

Peveril Meigs, III, and Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, The Final Dominican Mission Frontier of Lower California

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For almost seven decades, scholars and students of the history of Baja California have consulted *The Dominican Mission Frontier of Lower California* by Peveril Meigs, III, (1935) as virtually the sole scholarly source on the subject. The later monograph, "The Dominican Mission Foundations of Baja California, 1769-1822" by Father Albert Bertrand Nieser, O.P., (1967) presented as his Ph.D. dissertation to the Department of History, Loyola University, Chicago, in 1967, relies heavily upon the work of Meigs, and has only seen print in Spanish (Nieser 1998). Other more recent studies by Miguel León-Portilla, Lucila León Velazco, Mario Magaña Mancillas, Edward W. Vernon, and this writer, among others, also rely heavily on Meigs' work.

Peveril Meigs, III, was born 5 May 1903 in Flushing, New York, an unlikely birthplace for a later pioneer of Baja California history. Son of Peveril Meigs, Jr., a foreign exchange broker, and Lorena Stewart Meigs, he attended the University of California, Berkeley, where he earned his B.A. in 1925 and Ph.D in 1932. On 7 May 1928, he married Yvonne Lieben and a son and daughter were born of this union. He began his academic career as an instructor in geography at San Francisco State Teachers College (today, San Francisco State University) in 1929, and served as an assistant professor (1929-1932), associate professor (1932-1941), and professor (1941-1942) at Chico State College (today, California State University,

Chico), and while there was also a visiting professor at Louisiana State University (1938-1939).

As did many young scholars, at the advent of World War II Meigs entered government service as a research analyst in the U.S. Office of Strategic Services, Washington, D.C. (1942-1944); editor and editor-in-chief of the Joint Intelligence Study Publishing Board (1944-1947), and remained in government employ after the war as analyst for the Arctic Institute of North America (1948-1949), with a simultaneous teaching position at American University and George Washington University (1948), chief of the research section of the U.S. Department of the Army, Quartermaster Corps, Earth Sciences Division (1949-1953), and chief of the earth sciences division Quartermaster Research and Engineering Center at Natick, Massachusetts from 1953 to his retirement in 1965. He also served as chairman of the Arid Zone Commission of the International Geographical Union from 1950 to 1968. Meigs was an honorary member of the American Geographical Society; a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, London, and a member of the American Association of American Geographers, and American Association for the Advancement of Science. Having spent a lifetime of research and writing as a specialist on desert and arid lands in South America, Europe, Asia, and Africa, following his retirement Meigs devoted his time to actively researching the use of tides to run mills on the coast of eastern North America, and



Fig. 1. Peveril Meigs, 1924. (Photo provided by Willard Meigs.)

was so involved at time of his death on 16 September 1979, in Concord, Massachusetts.

Meigs authored over ninety books and articles, the majority of which deal with topics other than Baja California, such as *Water Planning in the Great Central Valley, California* (1939a); *Fundamentals of Economic Geography* (Bengtson and Van Royen 1950); and *Arid Zone Research: Geography of Coastal Deserts* (1966). Nevertheless, it is in his studies of the area of northern Baja California that Meigs is most appreciated. With the great Carl O. Sauer, as a result of field research begun in 1925, he co-authored *Site and Culture at San Fernando de Velicatá* (Meigs and Sauer 1927). His pioneering classic, *The Dominican Mission Frontier of Lower California* (1935), warranted a reprint edition in 1968 and a translation to Spanish (1994). Just prior to his leaving academe, Meigs published *The Kiliwa Indians of Lower California* (1939b).

In early 1934, Meigs submitted for publication to the magazine *Westways*, publication of the Automobile Club of Southern California, an illustrated seven-page typescript article titled: "Guadalupe: Last Mission of the Californias." On 12 February 1934, Phil Townsend Hanna, editor and general manager of the publication returned the article, explaining that the magazine was confining its publications to material related to the State of California. This article has remained archived until it was revived by the author's son, Willard L. Meigs of Derwood, Maryland and submitted to the *Pacific Coast Archaeological Society Quarterly* for consideration in December 2000. Although much research has been carried out in the intervening seven decades, the fundamental information in the article remains valid. Dr. Meigs would certainly be pleased to know that the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia of Baja California, notwithstanding the highly disturbed nature of the site in the center of the town of Guadalupe, is conducting excavations of Nuestra

Señora de Guadalupe. His article is published here in appreciation for the great legacy he has given to scholars of Baja California through his pioneering research.

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