Welcome to the California Missions Web Site. Much of California's history began with the Spanish Missions. The chain of 21 missions along California's El Camino Real ("The Royal Highway") represent the first arrival of non-Native Americans to California. Life for the California Native Americans was forever changed. In addition to Christianity, the missions brought many other things to California such as livestock, fruits, flowers, grains and industry. This was also the start of the civilization in which we live today. However, as a result of the arrival of the Spanish, many Native American lives were lost.

Every one of the California missions tell a story about the history of California. All have been, to some extent, restored and can be visited today.

A brief history of each mission is presented here. Later updates to this web site will include additional information about California's rich history.
This video clip is a 2.39 MB, 60 second mission overview.
San Francisco Solano

Twenty-first Mission

Founded: July 4, 1823 by Father Jose Altimira

Named for: St. Francis Solano, missionary to the Peruvian Indians

Location: in the town of Sonoma, 20 miles north of San Francisco on State Highway 12

The last and northernmost California mission, Mission San Francisco Solano was the only mission founded after Mexico's independence from Spain. It was also the only mission founded without the prior approval of the Church.

The brash Father Jose Altimira, sent from Spain in 1819 to assist at Mission Dolores, devised a plan to found a new mission to the north where the climate was warmer. Instead of going to his proper church superiors he made his proposal to Governor Don Luis Arguello, who was responsible for keeping the Russians out of Northern California. Fr. Altimira's plan to move both the Dolores and the San Rafael missions to Solano seemed to be the solution to the Governor's concern about the Russian encroachment in his province.

Eventually the Church gave their approval for the new Mission San Francisco Solano, to be run by Father Altimira, but insisted that Missions Dolores and San Rafael be undisturbed.

The new mission seemed to get off to a good start. The vineyards were flourishing. But soon the cruelty of Father Altimira became evident. His constant flogging and imprisonment of the Native Americans, in his efforts to "civilize" them soon caused a revolt. A large group of angry Native Americans attacked the mission in 1826. After looting and burning buildings and supplies, they forced Father Altimira to flee to Mission San Rafael. Soon after that, unwelcome at any of the missions, he returned to Spain.

His replacement was the faithful and kind Father Fortuni. After spending several years rebuilding the mission he restored it to its former strength. His new adobe buildings had tile roofs, and a convento with 27 rooms made up a large part of the quadrangle.

Barely finished, the mission was secularized in 1834 and came under the control of General Mariano Vallejo. He was supposed to see that the mission properties were distributed to the Native Americans. Instead he claimed the mission property to be his own and added it to his already vast property holdings in the area. With the promise of protection, room and board, he put the Native Americans to work for him.

Vallejo built up a large pueblo (town) in Sonoma, and for a while maintained the mission church. Eventually, the settlers removed the roof tiles and timbers for use in their own buildings and the mission's adobe walls began to dissolve. A new adobe church was built for the parish at the same site of the original mission church.

When the Americans arrived in Sonoma to take control of California from Mexico, General Vallejo was imprisoned. For a brief time the Mission Solano continued to serve as a parish church for the new American settlement.

The Historic Landmarks League purchased the mission property in 1903, and with state funds, restored the Mission Solano. When complete, in 1926, the League turned the property over to the state. Further restoration was then done and the mission is now the Sonoma Mission State Historic Park.
San Rafael Arcángel

Twentieth Mission
Founded: December 14, 1817 by Father Vicente de Sarria
Named for: St. Raphael the Archangel, patron of good health
Location: 20 miles north of the city of San Francisco in the city of San Rafael

This site was originally dedicated as an asistencia (sub-mission) of Mission Dolores. San Rafael was to serve as a convalescent hospital for the many sick neophytes (Christianized Native Americans) there. Concerned that the high death rate of the Mission Dolores neophytes was partly due to the damp climate, the padres decided to send the sick to a better location in order to recover.

The northern peninsula of the bay was warmer, with sunny slopes, and protected by hills from the winds and fog. After the construction of a simple building connected to a church the sick neophytes were wrapped in blankets and rowed across the bay. After a short time in this pleasant climate there was a remarkable improvement in their health. As word of this spread some of the other missions also sent their sick neophytes to San Rafael.

The padres were also converting large numbers of Native Americans living in the area and in 1822 San Rafael was given full mission status. In the short 17 years that the mission existed the Native American population reached over 1,000.

Just two years before secularization a new senior padre took over the running of the mission. Father Jose Maria Mercado had a reputation for being short tempered and not always taking the best course of action. When he saw a number of unknown natives coming towards the mission, he wrongly assumed that they were going to attack and ordered his neophytes to attack them first. What ensured was the death of 21 unarmed natives, and many more wounded. For his part in this Father Mercado was suspended from mission work for six months.

When the mission was secularized the lands were given to the Native Americans, but they were unable to properly manage it and soon lost all control of the lands to a Mexican General. He convinced the Native Americans to work for him at his ranch for only room and board.

The mission buildings were abandoned and eventually torn down in 1870 to be replaced be a new parish church. Many years later a replica of the original church was constructed.

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Santa Inés

Nineteenth Mission
Founded: September 17, 1804 by Father Estevan Tapis
Named for: Saint Agnes
Location: in the town of Solvang, 3 miles east of U.S. Highway 101

The last mission founded in southern California, Mission Santa Ines completed the mission chain that stretches 650 miles between San Diego and Sonoma. Located in the beautiful Santa Ynez Valley, with miles of fertile land, this mission quickly flourished.

After eight years of continuous building, the quadrangle, with a large adobe church, was complete. But soon after the great earthquake of 1812 hit and most of the church and other buildings were badly damaged. In 1817 the new church, with a campanario beside it, was dedicated.

In order to sustain the mission and its many livestock and crops an elaborate water system was designed. Water was brought from the mountains several miles away.

Despite the beautiful valley around the mission, there were few visitors due to its remoteness from the El Camino Real. It was a long and difficult journey to this mission, so the few travelers that did visit were heartily welcomed. When anyone was spotted coming up the long trail the church bell was quickly rung to signal to everyone that a visitor was approaching. There were special signals to let everyone know if the visitor was a padre, Native American, or white man. Everyone at the mission gathered at the door to greet the visitor.

When secularization was ordered, in 1834, the padres were forced to share residence at the mission with a Mexican settler. During this unhappy period, most of the Native Americans left the mission.

Fortunately, complete control of the mission was returned to the padres in 1843. The Franciscans then opened the first seminary in California, the College of our Lady or Refuge. This was later moved to a different location and the mission was sold to a Mexican settler. Later, when the United States gained control of California, most of the property was returned to the church.

Though never entirely abandoned, the mission buildings were not properly cared for and soon fell into disrepair. In 1904 the new mission pastor, with the help of a niece, spent the next 20 years restoring the mission to much of its original splendor.
San Luis Rey de Francia

Eighteenth Mission
Founded: June 13, 1798 by Father Fermin Lasuen
Named for: Louis IX, King of France (1215-1270)
Location: on a hill in the town of San Luis Rey

Nicknamed "King of the missions", Mission San Luis Rey was the largest and most populous of all the California missions. Its buildings covered 6 acres of land, and its Native American population reached 2,700 at its peak. Its important location filled the critical gap between San Diego and San Juan Capistrano. It was the ninth and last mission founded by Father-President Lasuen before his death in 1803.

The quick success of this mission is owed to Father Antonio Peyri, who staved with the mission for 34 years. Not wanting to see the destruction he believed secularization would bring, he retired two years earlier and returned to Spain.

Within 2 years most of the buildings were up and covered with tile roofs and work had begun on the big church that would be able to accommodate up to a thousand worshippers. Eventually even this was replaced with an even larger church with a single tower used as a lookout. With two people always stationed there, they were able to quickly announce the arrival of visitors, friendly or otherwise, and with flags were able to signal messages to the workers in the fields.

Within the quadrangle was planted the first pepper tree in California, and in a sunken garden in front of the mission were many exotic plants and fruit trees. The mission's open-air laundry was also located in the sunken garden where water flowed from the mouth of a stone gargoyle. The water then flowed down the tiles to be reclaimed for other uses. The mission's extensive water irrigation even had a charcoal filter purification system for drinking water.

Mission San Luis Rey also had the largest herd of livestock of any of the missions. In addition to the greater than 50,000 cattle and sheep, they had 1,300 goats, 300 pigs, and almost 2,000 horses.

After the loss of the revered Father Peyri the mission's decline began. The Native Americans attempted to maintain the mission for several years after secularization, but eventually, in 1846, all the buildings were sold. For a time the site was occupied by the United States Army. Though the mission was returned to the Church in 1865, it was mostly ignored until 1893, when it was rededicated. By then most of the quadrangle walls had collapsed, and much of the church was destroyed. Major reconstruction was begun immediately, and continues today.

San Antonio de Pala

This is the only asistencia (sub-mission) that still stands today. In 1816 a large chapel and buildings to house the many Native Americans was built in this area 20 miles inland from Mission San Luis Rey. This branch of Mission San Luis Rey is where most of its crops were grown.

Located here is the only known freestanding bell tower in the mission chain. The chapel, purchased back for the Catholic Church by the Landmarks Club in 1903, is the only parish church still serving the Native Americans.
San Fernando Rey de España

**Seventeenth Mission**
**Founded:** September 8, 1797 by Father Fermin Lasuen  
**Named for:** St. Ferdinand, King of Spain (1217-1252)  
**Location:** on Mission Drive, 1 1/2 miles west of the city of San Fernando

In that busy summer of 1797 for Father Lasuen he found his fourth new mission in a large valley discovered on an earlier expedition. Although this new mission was to close the gap between San Buenaventura and San Gabriel, due to the attractiveness of the valley the mission was actually much closer to San Gabriel. Today its close proximity to Hollywood has allowed it to be used for many movie location shootings.

In a short time the mission had outgrown its first small church and soon had completed the quadrangle with a large church. Barracks, houses for the nearly 1,000 neophytes (Christianized Native Americans), workshops and storerooms surrounded the quadrangle. All buildings were sturdily build and had rile roofs. A large convento (missionary quarters) dominated all these structures. Usually connected to the church, at Mission San Fernando it was added later and stands separate from the quadrangle. It was two stories high, 243 feet long, 50 feet wide, and fronted by a colonnade with 20 arches. This building is the largest adobe structure in California.

In spite of all the precautions taken in constructing the large church, it could not withstand the violent shaking of the 1812 earthquakes. The repairs made to the church afterward were so substantial that it probably would have then stood for a very long tie had it not been to damage done by vandals. After secularization the roof tiles were removed for use in other buildings, leaving the adobe walls unprotected. After the discovery of gold, vandals dug up the church floor looking for buried gold.

Mission San Fernando had over 30,000 grapevines and a wine factory. In addition to the wine they had a large trade in hides and tallow. At its peak there were more than 21,000 head of livestock. The natives were well skilled in leatherworks. They made shoes, clothes and saddles for their own use and for trading. They also made large quantities of rawhide strips that were used in building. Since spikes and nails were rare, pieces of rawhide were used to tie structures together.

Shortly after the mission was secularized one of the earliest gold finds took place on a neighboring rancho. One of the ranchers found shiny yellow particles clinging to the roots of an onion from his garden. Word of this discovery soon spread and the area became overrun with gold prospectors. It was false rumors that the missionaries had been prospecting gold for years that caused gold-seekers to dig up the church floor in search of buried treasure.

With the roof tiles removed from all buildings except the convento, they soon began to crumble back to the earth. The convento was eventually used as a hog farm in 1896. Fortunately the Landmarks Club soon turned their attention to Mission San Fernando. In order to restore the roof to the church before it completely collapsed, they sold candles for a dollar apiece and raised $6,000 to begin the restoration.
The third mission founded by Father Lasuen in the summer of 1797 was quickly filled with the many friendly Native Americans in the area. Fifteen native children were baptized on the same day the mission was founded. Accompanying the padres were many neophyte (Christianized Native Americans) families from other missions that helped to quickly win the confidence of the local natives.

For many years the padres kept the natives busy making and drying large amounts of adobe bricks to be used in a new large church. When the stockpile of adobe bricks was large enough construction began and was completed in just two years.

Although the exterior of the church was simple, the interior was elaborately adorned by an artist from Spain. Fortunately, this artwork has been preserved in its original form. Scenes show false balconies and pillars, archways, and imitation marble. Above the alter is the "all-seeing eye of God" with rays of light shining in all directions.

The neophytes were so content here that even when, in 1831, in anticipation of secularization, they were told that they were now free to leave the mission, none did. They all chose to stay with the padres. A few years later, in August 1834, the mission was secularized and all the property was given to the Native Americans. But without the guidance of the padres, the mission soon fell into disrepair. By 1844 most of the neophytes had left and all of the livestock was gone.

In 1846 all the mission property, except the church, was sold into private hands. One of the purchasers was William Reed, who along with his family and servants, lived in the mission until they were all murdered by a band of tramps looking for gold to steal. The tramps were all later caught and executed.

When the church was finally put back into service, in 1878, some restoration was begun. In 1928 it was returned to the Franciscan's to be used as a monastery and a parish church.
San Juan Bautista

Fifteenth Mission
Founded: June 24, 1797 by Father Fermin Lasuen
Named for: John the Baptist
Location: 17 miles north of the city of Salinas in the town of San Juan Bautista, 4 miles off U.S. Highway 101

Just 13 days after founding Mission San Jose Father Lasuen founded Mission San Juan Bautista. Located in the middle of the San Juan Valley, the mission sits right on the San Andreas fault! Although its location right on the fault was less dangerous than other locations, it accounted for many shaky days and nights. In October 1798 the shaking was so bad that the missionaries slept outside for the whole month. The earth shook as many as 6 times on one day, leaving many huge cracks in both the buildings and the ground.

Since the mission population was growing so quickly, when the church was destroyed by an earthquake in 1803 plans were already underway to build a larger church. Unlike most churches that were long and narrow with a single center aisle, this was to be wide enough for three aisles and room for over a thousand people. However, before the church was complete the padres became concerned that such a large structure would be unsafe in an earthquake. They felt that the open-arched walls separating the two side aisles were not strong enough to support the large tile roof when the ground shook.

Except for the first pair, all the arches were closed up to provide a safer structure. Much of the interior was painted by Thomas Doak, a sailor from Boston who jumped ship in Monterey, thereby becoming the first Anglo-American resident in California. Although he was not a great artist, he did work for just room and board, and the colors he mixed were so durable that they continue to glow today.

Among Father Arroyo's many talents was his ability to preach to the Native Americans in seven of their dialects. After rheumatism confined him to a chair he created the first dictionary-like document of the native languages.

Father Arroyo was eventually joined by Father Tapis who retired there after serving nine years as Father-President of the California missions. Like Father Duran at mission San Jose, Father Tapis was also very musically inclined. He created a system of using different colors for different types of music notes that made it much easier for the natives to follow. His choir of Native American boys was famous and performed for many visitors.

After secularization in 1835 the church continued to serve as a parish for the local town. After sustaining some damage from a quake in 1906, it was repaired and then suffered through some attempts at modernization. Fortunately, in 1949, the Hearst Foundation financed the restoration that restored it to its original form.
San José

Fourteenth Mission

Founded: July 11, 1797 by Father Fermin Lasuen
Named for: Saint Joseph
Location: in the town of Mission San Jose, 15 miles northeast of the city of San Jose on State Highway 21

Six years after the founding of the thirteenth mission in Soledad Father Lasuen was granted permission to establish an additional 5 missions, which he did in just 13 months. Mission San Jose was the first of these. Father Lasuen's plan was to locate the missions within one day's travel of another to be used as a safe rest stop for those traveling along the El Camino Real.

Located east of the San Francisco Bay, Mission San Jose was in a troublesome location known to be an area populated with many runaway neophytes (Christianized Native Americans) and hostile tribes. It served as a base for military operations against those Native Americans resentful of the intrusion of the missionaries. Many skirmishes and battles took place here between the hostile natives and the Spanish soldiers.

As a result of these difficulties conversions were slow. In the first year only 33 Native Americans were baptized. But eventually Mission San Jose had more converts than any other mission in Northern California. Over 6,000 baptisms were recorded.

The fertile land was well suited for large agricultural outputs of fruits, wheat and corn. They also had over 20,000 heads of cattle and sheep.

Much of the prosperity of this mission is due to Father Narciso Duran who presided over the mission for 27 years before he went on to become the Father-President of the California missions. Fr. Duran had a great talent for music and taught many neophytes (christianized Native Americans) how to read music and play the many instruments he obtained from Mexico. He even created a thirty piece band whose mission concerts drew audiences from many miles away.

A large adobe church was built for the many converts at Mission San Jose and it stood until a violent earthquake in 1868 destroyed it. In 1869 a wooden gothic-style church was erected on the foundation of the old church. It served as a Catholic parish until 1965. In 1982 it was carefully relocated to a town called Burlingame.

In 1985 one of the most authentic restorations of all the California missions was completed in Mission San Jose. Authentic adobe bricks were used and most of the work was done with tools resembling those used at the time of the original mission building.

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Nuestra Señora de la Soledad

Thirteenth Mission  
Founded: October 9, 1791 by Father Fermin Lasuen  
Named for: Our Lady of Solitude  
Location: in the Salinas River valley, 3 miles south of the town of Soledad and 1 mile west of U.S. Highway 101

The name of this mission tells a lot about it. Father Lasuen dedicated the site to "the Solitude of Most Holy Mary, Our Lady". It was a dry, windy plain that was very hot in the summer and freezing cold on winter nights. It was through the missionaries irrigation of the Salinas river that the area was transformed to allow the growth of crops and livestock herding by the missionaries.

Due to the inhospitable climate and land, there were very few Native Americans living in the area. Hence building and conversions were slow. It was six years before a large church was finally built. And since the desolate plain offered no protection against the floods of the Salinas river, the church was twice destroyed by the overflowing river banks. During a reconstruction in 1832 a third flood hit that was latter seen as the beginning of the end for the Mission Soledad.

It was also a very difficult assignment for the padres. Those sent there soon complained of rheumatism and poor health. After a year, many padres asked to be reassigned to a more pleasant site. In the short span of this mission's existence, almost thirty different padres were assigned here.

In spite of all the difficulties, the mission did prosper. Eventually the padres performed more than 2,000 baptisms and 700 marriages. The crops were bountiful and large herds of horses, cattle and sheep grazed the plains.

After secularization the mission site was soon abandoned and left to decay for over one hundred years. Finally, in 1954, the Native Daughters of the Golden West began restoring what little was left of the Mission Soledad. Today a small wing of seven rooms and a small chapel can be visited. Although the original quadrangle is gone, the lines of it can be traced in the mounds of the adobe ruins.

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Santa Cruz

Twelfth Mission
**Founded:** August 28, 1791 by Father Fermin Lasuen
**Named for:** the Sacred Cross
**Location:** on Mission Hill overlooking the city of Santa Cruz on the north shore of Monterey Bay

Mission Santa Cruz sits on a gentle slope surrounded by the beautiful redwood trees not far from where they meet the Pacific Ocean. When Father Lasuen raised the cross and said Mass on this picturesque location, little did he realize the misfortune and troubled times that would befall the mission.

Having experienced problems in the past when the missions were located too close to another settlement, the Franciscans saw to the passing of a law requiring at least a league of land between the mission and a pueblo (town). In Santa Cruz the Governor ignored this law, and even before the mission quadrangle was complete, notified the padres that not only was there to be a pueblo nearby, but that they would have to help support it. The padres tried to stop the founding of the Branceforte pueblo, but to no avail.

Many of the settlers that arrived from Guadalajara were criminals, with no ambition to grow their own crops. They often raided the mission's crops and would go out of their way to antagonize the natives.

On a day in 1818 the pirate Bouchard was spotted off the coast. The missionaries were aware of Bouchard's earlier attack on the Monterey Presidio (fort), so along with the neophytes (Christianized Native Americans), they quickly retreated inland to the safety of Santa Clara. When they returned they found that the mission had been plundered, but not by the pirate Bouchard. The Branceforte pueblo residents had helped themselves to everything of value at the mission.

Because of the unruly settlers in Branceforte the padres found it necessary to keep a very tight rein on the Native Americans, severely restricting their movements. This contributed to the fact that Mission Santa Cruz had the lowest population of all the California missions. Some of the neophytes behaved badly under such strict confinement, and many believed that they were treated too cruelly. This eventually led to the murder of one of the padres that was later to be the cause for the first autopsy performed in California.

Mission Santa Cruz was one of the first to be secularized. The land and supplies were sold and the few remaining natives left. Two earthquakes, in 1840 and 1857, destroyed the mission church. In 1889 a white painted brick church was built in its place for use by the town. In 1931 a small replica of the original mission church was built near the original site.

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La Purísima Concepción

Mission La Purísima was located in a fertile valley many miles off the beaten path of the El Camino Real. Much of its prosperity is the result of the tireless work of Father Mariano Payeras who served at Mission La Purísima for nineteen years. For four of these years he served as Father-President of the California mission chain, making La Purísima his headquarters.

In the early hours of December 21, 1812, a severe earthquake shook the ground for four minutes causing considerable damage to the mission buildings. Then a half hour later the earth shook again, finishing the destruction of the Mission La Purísima buildings. Shortly after that heavy rains flooded the site, sweeping everything away.

But the padres would not be driven out. They gathered the then homeless neophytes (Christianized Native Americans) and found a new site four miles to the northeast on the other side of the river.

Work soon began on an even grander mission. These new buildings - Mission La Purísima is the only mission complex not built in a quadrangle - were constructed to be resistant to future earthquakes. The southwest wall (facing the direction of the earlier earthquakes) was reinforced with stones and the adobe walls were four and a half feet thick in order to withstand any future shaking.

A large irrigation system was built to bring water from the springs in the hills three miles away. Aqueducts, clay pipes, reservoirs, and dams were used to provide water throughout the mission complex and lands.

In 1824, when word reached the La Purísima neophytes of one of their brother natives having been flogged at Mission Santa Ines, and the ensuing skirmish resulting in the death of two Native Americans, they revolted. Aided by rebels from Mission Santa Ines, they took control of Mission La Purísima and held it for almost a month.

When the Governor heard what was happening he sent soldiers from Monterey. After a battle of three hours the Native Americans surrendered. Sixteen Native Americans had died and many more were injured. In order to prevent any future uprising the Governor ordered severe punishments for the natives. Seven Native Americans were condemned to death and eighteen others were sentenced to prison.

Ten years later secularization came. Mission La Purísima was left to fall into ruin. In 1845 the mission and all its lands were sold for only $1,100.

In 1933 the Union Oil Company donated the mission property and the surrounding area to the public. This area is now a 966 acre state historic park. In 1951 the most complete restoration of all the California missions was begun. Ten fully restored buildings, with 37 furnished rooms, can now be seen as they originally appeared.
Santa Barbara

Tenth Mission
Founded: December 4, 1786 by Father Fermin Lasuen
Named for: Saint Barbara
Location: on a hill at the end of Laguna Street, overlooking the city of Santa Barbara

Santa Barbara was the first mission founded by Father Fermin Francisco de Lasuen, Father Serra's successor as President of the California missions. Although Father Serra dedicated the site of the Santa Barbara presidio (fort) in April of 1782, he did not have permission at that time to found a mission in Santa Barbara. The Governor at that time, Filipe de Neve, was jealous of the power he believed the Franciscans gained with each new mission. Through his superior, the Viceroy in Mexico, he was able to delay the necessary funding for new missions.

Sadly, Father Serra died just one month after the new Governor told him that permission was granted to found his longed for mission in Santa Barbara. It was Father Lasuen who traveled to Santa Barbara and selected the mission site. It was one and a half miles northeast of the Presidio (fort) in a hilly area called "rocky mound" with a majestic view of the valley and channel.

The first mission buildings were made of logs, with thatch roofs. Later an adobe wing completed the quadrangle with a dormitory, kitchen and storeroom. There were also rows of over 200 houses for the mission natives built next to the mission.

Eventually, construction of a second quadrangle was begun adjacent to the first. Throughout all this construction a succession of larger adobe churches was being built. The largest one, completed in 1794, had six side chapels and was destroyed in the 1812 earthquakes. Then work began on a new stone church that was 161 feet long, 42 feet high, and 27 feet wide. Initially only one tower was included, but in 1833 a second tower was added, making it the only mission with two towers.

The water system at this mission was so extraordinary that parts of it are still used today by the city of Santa Barbara. It was the most elaborate water system of all the missions. Water from a dammed creek in the hills two miles above the mission was carried by a stone aqueduct to a storage basin near the church. There was even a separate branch with a filtration system used for drinking water.

One year before secularization, in 1833, Father Narciso Duran, then president of the California missions, moved his headquarters from Mission San Jose to Mission Santa Barbara. Hence the documents for the entire California mission chain are in the archives here along with a large collection of sheet music from the mission era.

An earthquake in 1925 nearly destroyed the beautiful stone church that had survived all these years. An extensive restoration, at the cost of almost $400,000, was completed in 1927. Unfortunately, in 1950 a chemical reaction in the materials used in the restoration weakened the structure. The front of the church then had to be rebuilt, and steel-reinforced concrete now supports the mission that now appears just as it did in the mission's glory days.

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San Buenaventura

Ninth Mission
Founded: March 31, 1782 by Father Junipero Serra
Named for: Saint Bonaventure
Location: just east of U.S. Highway 101 in the city of Ventura

Originally planned to be the third mission in the California chain, halfway between San Diego and Carmel, San Buenaventura's founding was postponed for 12 years. Problems at other missions prohibited the availability of the military escorts needed to establish Mission San Buenaventura. Finally, on Easter Sunday, March 31, 1782, Father Serra raised a cross and celebrated Mass to found his ninth and final mission on the beach of the Santa Barbara Channel.

One of the main reasons for the prosperity of this mission was the extensive irrigation provided by a seven-mile-long aqueduct that brought water to the mission from the Ventura River. This allowed the production of many types of fruit, grains and vegetables. Due to the outstanding climate they were even able to grow exotic crops usually found only in torrid zones, such as sugar cane, bananas, coconuts and figs.

After the first mission church burned down a new large stone church was begun. Fifteen years later, in 1809, it was dedicated. Three years later the earthquake of 1812 severely damaged the church but it was quickly reinforced.

After secularization, in 1836, most of the mission lands were sold to private settlers. The mission church became a parish church for the surrounding town. Fortunately, the "modern improvements" made to the church in the 1890's were undone in 1957 when the church was restored to its original state.
After a delay of several months, due to an uprising of the natives at Mission San Luis Obispo, the second mission ordered to hold the San Francisco Bay was founded in Santa Clara. This was the first mission named for a woman, Saint Claire of Assisi, founder of the Poor Clares order on nuns.

Flooding of the nearby Guadalupe River forced the padres to move the mission many times. A third site, with a large adobe church, stood for 34 years until a severe earthquake in 1818 forced the mission to be moved again. Finally, construction on the fifth and present mission site began in 1822.

Shortly after the arrival of the Spaniards many of the native children died from an epidemic of measles. This sad part of Spanish colonization provided the padres with the opportunity to baptize many of the children who were brought to the mission in the hopes of making them well again. Mission Santa Clara led the other mission in baptisms as well as burials. The remains of many neophytes (Christianized Native Americans) are buried in the cemetery next to the mission.

Mission Santa Clara was one of the last missions subject to secularization, in 1836. After some of the mission lands were returned to the church the Franciscans turned them over to the Jesuit Order to be used as the site for the first college in California. Classes at what is now the University of Santa Clara began in 1851.

In 1926 the mission church that had survived more than a hundred years was destroyed in a fire. With only portions of the original adobe walls left standing, the church was rebuilt in 1929 and continues today to serve as the college chapel.
San Juan Capistrano

Seventh Mission

**Founded:** November 1, 1776 by Father Junipero Serra  
**Named for:** Saint John of Capistrano, Italy  
**Location:** in the community of San Juan Capistrano on Interstate 5 just off U.S. Highway 101

Called the "Jewel of the Missions" Mission San Juan Capistrano is probably the best known of all the California missions. Famous for its beautiful gardens, it is the spring home for thousands of swallows that annually migrate some 2,000 miles from their winter homes in Central America. Their arrival in San Juan Capistrano is celebrated on March 19th, Saint Joseph's Day, with the ringing of the mission bells.

Originally founded by Fr. Lasuen on October 30, 1775, the site was abandoned after eight days when they received word of an attack at the San Diego Mission. They quickly buried the bells for safe keeping and fled to the Presidio (fort) in San Diego for shelter.

When Fr. Serra returned a year later he found that the cross erected earlier by Fr. Lasuen was still in place and the bells remained safe in their hiding place in the ground.

Within the first year a little chapel that is still in use today was completed. It is believed to be the oldest church in California, and since it is one of only two still standing where Fr. Serra is known to have said Mass it is called "Father Serra's Church".

In 1796 work was begun on a large stone church that was to be the most magnificent of all the California mission churches. Under the guidance of an expert stonemason from Mexico the natives transported the stones from a quarry six miles away. Nine years later the church was completed. The Great Stone church was built in the shape of a cross, 180 feet long and 40 feet wide. Above the front entrance is a 120 foot tall belltower that could be seen for miles.

Tragically, this magnificent church only stood for six years. The devastating earthquake of 1812 destroyed this pride of the California missions. Even more tragically, 40 bodies were dug out of the rubble, as the quake struck during a Mass. No plans were ever made to rebuild the Great Stone Church.

When an attempt at restoration was made in 1860, so little was known about this painstaking process that they actually destroyed more than they restored. Later, in the 1890s, restoration attempts were successful in saving Father Serra's Church from disintegrating. The most recent and thorough restoration began in 1987 after the Whittier earthquake.

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San Francisco de Asís (Mission Dolores)

Better known as Mission Dolores, it is located in the San Francisco Bay that was discovered by accident when Gaspar de Portal's expedition was looking for Monterey Bay. It was immediately seen as an important naval base for the Spaniards to protect their colony from outside invaders.

Unfortunately, the often cold and damp weather kept the Native Americans away from this place, and it took almost a whole year before the first Native Americans were baptized there. The climate at the mission site was severe, often with chilly sea winds and damp fogs. This did not help the many natives stricken with the diseases brought by the foreigners. More than 5,000 Native Americans eventually died here from the measles epidemic. The problem of sick natives was so great that eventually, in 1817, a hospital mission was opened in San Rafael where the Mission Dolores inhabitants could recuperate in the sunshine. Later this became the Mission San Rafael Archangel.

In 1782 Father Palóu decided to move the mission to a more favorable site. In 1791 a beautiful new adobe church was dedicated. The Neophytes (Christianized Native Americans) built this church so well that it withstood the famous 1906 earthquake. Spared the earlier destruction of so many other California mission churches, it has been carefully preserved and today is the oldest intact building in San Francisco.

Soon after secularization, the mission began to decline. When the California Gold Rush hit the remote community around the mission became a bustling site. The mission area became a center for people to go to enjoy horse racing, gambling and drinking in taverns. Over time, the area was incorporated into a more respectable town area.

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San Luis Obispo de Tolosa

Fifth Mission
Founded: September 1, 1772 by Father Junipero Serra
Named for: Saint Luis, Bishop of Toulouse
Location: in the city of San Luis Obispo at Monterey and Chorro Streets

This mission marks the halfway point in the California mission chain. It is located near the Valley of the Bears where the Spanish had found such a large population of bears they were able to keep other missions from near starvation by hunting the bears and sending the meat to the missions.

Since there were so many friendly Native Americans in the area, Fr. Serra chose this location for his next mission. Although not all the natives were friendly. Just south of the mission were tribes that were determined to drive the white men out of the area. They would shoot burning arrows into the dry tinder buildings that would quickly spread to other buildings causing considerable damage and setbacks for the missionaries.

Finally, recalling the fire resistant Spanish tile roofs of their homeland, the missionaries began to manufacture similar clay tiles. The red clay was made in pits, then spread over wooden models to be dried in the sun. They were then baked in a kiln. These were the first roof tiles made in California. Not only were they a protection against the fire raids, they were waterproof, thereby keeping the interiors dry and protecting the adobe walls from the rain. These were eventually used in all future mission buildings built in California. Similar red tile roofs are seen today throughout California.

Secularization, in 1834, had devastating effects on the mission and its inhabitants. The livestock was driven off and the buildings were allowed to deteriorate to such a state that when it was finally sold in 1845 it brought only $510 - a fraction of its earlier value.

There was little left of the mission when it was returned to the church in 1859. Then, in 1868, the buildings were remodeled with white painted siding and used as a parish church for the flourishing town in the area. At one time there was even a New England steeple added to the church.

Eventually, in 1934, the steeple and siding were removed, and the church's earlier appearance was restored.

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San Gabriel Arcángel

Fourth Mission
Founded: September 8, 1771 by Father Pedro Cambon and Father Angel Somera
Named for: Archangel Gabriel
Location: on Junipero Street and West Union Drive in the city of San Gabriel

This mission, although one of the most prosperous, was also one of the most difficult missions for the padres assigned there. Located along the well-traveled trails used by travelers from Mexico to Alto (upper) California - and later from eastern United States to the west coast - it was a stop off point for numerous travelers. Many of these were simply weary from long and difficult traveling and only in need of food and temporary shelter; but there were also plenty of unwelcome visitors. The mission was often crowded with the military, whose behavior was usually very disruptive to the missionaries as well as the Native American living within the mission.

In 1775, the mission was moved to a new site. This new site was so prosperous that it became known as "The Queen of the Missions". It produced more wheat than any other mission as well as large crops of corn and beans.

Large herds of cattle provided the means for the highly prized industries of tallow-rendering and soap-making, as well as tanning hides for leather goods. The Native Americans here were also highly skilled weavers and wine makers.

Unique to this mission is the mosque-like appearance of the church. This is believed to be modeled after the Cathedral of Cordova (formerly a mosque) in Spain. The church was begun in 1779 but was not completed until 1805.

When secularization was ordered in 1834 the mission and all its wealth was sadly taken away from the Franciscans. When, in 1843, the Franciscans regained control of the mission, almost nothing was left. Most of the buildings were too damaged for use, and the remaining natives were close to starving.

President Buchanan restored the neglected property to the Catholic Church in 1859. A highlight of the museum there is a collection of canvases believed to be the oldest examples of sacred art done by native California painters.

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San Antonio de Padua

Third Mission
Founded: July 14, 1771 by Father Junipero Serra
Named for: Saint Anthony
Location: 5 miles northwest of the community of Jolon in Monterey County

Fr. Serra knew that this third mission's success was important to assure that his dream of a "chain" of missions be realized. Fr. Serra was so anxious to get this mission underway he hung a bell from a large oak tree on their very first day there and vigorously rang it to attract "All the Gentiles" within earshot.

He was not disappointed. Just a few days after their arrival, sensing the kindness and good intentions of the strangers, large numbers of natives arrived to meet them. They accepted the gifts of beads and cloth from the padres and in return provided their own gifts of seeds and acorns harvested in the area.

In 1773 the mission was moved to a site further north in the Los Robles Valley that offered a better water supply. The San Antonio River, about three miles above the mission, was dammed and long aqueducts brought the water to the mission where is was stored in reservoirs. The water was used to turn the first California gristmill, where wheat was ground into flour. Much of this early water system, along with the gristmill, are still there today.

Due to its remote location, the San Antonio Mission was badly plundered after its secularization in 1834. The mission was completely abandoned for almost 50 years, between 1882 and 1928. Restoration here was a formidable task, but seen as one of the largest and most picturesque of all the missions remaining in northern California, San Antonio was selected by the newly formed California Historic Landmarks League as one of their first projects in 1903.

A further restoration of all the mission buildings was funded by the Hearst Foundation and the Franciscans of California in 1948. The mission is now an accurate replica of the original mission as it stood in 1813. Parts of the compound are today used by the Franciscans, but most of the grounds are available to the public for viewing.
San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo

Second Mission  
**Founded:** June 3, 1770 by Father Junipero Serra  
**Named for:** Saint Charles Borromeo  
**Location:** a few miles south of the city of Carmel on Junipero Avenue

San Carlos Borromeo is believed by many to be the most beautiful of all California missions. It is here that Fr. Serra made his headquarters for his California missionary work, and where he was buried upon his death in 1784. A year after its founding, the mission was moved from Monterey to a beautiful site in Carmel Valley. The Monterey site was not only inadequate for growing crops, it was a long way from where the Native Americans resided.

Fr. Serra was buried in the sanctuary beside the alter in the adobe church next to his longtime friend Fr. Crespi. A few years later the current large stone church was built around the small adobe church. In 1803, upon the death of Fr. Lasuen, Fr. Serra's successor, he too was buried in the stone church.

When secularization occurred in 1834 all of the mission lands, except the church site, were sold to private parties. The great stone mission church was abandoned and for 30 years stood roofless after its collapse in 1851. Enough money was eventually raised in 1884 to build a new roof, but the steep pitch was out of place with the original design. The latest restoration, begun in the 1930's, has restored a more suitable roof, and is believed to be the most authentic restoration in the entire mission chain.

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San Diego de Alcalá

**First Mission**
**Founded:** July 16, 1769 by Father Junipero Serra  
**Named for:** Saint Didacus of Alcalá  
**Location:** 6 miles from the city of San Diego on Presidio Hill overlooking Mission Valley

Mission San Diego is the oldest mission in California, and the first link in the "chain" of missions that stretches 650 miles along the El Camino Real or King's Highway. On Presidio Hill there stands a large cross on which the following words are written: " Here Father Serra first raised the cross. Here began the first mission, here the first town, San Diego, July 16, 1769."

Being the first mission in Alto (upper) California, it understandably got off to a very slow start. The Native American's were very leery of close contact with the missionaries. They came at first only to receive the gifts brought by the missionaries. There was also much stealing of goods by the natives. There was even an attack on the mission, but the natives soon found out that their bows and arrows were no match for the Spanish soldiers firearms.

After a few years the padres decided to move the mission to a new site further away from the soldiers that were harassing the natives at the mission. The new location also had difficulties. There was not enough water and soil to grow enough crops to feed all the people living at the mission.

Eventually many of the Native Americans came to believe that the presence of the padres would soon force all the natives into this new way of life. With the help of many other tribes, on a night in November 1776, an attack party of 800 armed natives fell on the mission. They looted the supplies and set fire to the buildings.

Eight months after the attack the San Diego mission was rebuilt as a full quadrangle, much larger than the earlier buildings. In 1807 work was begun on a dam 6 miles upriver that would provided the necessary water for the mission to flourish. The dam was complete in 1816. Today there can still be seen evidence of the dam.

In 1834, when the San Diego mission was secularized, the buildings were sold to private parties and soon fell into disrepair. For 12 years (1850-1862) the US Army occupied the buildings, using the adobe church as a stable for their horses.

In 1862 the mission land and buildings were returned to the Church; but by 1931, when restoration began, only the facade was still standing. Today is continues as an active Catholic parish.

Santa Ysabel

Due to the difficulty in covering such a large expanse of land where the natives lived in southern California, an asistencia (sub-mission) was established by the padres in 1818. It was located in the mountains 60 miles east of the San Diego Mission to serve the Native Americans living in the Santa Ysabel Valley.

After secularization, the site quickly fell into private hands, and the buildings were left to fall into nothing more than heaps of earth. A new structure was dedicated in 1924, followed by additional buildings that are now served by the Sons of the Sacred Heart.

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This video clip is a 2.39 MB, 60 second mission overview.

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