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ALTA CALIFORNIA
TOUCHSTONE OF
ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE AND NATIVE CULTURE
THE REDISCOVERED GLASS PLATE IMAGES OF THE FIRST ALTA CALIFORNIA STRUCTURES

ALTA BOOK PROJECT

SPECIFICATIONS

Publication title: Alta California, Touchstone of Architectural Heritage and Native Culture

Format choices: 8"x10", 8.5"x11", or 9.375"x12.375" landscape, photo edition hardcover/softcover book

Specifications: 2 Chapters / 150 pages, plus Cover / 30-35,000 word count/photo count 70 sepia-tone and 140 color

Materials: Hardcover & Dust Jacket, glossy pictorial softcover, 80lb text matte paper

Media: CMYK, 300dpi print files, InDesign files or PDF, web Landing Page, original manuscript, e-Book, bibliography, and sources.

Publication Date: Target release date 2026. Annotations, 80% or better completed.

Compatibility: Park and Museum exhibits, charity fundraisers, educational resource displays, libraries, and retail sales.

PROLOGUE

The Indigenous Natives of California developed into diversified, efficient tribes using controlled burns to prevent wildfires and building homes from native materials. They knew cures from herbs, roots, barks, and ingredients that supported long lives. In the 18th Century, their fate changed drastically. European conquistadors and explorers intervened, followed by a fifty-year period when Franciscan friars dominated Indigenous people, reducing them to subjugation. Many disapproved of the 2015 canonization of Father Serra, the Missionary Presidente until 1784, because it highlighted the disruption he caused to Native generations. Missions showed European influence and forced Native laborers into a feudal system, where they suffered from disease and shorter lives. The missionaries' needs dismantled tribal bonds, using offers such as food security, religion, or punishment to enforce control. California's Native ancestors lost identity and traditions, facing separation from families and forced labor after entering the missions. Even the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs failed to protect treaties and land patents. U.S. courts often supported removals, causing entire tribes like the Cupeño to be displaced in events such as the "California Trail of Tears."

MISSION STATEMENT

The Spanish colonial settlement's origins led to Spanish friars' oversight and a crucial period of decision-making for each tribal Nation at Alta California's founding. This new edition details authentic California Native leaders, where they lived, and the specific stories of mission settlement construction in the 18th and 19th centuries. Presenting 70 vintage glass-plate sepia-toned images alongside current photographs, it visually documents the structures as Native Californians first saw them. Alta California aims to foster discussion, collaboration, and publicity with Native tribes, historic parks, institutions, and foundations, and to reveal the Native perspective within the story of Alta California. The project highlights the continuity of Native traditions, the roots of mission pueblos that evolved into modern cities, and the ongoing disruption experienced since European arrival. It seeks to broaden public understanding of California's first citizens, emphasizing the founding structures as vital resources for educating the public about Native traditions, customs, and land locations.

ALTA CALIFORNIA 250 & THE AMERICA 250 PROJECT

Author Robert A. Bellezza seeks a clear partnership with AMERICA 250 to publish, promote, and distribute the new book. The publication is positioned for e-books, websites, brochures, videos, exhibits, and marketing materials supporting this project's specific goal: to commemorate the 250th anniversary by illuminating California's architectural and Native heritage. The press-ready hardcover edition marries book and website initiatives for release in early 2026.

A VIEW OF THE PAST

The timing is ideal. The author, a journalist and publisher, published five books on California Spanish Missions by Arcadia in 2012 and 2013. As a journalist and publisher across California, he has produced 60 travel magazines and five books on related topics. He uncovered hidden historical resources at an estate sale in Grass Valley, and over 70 antique glass plate negatives and WPA images of California's founding landmarks from the 17th and 18th centuries. They had been kept in envelopes dated from 1928 to 1937. The collection's large-format photos were taken before many historical restorations. They

served artisans, architects, and contractors during the late 1930s as they restored all the Spanish Alta California missions. Due to the sensitivity of the subject, Native Americans had been excluded during these restorations. Museums and the Park Service rarely offer in-depth living history, including the Native perspective. As a result, many Indigenous traditions were lost throughout California. In 2019, Governor Gavin Newsom issued the first formal apology from the State of California to Native Americans for the “violence, exploitation, and dispossession” inflicted by the state.

COMPARATIVE PUBLICATIONS, ANNOTATIONS, AND INTENDED CONTEXT

Author Robert A. Bellezza draws on decades of direct research revealing the diverse historical roots of California’s founding. As executive publisher of California Tour and Travel from 1994 onward, he conducted interviews with Native Americans and State Parks staff, contributing unique firsthand material. Rooted in the tradition of Jack D. Forbes and his work on Native Californians, this book seeks to clearly tie the visual and documentary history of Alta California’s founding to the lived experiences of modern Californians.

Recent books explore California’s missions from different angles, yet Alta California 250 stands apart by documenting the 18th-century founding figures through historically accurate, photography-supported content. This commemorative edition’s clear purpose is to honor America’s 250th milestone while spotlighting Native culture and architectural heritage, providing a unique and grounded addition to the existing body of work.

The author, Robert A. Bellezza, spent over a year visiting each mission site and specific libraries. He enjoyed photographing, interviewing, and meeting curators and museum staff. In 2012, under an agreement with Arcadia Publishing, he organized statewide collaborations for five volumes on California Spas. Robert A. Bellezza spent over a year visiting each mission site and library. He enjoyed photographing, interviewing, and meeting curators and museum staff. In 2012, he worked with Arcadia Publishing and organized collaborations for five volumes on the California Spanish Missions. He also handled the book design, editing, format, and image selection, resulting in one of the largest photographic collections on the subject. The new edition of Alta California 250 is due in September 2026 and will feature a landscape-style hardcover, matching the national AMERICA 250 projects. yearly, 40% are students, and many travel in-state along the historical mission trails of El Camino Real, from San Diego, Santa Barbara, and Monterey, to venture as far north as Sonoma County. Among the 21 main Spanish missions are features commonly seen in today’s Spanish, Moorish, and Mexican architecture influences, reflecting the lineages of Latin, European, American, and Native Californian heritage.

MARKETING AND TARGET AUDIENCE

Millions of visitors discover of the Spanish California Missions each year. Throughout the seasons, many of the earliest architectural buildings in California are situated in regionally serene, romantic destinations. The San Juan Capistrano mission alone attracts over 500,000 person-trips yearly, 40% are students, and many travel in-state along the historical mission trails of El Camino Real visiting one or many missions, from San Diego, Santa Barbara, and Monterey to as far north as Sonoma County. Among the 24 Spanish missions presented are the features found commonly in today’s architecture influence from Spanish, Moorish, and Mexican lineages of Latin, European, American, and Native Californian heritages.

HIGHLY MARKETABLE FACTORS OF THE ALTA CALIFORNIA PUBLICATION

- California residents account for more than 80% of inbound holiday travel, equaling 268 million person-trips in 2024.
- The story of settlement in Alta California and the founding legacy of its historical harbors, towns and cities statewide.
- The contemporary exploration of the origins and history defining Native American California roots and culture.
- Visting the architectural wonders of massive California colonial structures draws interest and enthusiasm from all corners, and is often compared with a pilgrimage to the Egyptian pyramids.
- High-quality visually appealing photography and many formatted in full-pages with comparative images then and now.
- Strong research and narrative gleaned from primary sources, coincide with the National AMERICA 250 program and extended audience.
- Strategic targeting specific historical and photographic enthusiast markets.
- There’s a demonstrated existing interest in books about California’s founding missions. Various titles available touch on history, art, recreation, and preservation.
- The author’s previous books on this subject are a proven consistent historical resource, sold widely over a decade. The new book release takes advantage of a subject at over 20 statewide destinations, within an established marketplace.
- Major attractions like Los Angeles, San Francisco, and State and National Parks draw millions of international and domestic visitors.
- Niche Market specific audience history, antique photographs, and local history.
- San Diego County has more Indian reservations than any other county in the United States, within 18 federally recognized Tribal reservations have an estimated 58,000 Native Americans and Alaskan Natives.
- Mission San Juan Capistrano receives annually 500,000 visitors, 80,000 school children visiting the Mission each year.
- Many 4th-grade California students study and visit the missions as part of their history classes.
- Key out-of-state markets include Arizona, Texas, and New York. Key international markets include Canada, Mexico, China.

PREFACE

PROLOGUE

CHAPTER ONE

MISSIONS PAST & PRESENT

Historical Alta California and the legacy of Native inhabitants from the time of the founding Spanish colonies. The author's rediscovery of 90-year-old glass plate original negatives used by the Historic Building Survey and Work Progress Administration from the 1920s-30s. Descriptions of historical restorations, settlements, and comparison of contemporary renovations on the founding structures.

CHAPTER TWO

MISSIONS OF ALTA CALIFORNIA

24 SUB-CHAPTERS IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

1/ 1769 Mission San Diego de Alcalá

The Kumeyaay, organized into twelve contemporary bands traced to villages once located along the banks of the San Dieguito River are the inhabitants of a region from the Pacific Ocean shores, at the Mexico border of Alta California, stretching inland across to the Laguna Mountains, from the Sonoran Desert to Ensenada Baja, with their territory as far north as the San Luis Rey River. The Spanish landing and first gestures of exchange with the Kumeyaay led to trenchant conflicts, the Indigenous people effected a series of uprisings against Spanish authority. The conquest by Gaspar de Portola blazing a trail to Monterey, founding the second established mission church with a chapel, harbor, and presidio, signifying the Alta California capital of Monterey and terminus of El Camino Real, the possession of the Spanish King Carlos.

2/ 1770 Royal Presidio Chapel (La Capilla Real)

El Camino Real's at the San Carlos Chapel, and symbolic church of the Spanish King, the capital of Alta California and early northern boundry of Spanish territorial dominion. The chapel, contemporaneously renamed the San Carlos Cathedral, is the earliest Alta California stone building extant. It established the second presidio and mission colony and presidio, home to Native Ohlone and Esselen, the early coastal mission Indians.

3/ 1770 Mission San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo

The northern settlements of Monterey and Carmel constitute the traditional homeland of the Indigenous Ohlone people, whose ancient traditions and oral histories are well documented. Archaeological evidence indicates continuous habitation of these ancestral territories for at least 10,000 years.

4/ 1771 Mission San Antonio De Padua

In 1771, Father Serra traveled from Monterey to the southern encampment near the Santa Lucia coastal range, in Jolon, consecrated Mission San Antonio and by 1805, nearly 1,900 neophytes worshiped there, making it one of the largest missions along El Camino Real.

5/ 1771 Mission San Gabriel Arcángel

The Tongva, of Uto-Aztecan descent, part of the Shoshonean linguistic branch lived throughout 4,000 square miles of land in small villages numbering from 5,000 to 10,000, called Tovaangar, and included the Los Angeles Tongva people. There, Mission San Gabriel Arcángel was dedicated the fourth Alta California mission, and a centerpiece of inland expansion, as a hub on the mission trails between the northern and southern settlements.

6/ 1772 Mission San Luis Obispo de Tolosa

Central to the missions and settled between Monterey and San Diego, on the coastal Homeland of the northern Salian and Native Chumash, makers of intricate basketry and the ocean-going tomol, plank canoes, endemic to their lifestyle through millennia. They lived as hunters, gatherers, and traders on both land and sea.

7/ 1776 Mission San Francisco de Asís

Founded in June 1776, the diarist Fr. Palóu, gazing upon the Golden Gate, giving praise, wrote, "Thanks be to God that now our father St. Francis with the Holy Cross of the Procession of Missions has reached the last limit of the Californian continent." The Adobe Mission San Francisco de Asís completed in 1790, by the Native peoples of San Francisco Bay. They traveled in traditional tule balsas, boats from tightly bundled dried reeds, which were well-suited for navigating the bay's waters.

8/ 1776 Mission San Juan Capistrano

Establishing the seventh Alta California Mission in November 1776, Father Junípero Serra consecrated Mission San Juan Capistrano, "The Jewel of the Missions", and the Serra Chapel, the oldest historical building in California, was dedicated.

v9/ 1777 Santa Clara de Asís

Honoring the patron, Saint Clare, the Mission Santa Clara de Asís was a contemporary of Saint Francis, founded along indigenous trails. It is the seat of Santa Clara University, by Spanish Jesuits in 1825, as California's first institution of higher learning.

10/ 1782 Mission San Buenaventura

Records indicate the Chumash Nation families thrived in this region for 10,000 years, settling north to Morro Bay and San Luis Obispo, and south in Ventura and Malibu. Nearly 20,000 Coastal Chumash living in and around the coastal settlements of Ventura and the Channel Islands. Waterproof huts from tule reeds lined the coastal plains and people were observed gathering, preparing, and harvesting acorns, nuts, seeds, and berries, and hunting.

11/ 1787 Mission Santa Bárbara, Virgen y Mártir

The "Queen of the Missions" built as a collaborative construction effort with Father Ripoll, supervised from 1815 to 1820, and masterwork of architecture. Chumash artisans built the large chapel, creating elaborate entryways, and Native artwork weaves intricate, delicate patterns and colors inside Mission Santa Barbara. One of few surviving missions after secularized years, houses the original historical mission archives.

12/ 1787 La Purísima Concepción de Maria Santísima

At the center of a large scale uprisings of the 1830s, this mission represents a persistent struggle for independence, after the takeover Mexico, and opposing a series of broken societal promises, less equality, and blanket loss of Native traditions, as Mission followers were subjugated within the system.

13/ 1791 -La Exaltación de la Santa Cruz

The twelfth mission of Alta California located on a hilltop overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Founded by Fr. Fermin Francisco de Lausén on August 28, 1791. 500 neophytes contributed to the construction of the church and associated properties. The cornerstone was laid on September 18, 1793, near the Ohlone and Yokut communities. At its peak in 1798, the mission's neophyte population reached 644, with nearly 3,000 head of grazing cattle.

14/ 1791 Nuestra Señora del la Soledad

Founded in October 1791, the congregation had by 1796, baptized 289 neophytes. By 1805, the mission's population reached 725 Natives, with half from Mission Santa Cruz, showing the community's growth despite hardships with seasons of flooding and extreme drought.

15/ 1797 Mission Del Gloriosísimo Patriarca San José

The mission served nearby El Pueblo de San José de Guadalupe, the first formal city in Alta California, founded in 1777. In 1811, the friars baptized 1,886 neophytes at the San José mission, bringing the total to 6,700 baptisms recorded into the 1830s.

16/ 1797 Mission San Juan Bautista

A turning point of the rapid expansion in the Alta California mission chain of colonies, as Mission Presidente Father Fermin Lasuén established of nine additional grand missions in the following years. The largest, Mission San Juan Bautista, the fifteenth mission, consecrated on June 27, 1797, sixteen days after the founding of Mission San José. Between 1797 and 1834, more than 3,000 California Indians left their ancestral villages to join others at Mission San Juan Bautista, situated within a traditional fertile farming valley of Native Mutsun families.

17/ 1797 Mission San Miguel Arcángel

Directly on "The King's Road" near reliable water sources, the original Adobe church at Mission San Miguel Arcángel, dedicated in 1797, measured 28 by 34 feet, with an earth-covered roof. The mission colony reached a peak of 1,169 conversions in 1804. The Native Californians primarily of Salinan and Yokut descent, constructed the original mission church from wood hewn in Cambria, and used decorative artwork and painted colors of Indigenous artisans, visible on balconies, doors, and archways.

18/ 1797 Mission San Fernando Rey de España

Located within the ancestral homeland of the inland Tataviam tribes and established in a vast, barren field of Los Encino Rancho, the mission location served between San Gabriel and San Juan Capistrano along El Camino Real. The two-story historical Adobe convento "long" building is the largest original Adobe structure among California's missions, constructed between 1808 and 1822, once used as a stagecoach stop. Today, the Mission Church was rebuilt in 1971 after a destructive earthquake leveled the building.

19/ 1798 -San Luis Rey de Francia

In 1831, the most productive and successful mission reported 26,000 cattle, 25,000 sheep, and 2,000 horses, noting that the livestock consumed 395,000 bushels of grain. Harvests included over 2,000 barrels of mission wine, field crops, and various forms of product manufacturing. Nearby, tilled crops of barley, maize, wheat, raised livestock, and produced hides and tallow.

20/ 1804 Mission Santa Inés, Virgen y Martir

The nineteenth Alta California mission founded on September 17, 1804, intending to convert the Native Chumash living east of the coastal mountain range in the Santa Ynez River Valley. Thousands of Indigenous people from the surrounding foothills, and the mission's population having reached 768 in 1816, grew over the years, with 1,411 individuals baptized. The mission established a gristmill for grinding corn and wheat, and processed wool and cloth, by Native Chumash industries.

21/ 1817 Mission San Rafael Arcangel

Founded on December 14, 1817, as a health resort and Asistencia for Mission Dolores, the Mission San Rafael Arcángel, with the local Indigenous community, increased the mission's population to 1,140 by 1828. The chieftains' names live on in Marin County, Solano County, and the town of San Quentin. The modern additions of a signpost bell marker, stone masonry walls, and further restorations memorialize the historical significance of today's Mission San Rafael Arcángel in California.

22/ 1823 Mission San Francisco Solano

Founded in Sonoma's Valley of the Moon by an ambitious young Franciscan, Fr. Altimira, it was the last to be established in California, selected for its fertile soil, fresh water, and abundant wood. It served as the backdrop to the Bear Flag Revolt, a bloodless skirmish in which 60 Americans, assisted by US General John C. Frémont from Sutter's Fort in the Sacramento Valley, began the surge to overthrow the Mexican rulers of California.

23/ 1810 Mission San Antonio de Pala

With the expansion of Mission San Luis Rey to the eastern and northern coastal corridors, the abundant water resources farmed fertile agricultural lands. Irrigated from Warner Springs, Asistencia Mission San Antonio de Pala, and home of the Cupeño, forced into removal from their ancestral homelands. Founded in 1816, it was granted to be a full mission soon after.

24/ 1818-Santa Ysabel Asistentia, Santa Ysabel

A young baptized neophyte Diegueño of Mission San Diego, witnessed the Battle of San Pasqual Valley, during the Mexican-American War in her homeland. The tribal Kumeyaay providswater to American soldiers in 1846, for California's freedom from Mexico, led by U.S. Army General Kearny.

TIMELINE

PHOTO INDEX

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