

Refrence

The California Missions On-Line Project



Mission History

This page was designed as a brief historical overview of the California Mission Chain.

• Founding of the missions	• The community
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Founding of the missions

The California Mission Chain was started in 1769 by Father Junipero Serra at the direction King Charles III of Spain. King Charles wanted to establish permanent settlements in Alta California to keep control of the land as other people and countries were beginning to come to the area. The settled land was to become part of the Spanish territory. The missions were built near the coast to establish towns, and to be able to trade with ships and people coming to the area. The last reason for building the missions was to convert the Indians to Christianity. The missions were placed a day's walk from each other. The entire span of missions along the El Camino Real is 650 miles. The missions were similar in appearance with each having a quadrangle where the shops and rooms were, a church and a bell tower. The church was built to be as tall as the highest tree in the area so that it could be easily seen from a great distance.

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Local Indians

The Indians of California adapted to the mission system in one way or another. Most willingly became

part of the mission life, but others left their native lands to continue with their own way of life. Many were forced to live on the missions and were treated badly by the Spanish soldiers. Unfortunately, the missions were a main reason for the loss of so many California Indians. They were killed by unknown and unfamiliar diseases, starved, beaten, killed or assimilated in to the Spanish culture so much so that it is hard to find a true Native Californian today. The Indian way of life was drastically changed by the missions, they had to follow the padres rules and religion was unfamiliar to them. They had to live in the mission compound and follow a hard schedule. Thousands of California Indians are buried in mission cemeteries.

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Economy of the mission

The economy of the missions were similar to each other in that they planted crops of wheat and corn. They also planted vineyards, and raised cattle and sheep. The agriculture was needed not only to maintain the mission community and the nearby Indians, but was used for trade and served to visitors to the mission. Each mission worked hard to be self-sufficient and independent. They would help each other by trading and selling their goods. Nearly all of the work done at the missions was done by the local Indians.

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The community

Many of the largest cities in the State of California started as pueblos of the missions. Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, San Gabriel, San Jose, San Juan Capistrano just to name some of the cities, all grew up as part of the mission system. The California Missions are important because of this. Without the missions, these towns would not exist. There is almost nowhere in California that you can't see some remains of our Spanish and Mexican heritage, the missions were a very, very large part of that heritage.

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Secularization

After Mexico won its independence from Spain, it found that it could no longer afford to keep the missions running as Spain had done. In 1834, Mexico decided to end the mission system and sell all of the lands. They offered the lands to the Indians who did not want the lands or could not come up with the purchase price. The lands were divided into smaller Ranchos and sold to Mexican citizens who were helpful during the war for independence. After nearly 30 years, the missions were returned to the Catholic Church. Although some of the missions had already been returned to the church, in 1863, President Abraham Lincoln signed an Act declaring that all of the 21 missions in the California mission chain would become the property of the Catholic Church and have remained so since that time.


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Rebirth and Current Use

Many of the missions were rebuilt and restored following the period of secularization. Most are just rebuilt replicas of the original churches. Most of the missions have a representation of the quadrangle which was so important in the life of the missions. All of the missions have ruins to see, museums and unique stories to tell. Nearly all of the missions are used as parish churches serving a local community. The restoration continues to this day and will always be an important part of California's Spanish history. They are open to visitors and students of 4th grade and of California history.

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