

Time Line for the Establishment of the Pueblo de Branciforte

By Phil Reader

1542

Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo and Bartolome Ferrelo, flying the flag of Spain, explore the west coast of North America.

1565

The Crown-sponsored Manila Galleons, from New Spain, begin their yearly transpacific voyages of commerce to the Philippines. On the return trip they pass down the coastline to Acapulco.

1579

English privateer Francis Drake sails up the coast of California in search of the Northwest Passage.

1595

Merchant/adventurer Sebastian Rodriguez Cermeno unsuccessfully explores the California coast for an acceptable port-of-call for the Manila Galleons.

1602

Sebastian Vizcaino, also in search of good harbor, discovers Monterey Bay. His discovery sets the scene for the settlement of the Alta California region.

1769

Father Junipero Serra and Captain Gaspar de Portola begin the land-based exploration and settlement of Alta California.

1774

Spanish navigator Juan Perez discovers the Nootka Sound, a harbor on what was to become Vancouver Island, and claims it for Spain.

1778

English explorer Captain James Cook lays the foundation for a British claim to the region when he visits the harbor and names the Nootka Sound. During the next decade several countries, including both Spain and England, as well as the Russians, French and Americans, vie for control of the area.

1789, May 5

"The Nootka Incident."—Fearing the loss of the Nootka harbor and her dominance in the region, the Spanish government dispatched two vessels, under the command of Estaban Jose Martinez, to secure the sounds. Upon arrival, he found five other ships anchored there already. Two British, two American and one Portuguese. Martinez captured the two English ships in an action which led to a threat of war between Spain and England. However, international pressure was quickly brought to bear upon the two old adversaries.

1790, October 28

A costly war was averted by the compromises which were reached at the "Nootka Convention". Under the terms which were finally agreed upon on April 2, 1794, both nations should have access to the Nootka Sound, but Britain could not enter upon or establish any bases in Alta California. In spite of the compromise, Spain continued to view the British intentions in the Pacific region with a great deal of suspicion.

1794

Miguel de la Grua Talamanca, Marques de Branciforte, succeeds Juan Vicente Pacheco de Padilla, conde de Revilia Gigedo, as Viceroy of New Spain. Branciforte - like his predecessor - is acutely aware of the vulnerability of Spain's Alta California province. With this in mind, he sets about planning for the defense of the region.

1794, October 17

Miguel Costanso, a military engineer with geographical knowledge of the area, sends a letter to Branciforte containing a plan for the bolstering of California's military defenses. Costanso suggests settling retired soldiers in the area.

1795, November 17

Don Jose Maria Beltran, Royal Exchequer and Minister in Charge of the 2nd Naval Department, drafts a detailed plan for the fortification of Alta California. Using Costanso's suggestion, he recommends establishing a new pueblo in central California to be populated by retired soldiers, skilled craftsmen and Christianized Indians. Following Viceroy Branciforte's approval, a Free Company of Catalonian Volunteers—numbering 75—is dispatched to Alta California, where, upon completing their terms of enlistment, they are to become land grantees of the new pueblo.

1796, January to June

Lieutenant Alberto de Cordoba and Diego de Borcia, Governor of Alta California, seek out an appropriate site for the pueblo, which is to be named in honor of Viceroy Branciforte. They investigate three possible locations: one at Alameda, another near the presidio at San Francisco, and the third on the east bank of the San Lorenzo River across from the Santa Cruz Mission.

1796, April

Lieutenant-Colonel Pedro de Alborni arrives at San Francisco with the Catalonian Volunteers. However, they are sent to various presidios throughout Alta California.

1796, August 4

Governor de Borcia reports to Viceroy Branciforte that the Santa Cruz site is best suited for settlement and recommends that the "Pueblo de Branciforte" be established there.

1796, October 6

Cordoba draws up a detailed plan for the center of the pueblo which, in compliance with the Laws of the Indies, included a plaza, streets, houses, a church and town-lots. He also sketches a map of the four leagues of land which are to belong to the pueblo. These, along with his other recommendations, are sent to Branciforte in Mexico City.

1797, February 25

Viceroy Branciforte orders the establishment of the Pueblo de Branciforte on a bluff above the San Lorenzo River. The recruitment of settlers for the pueblo begins in New Spain.

1797, June 20

The first group of colonists from Guadalajara arrive at Branciforte.

1797, July 24

Governor Diego de Borcia formally dedicates the Pueblo de Branciforte at the site.

Sources

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