



On April 11, 1769 the first seaborne contingent of Spanish settlement arrived at a quiet harbor in San Diego aboard the *San Antonio*. Just a scant three months later, these Spanish soldiers and missionaries, led by a Franciscan priest named Junipero Serra, gathered amid oaks and coastal sage scrub to dedicate the founding of Mission San Diego de Alcalá. The two events set into motion the first of 21 missions extending northward and the evolution of that calm harbor into a working Port.

They weren't alone. Indigenous peoples were there too. They had arrived 10,000 years or more earlier, but that moment marked a different beginning, not just a new mission but the beginning of a new city named San Diego and more broadly, a state called California.

Serra wasn't the first European to see the place. The Portuguese explorer Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo briefly sailed into the local bay in 1542 on his flagship, the *San Salvador*. Sebastián Vizcaíno followed in 1602, mapping and naming the area after his own ship, the *San Diego* and a sanctified 15th century Spanish missionary.

But the dedication of San Diego de Alcalá – “the mother of missions” – marked the birth of modern San Diego and the next two and a half centuries of civic history—a time to remark and celebrate.

Settlers moved from inland to the flats beside a rich bay, what is now Old San Diego. In 1820, there were a mere 600 residents. But in the decades to come, many more people would come. Some, like author Richard Henry Dana and Helen Hunt Jackson, would not stay long, but vividly recount time spent here. Others like William Heath Davis and Alonzo Erastus Horton would buy land and build, businesses and dreams. In 1850, the city incorporated. Its first mayor was Joshua Bean, brother of notorious Judge Roy.

Civic leaders like George W. Marston, John D. Spreckels, Elisha Babcock, H.L. Story and the Kimball Brothers built empires of trade and tourism – and laid foundations for those who followed, such as installing the first electric street railway system west of the Mississippi River in 1887 and the first modern playhouse, Spreckels Theatre, in 1912. Kate Sessions would beautify San Diego, planting thousands of trees and plants in what is now Balboa Park, one of the oldest public parks in the nation.

San Diegans reached for the sky. In 1883, John Montgomery made the world's first “controlled flight” in a heavier-than-air craft, flying 600 feet in a glider at Otay Mesa. The Wright brothers wouldn't fly at Kitty Hawk for another 16 years. Glenn Curtiss successfully flew the first seaplane off Spanish Bight in 1911. Charles Lindbergh departed May 9, 1927 in a

custom-built monoplane called the Spirit of St. Louis, with plans to fly solo from New York City to Paris. San Diego dedicated its airfield to him one year later.

The U.S. Navy's Great White Fleet paid a port of call in 1908. Four years later, it launched plans to build a naval training station, hospital, repair facilities and air base on North Island, the latter with just three planes and three fliers. The Army and Marines followed suit, building bases of their own. Two world wars swelled ranks, jobs and ambitions.

In 1936, the city got its first professional baseball team, the Pacific Coast League Padres, and glimpsed a remarkable 18-year-old outfielder from Hoover High School named Ted Williams. The San Diego Chargers arrive in 1961, playing in four of the first five American Football league national championship games.

San Diego is a mindful city. In 1897, San Diego Normal School began educating local women to become elementary school teachers. It had seven faculty and 91 students. In 1923, it became the San Diego Teachers College, moved in 1931, expanded beyond teaching teachers and became, in 1974, San Diego State University. Today, it has more than 1,600 faculty, 91 undergraduate majors and almost 35,000 students.

The University of San Diego was founded in 1954. The University of California San Diego established in 1960 with 63 acres deeded by the city to the state. Over the years, UC San Diego too grown: 2,141 acres (including Scripps Institution of Oceanography, founded in 1903), 1,460 faculty and nearly 40,000 students. It is considered one of the finest research universities in the world.

The San Diego Zoo, created by Harry Wegeforth with animals imported for the 1915 Panama-California Exposition, is world famous too, as is Sea World, which opened in 1964.

At last count, almost 1.5 million people call San Diego home. Almost 36 million more people will come visit this year. How many would like to call San Diego home too isn't known. But one thing seems certain: The more they know about this place, the more they – and San Diegans – have to celebrate.