722–1789). Courtesy of The Bancroft Library.

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 halfway 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*, 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 toward this port.

On the 27th day of June we arrived in the vicinity of this port [San Francisco Bay], and a camp was made composed of fifteen bell-shaped tents on the shore of a large lagoon that empties into the arm of the bay, which extends fifteen 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 SS. Peter and Paul. 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



"The Indian Manner of Combat," 1791, by José Cardero, an artist who visited California with a Spanish scientific expedition led by Alejandro Malaspina. *Courtesy of The Bancroft Library.*

a month and neither the ship nor the soldiers that Commander [Fernando] 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 of August, its delay having been due to contrary winds, which had forced it down to 32° [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....

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,¹ 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 [at Mission San Francisco], and the teaching of the catechism still goes on.

¹ The Salson Indians, an Ohlone-speaking people who lived near present-day San Mateo, in fact attacked and burned several neighboring villages in August 1776; their violence may have been an attempt to secure Spanish favors for themselves or simply part of a local feud.