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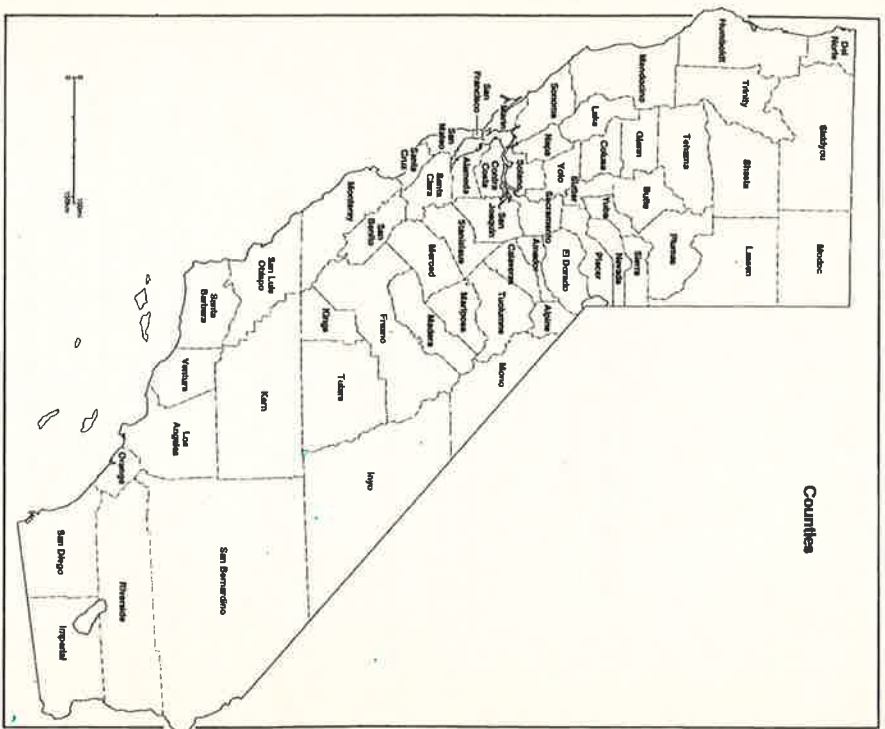
CALIFORNIA

A History

KEVIN STARR



A MODERN LIBRARY CHRONICLES BOOK
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NEW YORK



The Counties of California
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torians, for it underscored from an English point of view the competition between two great civilizations for California and other regions on the North American continent.

So, too, were the Spaniards discovering—tentatively, even feebly, given the vast distances and their slender resources—the importance of a California connection. In 1584 a galleon commanded by Francisco de Gali discovered that the best way to get from the Philippines to New Spain was to follow the Japanese current westward, head directly toward the coast of Alta California off Cape Mendocino, then sail down the coast of California (Alta and Baja) and round Cape San Lucas to Acapulco on the western Mexican coast. This route was followed regularly by the Philippine galleons in the years to come. Unfortunately, the voyage across the Pacific could take as long as two hundred days, and few crews escaped a deadly toll of scurvy, dysentery, beriberi, vermin, the usual round of shipboard accidents, and even death from lightning. Logically, then, there emerged a plan in the mid-1580s in the mind of Pedro de Moya y Contreras, viceroy of New Spain and archbishop of Mexico: find and develop a port on the coast of Alta California where the Manila galleons could land before continuing south.

In 1595 the viceroy entrusted an exploratory expedition to the Portuguese merchant-adventurer Sebastián Rodríguez Cermeño. Take the galleon *San Agustín* across the Pacific from the Philippines, the viceroy instructed, and explore the coast of Alta California for possible ports. On November 6, 1595, after the usual horrible voyage, the *San Agustín* anchored in the same bay where the *Golden Hind* had found safe harbor. Cermeño named the harbor the Bay of San Francisco and formally claimed the region for Spain. Unfortunately, on November 30, 1595, a sudden storm drove the *San Agustín* aground at Point Reyes, scattering its treasure on the shore. For generations to come, the Coast Miwok would fashion ornaments from shards of shipwrecked china; eventually, one intact teacup would be dis-

covered by an amateur archaeologist. All that was left to Cermeño and his crew of seventy after the shipwreck was a makeshift launch they called the *San Buenaventura*, constructed from the wreckage. In this fragile bark, Cermeño and his men poked their way down the California coast to Acapulco, missing the Bay of San Francisco entirely and subsisting on fish and acorns provided by friendly Indians.

There had to be a better way to explore the California coast, and that was a formally commissioned and provisioned expedition from Mexico northward, as opposed to the use of galleon crews exhausted by more than two hundred days at sea. And so the Spaniards made one last reconnaissance before—as it turned out—abandoning Alta California entirely for the next 167 years. This last effort was impressive: three vessels with a crew of two hundred accompanied by three Carmelite chaplains, under the command of Sebastián Vizcaíno, a merchant-navigator with long experience in Mexico and the Philippines. Commissioned captain general of the expedition, Vizcaíno sailed from Acapulco on May 5, 1602. Reaching and naming the Bay of San Diego on November 10, he methodically explored his way up the coast, arriving on December 16 at a bay that he named in honor of the viceroy, the Conde de Monterey. Moving north, the Vizcaíno expedition—once again, one is tempted to say!—missed the entrance to San Francisco Bay, although the Spanish ships did pass close to the Farallon Islands off the entrance to that great harbor. Vizcaíno sailed as far north as Cape Mendocino before bad weather and scurvy forced his return to Acapulco.

Never one to hide his light under a bushel, Vizcaíno made much of the maps and descriptions of the California coastline his crew had assembled. He was especially boastful of the Bay of Monterey as being the perfect harbor for Manila galleons arriving from the Philippines. Yet while Vizcaíno, promoted to the rank of admiral, went on to a distinguished career exploring and