



Statue of Friar Juniper de la Serra in the Capitol's National Statuary Hall, in Washington DC

THE FOUNDING FATHERS OF CALIFORNIA

The first three governors of California were Catalans: Gaspar de Portolà (1769-70), Pere Fages (1782-90) and Josep Antoni Romeu (1790-91).

In 1769, Gaspar de Portolà left Guadalajara (in Mexico, at the time part of New Spain) in order to explore and colonise *Alta California* (Upper California), accompanied by the Free Company of Volunteers of Catalonia, led by Pere Fages. The expedition was key to the founding of the future great cities of San Diego, Monterey and San Francisco. In order to strengthen the colonising dimension of the endeavour, the explorers' wives arrived from Catalonia in 1781.

In 1789, the Free Company undertook another expedition, this time led by Pere d'Alberni. They headed towards the north, scrutinising the Pacific Coast of the North American continent. They eventually arrived in Nootka Sound, the present-day island of Vancouver, which had earlier been 'discovered' by another Catalan, Joan Peris, in 1774. The Company were to remain there for two years, building a fort, an experimental farm and even collecting the first vocabulary of the native inhabitants' language, containing some 600 words.

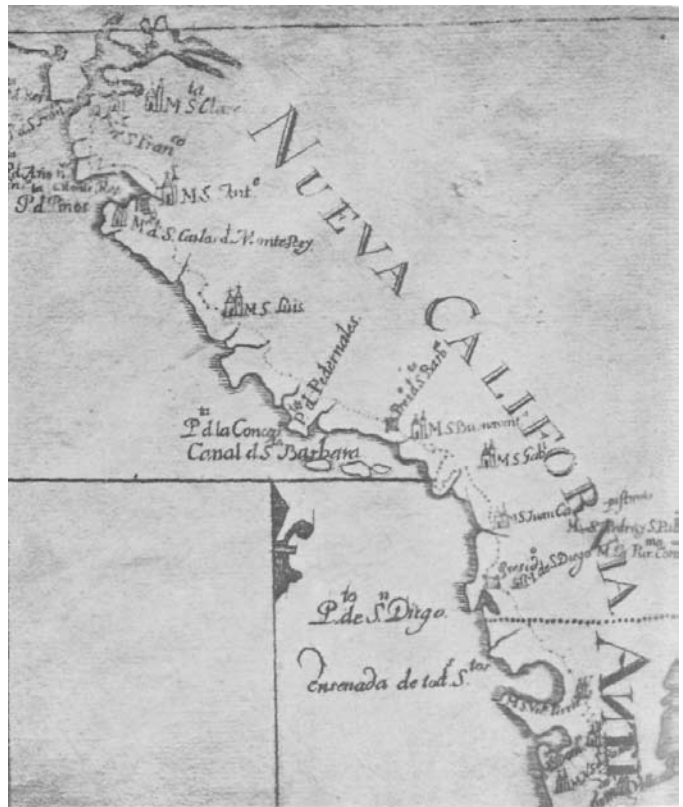
In 1790, a new expedition left the base in Nootka to explore further to the north. They undertook cartographic research whilst travelling to Kodiak Island in Alaska.

The foundations of the future California were not only laid by Catalan explorers, however. Another expedition ran parallel to the Free Company's seaborne expedition of 1769. It moved on land and was led by Franciscan monks origi-

nating from the Franciscan province of Majorca (the largest of the Catalan-speaking Balearic Islands) and headed by Friar Juníper de la Serra.

Moving more slowly on foot with ox caravans, the Franciscans were the first to outline what was later to become the renowned *Camino Real* (Royal Way). The task was immense, with the construction of missions and forts, and complex networks of canals, paths and seaports. Typically Mediterranean construction techniques were used, such as tiles. There was also the introduction of cattle and crops that were of Mediterranean origin, thus laying the foundations of the Californian wine industry that is currently so well celebrated.

Since 1931, the first Franciscan leader in Upper California, Friar Juníper de la Serra, has been officially considered one of California's founding fathers. He is represented in a statue in the National Statuary Hall of the Capitol Building



in Washington DC, the sculpture gallery of the Founding Fathers of the various states that make up the present day United States.

One of the first maps of Upper California

'This section is coordinated by Manuel Manonelles