

# Background Sheet 1

## Why the Missions in California Were Started

### Spain Decides to Settle California

Spain was a powerful country and was the one that sent the most explorers to the New World. For example, in 1529, a Spanish explorer named Hernando Cortez landed in Baja California. He named this land New Spain. Cortez visited the great kingdom of the Aztec. From the Aztec, Cortez heard stories about the Seven Cities of Gold. The stories told of cities far to the north said the city streets were paved in gold. Cortez sent his soldiers to look for them but was not successful.

Later, in 1542, another explorer, Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo, sailed north along the coast of Alta California. He was looking for gold too. On September 28, Cabrillo anchored two ships off the coast of what is now San Diego. When Cabrillo landed at San Diego, he put up a wooden cross and claimed the land for Spain. Cabrillo sailed north along the entire coast of California before returning to New Spain.

But there was a problem. Explorers from Russia, England, and other countries were coming to California also. The King of Spain finally became concerned that other countries would settle California before Spain. Also, the King of Spain felt it was their duty to Christianize the Native Americans living in California. So in 1769, Gaspar de Portola, a military commander, and Father Junipero Serra, a Franciscan missionary priest, were sent to start the first Spanish settlement in Alta California. Fr. Serra's two jobs were to build the missions and Christianize the Native Americans. De Portola's two jobs were to protect the missions and build presidios (the Spanish name for military forts) where the soldiers lived.

Building settlements in California solved another problem. Spanish ships made long trading voyages to New Spain. During these trips the sailors often became sick with scurvy. Sailors got scurvy because they did not eat enough foods containing vitamin C (like oranges, lemons, and limes). Their arms and legs swelled and got stiff, their teeth rotted, and most people with scurvy eventually died. Having settlements in California gave trading ships somewhere to stop for fresh fruit and supplies. These fresh foods would keep the sailors healthy.

### Spain's Three Part Plan to Colonize California

In order to claim California, the most important thing was to establish its presence in the land. This involved a three-part plan. First, build missions along the coast. Then build presidios and pueblos around the missions. The missions would be the religious centers. Presidios would house soldiers to protect the missions. Pueblos, or towns, would allow people to live around the missions. The missions would be connected by a road known as El Camino Real (The King's Highway). Father Serra and Portola sailed to Alta California and founded the first mission, San Diego de Alcalá, in 1769. In the end, a total of 21 missions were established.



# Background Sheet 2

## The Missions Were a Business

### Surviving in the Wilderness

The missions were built in the wilderness, so to survive, the missions had to be able to support themselves. This meant that any food, clothing, tools, building materials or furniture had to be made at the mission site. Every mission had some type of agriculture, growing whatever vegetables, grains and fruits they needed. The missions each had large herds of sheep and cattle. The sheep provided meat and wool to make clothing and blankets. The cattle played the most important role in the prosperity of the missions.

### Importance of Cattle

The mission cattle provided three important products: meat, hides (animal skins), and tallow (animal fat). The meat fed the people who lived at the missions. Since they had thousands of cattle that were constantly being killed for the hides and tallow, the meat actually posed a big problem. Every hide meant more than a 1,000 pound carcass! Even though they ate beef for every meal, they couldn't eat all that meat! Remember, there were no refrigerators or freezers! Grizzly bears often invaded the missions in order to feast on the carcasses, which was also a big problem.

The hides could be manufactured into many different leather goods, especially shoes. This was a huge money maker! In fact, the hides were often called "California Banknotes" because they were so valuable! The tallow was also valuable. It was used to make candles and soap. The missions would use the soap and the candles, of course, but they also sold it.

### Trade – The Key to Mission Success

Many ships came to California for hides and tallow. They arrived loaded with items for trading. This was very important because there were no stores for the people at the missions to purchase anything. The ships brought anything that people living in the wilderness might need: tools, flour, salt, fabric, dishes, metal pots, furniture, and sewing materials. Trading hides for these items supplied missions with items that they couldn't make themselves or were luxury items. They "bought" these things by trading valuable hides.

### Spain Profits

The success of the missions was good for Spain too. They received valuable hides from the missions. They also earned money from the many trading ships that came to California. How? The Spanish government required all trading ships to stop at the Customs House in Monterey to pay taxes. Before they could sail to missions or ports in California, ships had to unload their cargo, declare each item, and pay the required tax. Unfortunately for trading ships, these taxes were very high. Some items carried duties as high as 100% of their original value! Most items carried a 25 to 50 percent tax.

### Smuggling

Many captains smuggled goods to avoid paying the high import taxes. They first stopped at one of the Channel Islands, off the coast of California. There the crew unloaded some of the ship's cargo and left a crew member to guard it. The ship continued to Monterey, where the captain claimed what was left of his cargo and paid a smaller tax. After paying the tax and getting permission to stop at California ports, the captain returned to the Channel Islands to pick up the hidden cargo – if it had not been taken by pirates! This was actually quite common.



# Background Sheet 3

## Native Americans at the Missions

### **The Padres wanted to Convert the Native Americans**

The padres' most important task was to teach the Native Americans about Christianity. But to do this, they needed to convince them to come to the missions and become converted. Newly converted and baptized Native Americans were called Neophytes. Once they were baptized, they were required to live permanently at the missions and they could not return to their villages.

### **Why Native Americans Came to the Missions**

In order to convert them, the padres had to convince the Native Americans to come to the missions. How? They were introduced to musical instruments such as violins, trumpets, and flutes, which was very enticing. They also got to join choirs and perform. In addition, they were taught how to become farmers and they didn't have to spend all their time hunting. Also, they got to live in sturdy, warm rooms where they were protected from the weather. Finally, they got to use modern technology such as metal pots, looms to weave cloth, and candles for light at night.

### **Slave Labor**

The padres were not able to do the building of the missions, raising of the cattle, or growing the necessary agriculture required to survive. The only way this could happen was to force the Native Americans to do all the work! In addition, they did not pay them anything to do all the hard labor. Their days were busy from early morning until evening working in the fields, making adobe bricks, raising cattle, making cloth, making all the meals etc.

Essentially, the Native Americans were treated like slaves. And, just like slaves, if they tried to run away, soldiers hunted them down and returned them to the mission. They were then severely punished. The most common punishment was extreme whipping, sometimes even being whipped to death. They were often also put in stocks or tied to a stake. Other punishments included getting a cross burned on the forehead. These severe punishments were not just for running away. The Native Americans were punished for actions such as being late to religious services, disobeying the padres, not finishing their assigned tasks, or taking a break from work.

### **Disease and Unsanitary Conditions**

The Native Americans at the missions lived in terrible conditions. First of all, families were separated. All the women and girls had to live in a monjerias. They were locked in at night and they couldn't leave, even to go to the bathroom. They had one or two buckets in the rooms to share for that. They also often did not even have blankets. The men lived separately in similar conditions.

Overall, the buildings and rooms were filthy. The rooms also usually were infested with rats who carried diseases. The Native Americans got sick and thousands died at every mission from the flu, dysentery, and even malnutrition. But the worst part was that the Spanish brought with them many terrible diseases. The Spanish had immune systems that could fight against these diseases, but the Native Americans could not fight against them. Two of the deadly diseases which killed the most Native Americans were measles and small pox. Sadly, almost half the children at the missions died before they turned 4!

# Background Sheet 4

## Mission Architecture

### European Influences

To build the missions, the padres borrowed ideas from European architecture. The Moorish style was one that they borrowed. The Moors were Moslems from North Africa who came to Spain. The tall bell towers, courtyards, and the beautiful courtyard fountains, show the Moorish influence. A second style borrowed from Europe was the Vitruvian style. Vitruvius was a famous Roman architect. Some features of the missions reflect his style: tile roofs, floor tiles, arches, vaults, domes, and aqueducts to carry water.

### Early Mission Buildings

Early mission structures were very primitive. The church and mission quadrangle was usually built by putting logs straight into the ground, tying them together with hide strips, and then covering the structure with mud. In addition, the padres and Native Americans used rocks to build the missions. But they found that rocks were dangerous when these buildings collapsed during earthquakes. Later, adobe or clay bricks were used for mission buildings because it was safer and there was not always a lot of wood easily available near mission sites.

### Adobe

Many missions were made of adobe. This was because wood was not easily available along the California coast, and stones were not safe because they were unstable.

Native Americans made the hundreds of bricks required to build a mission. To make adobe, the Native Americans mixed mud and straw and put the mixture into large, square molds about 2 feet wide. Sometimes they also added cattle blood and urine to the adobe mixture. They allowed the bricks to dry in the sun. After drying on one side the bricks were turned over to dry on the other side.

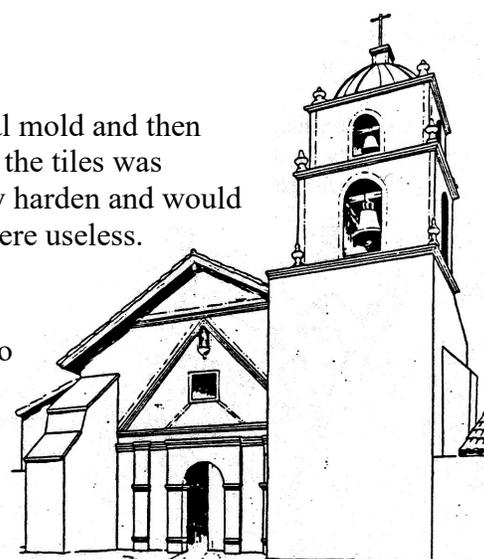
Unfortunately, because adobe bricks were not baked, they dissolved in the rain. To protect the bricks, a thick plaster whitewash was painted over all the walls. This whitewash was made from crushed seashells such as oysters. Since the whitewash needed to be constantly replaced, Native Americans were always busy putting a fresh coat of whitewash on the mission walls. Steeply sloped roofs that extended well beyond the walls also protected the adobe from the rain. These sloped roofs created protected “hallways” outside and were called arcades.

### Roof Tiles

Clay tiles covered the mission roofs. These tiles were shaped in a special mold and then baked. The temperature in the ovens was difficult to regulate, so baking the tiles was not reliable. If the oven was not hot enough, the clay would not properly harden and would dissolve in the rain. If the oven was too hot, the tiles would crack and were useless.

### Campanarios and Bell Towers

Missions were built with campanarios – large walls with arches cut out to hold the mission bells. Sometimes the bells were displayed in a tower instead. The mission bells were important because they need to stay organized. Remember, they did not have clocks in those days. The

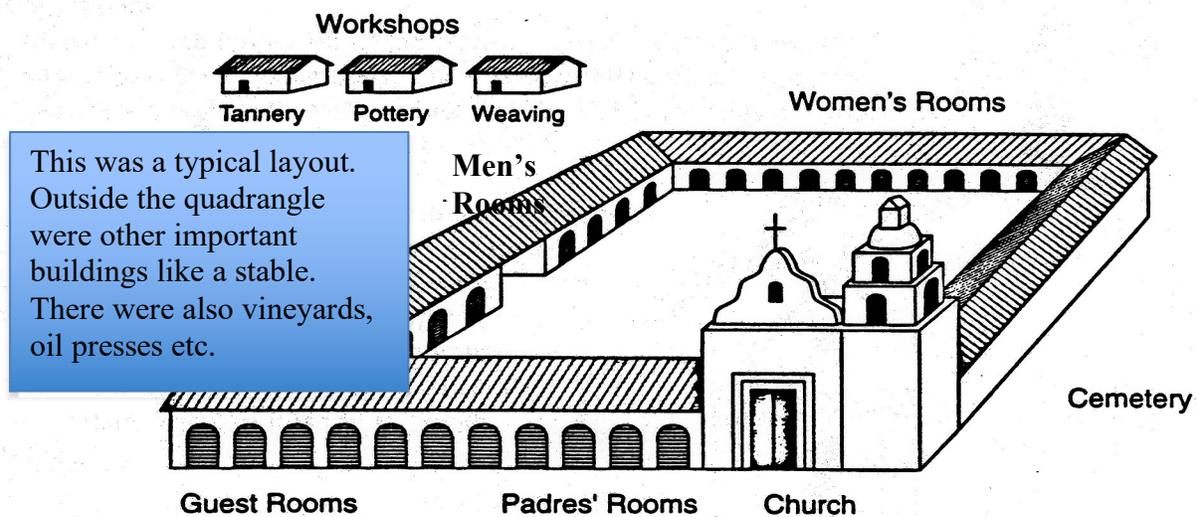


Mission San Buenaventura

bells called the padres and Native Americans to wake up, go to church, go work, go to dinner, and go to bed. Think of how we use bells at school to help stick to the daily schedule. Bells were expensive, and so the more bells a mission owned and displayed, the more prosperous it was considered. Mission San Diego was known for its unique campanario that holds five bells. The poorest missions just had one or two bells hanging from a simple, wooden frame.

## Mission Layout

Missions had similar layouts. Each mission included a church sanctuary and living quarters for the padres and the Native Americans. The buildings were built around a central patio area in the shape of a quadrangle. This design was useful because it provided a central meeting place and security for those inside. This was important because as time went on, unhappy Native Americans started attacking the missions so the quadrangle acted like the wall of a fort. Usually the church was on one corner and the padres' rooms and guest rooms were nearby. The workshops were often outside the quadrangle. Only one mission, La Purisima, did not follow the quadrangle plan.



## Unique Architecture

Although each mission was built using the same general layout, no two missions were identical. Each priest built his mission to reflect his own tastes in architectural style. Special features were purely for decorative reasons. For instance, San Miguel Mission has 16 arches because it is the sixteenth mission.



# Background Sheet 5

## Daily Life at the Mission

### **Everyone at the Mission**

Everyone, including the Native Americans, the padres, and the soldiers, started their day by waking up at dawn and attending a church service called a mass. This service lasted an entire hour! After that, everyone had to go to work. At noon and before dinner, everyone also had to attend more church services.

### **Native American Women Worked Hard**

The Native American women were responsible for all the cooking. A popular meal was a porridge called *atole*. This was made from barley, which was pounded and roasted. Their dinner typically consisted of a thick porridge made of ground wheat, maize, peas, and beans. It was called *pozoli*.

The women also were taught to sew, to spin wool into thread, to weave the thread into cloth, make clothes, and pound grain into flour. They also melted down the tallow and used that to make candles and soap. They also had to do all the cleaning of the rooms and buildings.

In addition, the women were in charge of taking care of the children and also watching over anyone who was sick.

### **Native American Men also Worked Hard**

The Native American men did most of the hard, physical labor at the mission. The top priority was to take care of the animals and farms. They would sow seeds in the fall and harvest plants in the spring. They also sheared the sheep for their wool and branded cattle.

There were also specialized workers who tanned leather and worked as blacksmiths to make tools and pots and pans. Others were trained to be carpenters and would work with wood to make furniture such as tables, chairs, and dressers. Some were trained as cobblers to make shoes.

### **Even Native American Children had to Work**

The Native American children had to work too! They basically had to help the adults with their work. So a boy would help the men with their chores. A girl would help the women with their chores. They also had smaller responsibilities like weeding the garden, feeding the animals, and pouring urine into the adobe mixture. All the children also had to go to “school” every day. They learned how to speak Spanish and they learned about the Catholic religion. The older boys actually were trained to help in the mass as altar boys.

### **The Padres also had Responsibilities**

The padres were the ones in charge at the missions. Their primary responsibility was to Christianize the Native Americans. That meant that they needed to teach them about the Catholic beliefs. Also, as part of this, they ran the church services, baptized the converts, and taught them how to pray. They also were responsible to teach the Native Americans many brand new skills. They taught them how to become farmers, how to weave cloth, how to make new kinds of food, how to make candles etc. Since the Native Americans spoke many different languages, communication was a huge issue. So they worked hard to teach them Spanish. They also taught them how to play many musical instruments.

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# Background Sheet 6

## Monterey Bay and Mission Carmel

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### Portola Explores California

After establishing the first mission in San Diego, Fr. Serra sent Gaspar de Portola to look for the Monterey Bay. He wanted to build the second mission there. But, although Portola sailed into Monterey Bay, he was not able to identify it. This was because he was using the explorer Vizcaino's map, which had significant errors. Portola was running short on supplies, and his men were anxious and confused and they were basically lost. He decided to give up and turn back to San Diego. Before leaving, he erected a cross on a hill overlooking the bay. At the base of the cross he buried a bottle with a message for the next supply ship explaining that he could not stay. He returned to San Diego and told Fr. Serra he was unable to find the bay.

### The Glowing Cross

However, after he left, something unusual happened back at the bay in Monterey. The ocean in the bay had a very high amount of phosphorus in the water. As waves pounded on the shore, the phosphorus in the ocean water landed on the cross and eventually absorbed into the wood of the cross. Phosphorus is a chemical element that makes things glow in the dark, so the cross soon began to glow in the night. This cross presented an unusual and curious sight for the Native Americans. They thought it was a spiritual vision, and they placed feathers, fish, and arrows around the cross. When Portola returned the next year, he and his men were amazed to see all the offerings. The Native Americans told tales about how the cross glowed and how sometimes at night it grew tall enough to reach the sky!

### The Second Mission is Founded

Portola and Serra finally figured out that the bay Portola had discovered a year earlier actually was the Monterey Bay that Vizcaino had written about. So Father Serra set out on a ship called the San Antonio to return to Monterey Bay, and Fr. Serra established the Carmel Mission. On June 3, 1770, they erected another cross to mark the site for Alta California's second mission. They named the mission San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo after Saint Charles. This mission became Father Serra's favorite mission and he made it the capital of all the California missions. When Father Serra died, he was buried in front of the altar.



Mission San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo



# Background Sheet 7

## Good Padres and Bad Padres at the Missions



### **Father Quintana at Mission Santa Cruz**

Father Quintana was so cruel to the Native Americans at Mission Santa Cruz that they rebelled in anger. The Native Americans were always afraid of Father Quintana but one day he made a special whip that had sharp, metal hooks on the ends. He used this to beat an Indian, Donato, almost to death. He planned to whip another Indian the next day. So, 14 Indians decided to murder him to prevent the whipping. They needed to do it in a sneaky way so they wouldn't get in trouble so they lured him into the garden. Then they strangled him with his own cape. After that they put his body in his bed and locked the door from the inside so that everyone would think he had died naturally. He had been sick so this was pretty believable. Soon after that, rumors about Father Quintana's death started to grow. At first everyone thought his death was natural. Then the secret got out that he had actually been murdered. At that time everyone thought that he'd been poisoned. Then an old Indian confessed on his deathbed that Father Quintana had been murdered. Finally, the padres asked Dr. Quixana to perform an autopsy to figure out what really happened to Father Quintana. Dr. Quixana was the Royal Surgeon for the Monterey Presidio. They came to Santa Cruz and dug up Father Quintana out of his grave. Then he performed the very first autopsy that happened in California. He discovered that Father Quintana's neck had been broken so it clearly was a murder. Nine Indians were arrested. They were given 200 lashes and put in jail for 10 years. As a result of Father Quintana being so despicable, he was murdered; however, in 2012 the Catholic Church formally apologized for his cruel treatment of the Indians at the mission.

### **Father Peyri at Mission San Luis Rey**

Father Antonio Peyri was a popular and loving padre who was respected by the Native Americans at the mission. Pablo Tac, a Luiseno Native American who lived at the mission, said "If anyone wants anything, he will ask the missionary, who will immediately give him whatever he asks because he is the father of us all." They were allowed to live in their nearby village, which was highly unusual, which meant families did not have to be separated. The men were allowed to go hunting as long as they attended to the farms and crops at the mission. The families would have breakfast together in the mornings and during the lunch break they would return to their homes for lunch. The young children went to school at the mission every day. They learned how to read and write and they learned about the Catholic religion. However, the father made sure they always had plenty of time to play every day. Padre Peyri was also a rule breaker because he actually paid the Native Americans for their daily work! Padre Peyri tried to protect the Native Americans at the mission when Mexico took over but Mexico was determined to take away their land and security. Eventually, Father Peyri found out he could be arrested. So finally he gave up and decided he needed to go back to Spain. In 1832, hoping to avoid painful farewells, he sneaked out to a ship in the middle of the night. When everyone woke up the next morning, he was missing. Everyone panicked. A group of 500 Native Americans rushed 30 miles to the beach at San Diego. They caught up with him just as he was about to set sail for Spain. They pleaded with him to return. However, he knew he could not do this. He stood on the ship with tears flowing down his cheeks and gave them a goodbye blessing. As the ship sailed away, many Native Americans threw themselves into the waves and swam after the ship, continuing to plead with him to stay.

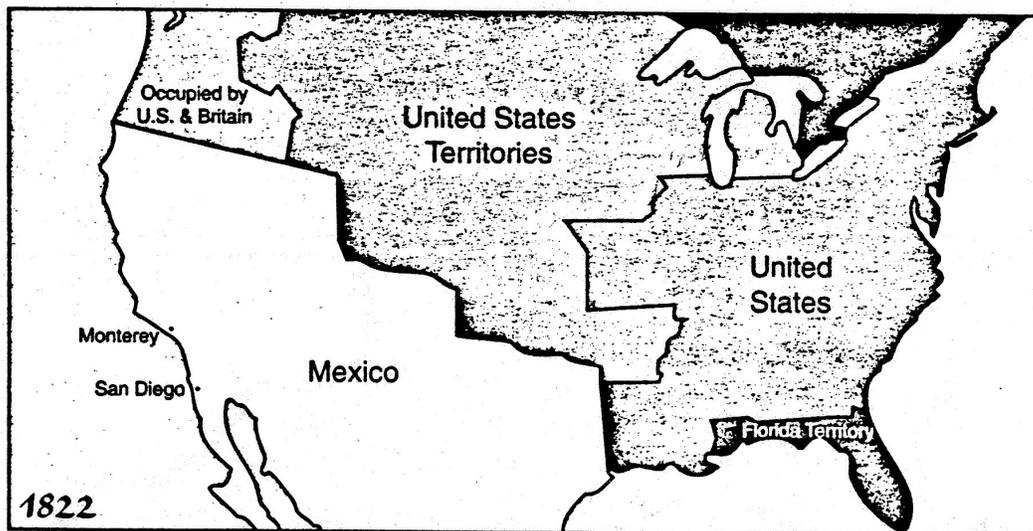
# Background Sheet 8

## Secularization

### The End of Mission Life

Secularization marked the end of mission life as it had been. To secularize means to take land from the church and give it to the people. In 1821, Mexico won a big war against Spain. This meant that they now owned Alta California. Mexico had to decide what to do with the missions. So in 1833, the Mexican government returned most mission land to the native people.

Unfortunately, the Native Americans were not able to adapt to secularized life. They did not understand the concept of owning their own land, and they did not know what to do. They had spent their lives living with and working for the padres. Without the padres to guide them, they were not able to make a living from their land. Most of them had been



born at the missions and didn't have a native village to return to. In the end, they were forced to sell or to give the land to eager Spanish and Mexican settlers. They gained little money for their land, and they were forced to work, almost like slaves, in order to survive.

### The Rancho Period Begins

This sale of mission lands led to the Rancho Period in California. Large numbers of Spaniards came from Mexico to California. They brought horses, bought large plots of inexpensive land, and created ranchos. Rancho is the Spanish word for ranch. These Spanish settlers were the original cowboys!

### Returning Land to the Church

Eventually the Catholic Church got back some of the mission land. After California became part of the United States in 1850, the United States congress returned some of the lands and buildings to the church. In the 1860s, President Lincoln returned the remaining mission buildings and land. Most of the missions today still function as real Catholic churches.

### Benefits of the Mission Period

The missions benefited California in at least three major ways. First, the missions helped people understand what crops and products could best be produced in the climate and soil along the coast. In addition, the missions established the architectural style still found throughout California. Finally, many of the pueblos built around the early missions have become major cities in California.