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# **ALTA CALIFORNIA**

## **RUINS TO RENOVATION, 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 format, photo edition hardcover/softcover book

Specifications: 2 Chapters / 180 pages, plus Cover / 30,000 word count

Materials: Glossy pictorial cover, 80lb text matte paper, Hardcover and Dust Jacket

Media: PDF CMYK, 300dpi print files, available InDesign files, Landing Web Page, manuscript, image media sources, and e-Book publishing.

Publication Date: September 2026. Annotations and author narrative, 90% completed.

##### **PROLOGUE**

The Indigenous Natives of California developed their tribal diversities harmoniously over centuries and practiced fire prevention through controlled burns, constructed homes of native materials, and knew the cures extracted from herbs, roots, barks, and other ingredients that nurture long lives. During the 18th Century, the exact opposite fate befell them during the intervention of European conquistadors and explorers, during a period of the Franciscan friars, often dominating Indigenous people through subjugation. To the dislike of many, the canonization in 2015 by Pope Francis of Missionary Presidente Father Serra, the lead missionary until his demise in 1784, raised awareness for the disruption caused to generations of Native-born people. The missions became a display of influence over Native laborers toiling under an enforced feudal system, subjected to European diseases and shortened lifespans. The underlying factor to fulfilling the needs of the missionaries began by destroying tribal ties, using inducements, agricultural security, or the remorseful consequences of corporal punishment. California's Native ancestors incurred the loss of identity and tradition, the separation of family members and bondage immediately on entering the mission. Indigenous natives became the target of duplicity, the confrontation by the force of laws and injustices, losing their land holdings and livestock. Even the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs failed to enforce treaties and land patents, triggering removals that were often supported by U.S. courts resulting in an entire tribal bands dislocated from their homeland, as with the Cupeño "California Trail of Tears".

##### **MISSION STATEMENT**

The Spanish colonial settlement origins brought Spanish friars' governing oversight during a period of internal decision-making of each individual tribal Nation at the time of Alta California's founding. First, as a series of photography books published by Arcadia Publishing, the new Alta California 250 book edition presents a detailed chronological record of real Native leaders from where they lived and the stories surrounding the mission colonies and founding structures of the 18th and 19th centuries. The premiere unveiling includes 70 vintage glass-plate sepia-toned images, mixed with current-day photographs depicting these immense structures. They are revealed as they appeared to the Native Californians, who built them 250 years before by hand. The premiere edition of Alta California 250 establishes potential discussion, publicity and collaboration with Native American tribal bands, regional California State Historic Parks, institutions, and private foundations, bringing new light to the Alta California founding story. The Native background history of the past uncovers a fight for freedom and passive resistance. The mission pueblos have become the cities we know today, beginning a path of centuries of disruption left by the first European landing. The project aims to expand the public knowledge the legacy and traditions of California's first citizens. Each mission, now opened to the public, are attractions visited by many millions throughout the year. These founding Alta California structures serve as educational discourse, and a study of the first people in California, their traditions, customs, and the tribal locations of Native lands, to benefit all.

##### **ALTA CALIFORNIA 250 & THE AMERICA 250 PROJECT**

Author Robert A. Bellezza seeks agreement with a collaborative partnership aligned with AMERICA 250 to publish, promote, and distribute the new book. Also, the publication demonstrates further potential for e-books, websites, brochures, videos, photography exhibits, and media marketing materials. The hardcover premiere Edition, nearly press-ready and targeted for early 2026, coincides with the book's release and its website: [www.AltaCalifornia250.com](http://www.AltaCalifornia250.com).

## **A VIEW OF THE PAST**

The timing could not be better, as author of five California Spanish Missions books, published by Arcadia in 2012 and 2013, completing research practically every part of California as a journalist and publisher, completing 60 California travel magazines and five books on related topics, uncovering its hidden sources to the earliest periods in Golden State history. An estate sale in Grass Valley caught my attention, and the discovery of over 70 antique glass plate negatives, WPA images of California's founding landmarks from the 17th and 18th centuries, each carefully preserved in envelopes dated from 1928 to 1937. The collection consists of large-format photographs taken well before many historical restorations by artisans, architects, historians, and construction companies during the late 1930s. The photos were used to aid the official restorations of the entire Spanish Alta California mission chain, which due to sensitivity of the subject, had precluded any Native American input. The restorations by museums or the Park Service of these unique foundational landmarks to date, offer few living history experiences for a deeper understanding of Native history perspective to identifying ancestral traditions and Native lands. It's an immense impact, as observed throughout California, in effect of a general neglect contributing to the cumulative losses of Indigenous traditions. 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 upon them by the state.

## **COMPARATIVE PUBLICATIONS, ANNOTATIONS, AND INTENDED CONTEXT**

It is the author's, Robert A Bellezza's intention to focus on this subject as one taking decades of direct research in weaving together diverse historical elements to California's founding days. As executive publisher of California Tour and Travel, in 1994, he had conducted interviews and meetings with Native Americans, hospitality associates, State Parks personnel, and researched library special collections. In the tradition of Jack D. Forbes and in particular, his work Native Americans of California and Nevada, brings to light the names and stories of an unknown history regarding his extensive life as a Native American scholar, closely tied to the University of California. Alta California 250 ties together visualization of its founding days with the reality of the present day, experienced by those touring California highways.

Recently, authors have contributed to the subject in varying perspectives: the following releases during the past five years demonstrate the current viability of the subject: Hiking and Cycling the California Missions Trail: From Sonoma to San Diego by Sandy Brown, published by Cicerone Press in 2023, another, California Mission Walk: The Hiker's Guide, which was recently revised from 2012, in 2022 and 2023, by author, Butch Briery. This incorporates ten years of updated trail data for the "new wave" of mission walkers. Originally published in 2016 independently through Amazon and Lulu Press, California Missions, Visiting All 21 is a family-oriented road-tripper's guide that includes a "Mission Passport" section for stamp collecting—a highly popular feature for recreational tourists. In Search of the Real California Missions, written by Christian Clifford in 2021, leans into the spiritual and personal quest narrative, which is a growing niche in the mission-touring market. Among the historical & critical works, Re-imagining the California Missions: A Former Franciscan Friar's Search for the Truth, by Mark R. Day and published in 2025, is a highly discussed critique that attempts to bridge the gap between Franciscan tradition and historical reality. The book, We Are the Land: A History of Native California, by Damon B. Akins and William J. Bauer Jr., released by the University of California Press in 2021, offers subjects other than just the missions and cited by reviewers on Goodreads as essential context for the Alta California era. Therefore, the new release on the subject, Alta California 250, Architectural Heritage and Native Culture, an historically accurate, grounded, photography-backed commemorative edition celebrates the figures of 18th-century California and honors the 250th milestone of America's freedoms.

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 members. In 2012, under an association with Arcadia Publishing, he organized statewide collaborations for five volumes on the California Spanish Missions, as well as overseeing the final book design, editing, format, specifications, and use over 1,000 images, creating one of the largest photographic collections on the subject published. The new edition on Alta California 250 is designed for a September 2026 release date, and includes a landscape-style hardcover version, to align with nationally recognized AMERICA 250 commemorative projects.

## **MARKETING AND TARGET AUDIENCE**

Millions of visitors annually discover the Spanish California Missions throughout the seasons. Many of the first architectural buildings in California are situated in serene and romantic destinations. The San Juan Capistrano mission alone attracts over 500,000 person-trips yearly, 40% are students, and many traveling 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.

## 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.
- A premiere edition allows a new form and concept of Native American reading in California's history, roots and culture.
- High-quality visually appealing photographs with many in full-page formats, in the concept of both images then and now.
- Strong research and narrative from primary sources coincide with the National AMERICA 250 program and extended audience.
- Strategic targeting of the specific historical and photographic enthusiast markets.
- There's a demonstrated existing interest in books about California missions. Various titles available involve history, art, and preservation.
- 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, with 18 federally recognized Reservations are an estimated 58,000 Native Americans and Alaskans.
- Mission San Juan Capistrano receives an annual 500,000 visitors, with 80,000 of those school children at the Mission each year.
- Many 4th-grade students visit the missions as part of their California history studies.
- Key out-of-state markets include Arizona, Texas, and New York. Key international markets include Canada, Mexico, and China.

**PREFACE****PROLOGUE****CHAPTER ONE****MISSIONS PAST & PRESENT**

Explore the wide landscape of historical California, the Native inhabitants' legacy at the time of the founding Spanish colonies. The discovery of Alta California continues to reveal a lineage of Spanish, Mexican, and American shared founding. The author brings to light 90-year-old glass plate, original negatives, used by the Work Progress Administration of the 1930s of over twenty historical restorations, using contemporary photography. The accompanying annotations outlining both today and yesterday's era, lends vivid comparisons to ascertain a unique arc of its 250-year history.

**CHAPTER TWO****MISSIONS OF ALTA CALIFORNIA IN****24 SUB-CHAPTERS IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER****1/ 1769 Mission San Diego de Alcalá**

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

**2/ 1770 Royal Presidio Chapel**

At the terminus of El Camino Real's at the Monterey harbor north end at the San Carlos Chapel, the symbol for the church of the Spanish King, capital of Alta California, and the extended territorial dominion. The chapel was contemporaneously renamed the San Carlos Cathedral and is the earliest Alta California stone building extant in Alta California. The second presidio established north of the first mission colony of San Diego, and 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 Costanoan 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, and 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 and part of the Shoshonean linguistic branch, lived throughout 4,000 square miles of land, in small villages numbering from 5,000 to 10,000, which they called Tovaangar, and included the Los Angeles Tongva people. There, Mission San Gabriel Arcángel was dedicated as the fourth Alta California mission and the centerpiece of inland expansion, serving as a hub on the trail to the northern and southern settlements.

**6/ 1772 Mission San Luis Obispo de Tolosa**

Central to the scheme, and settled between Monterey and San Diego, near the coastal Homeland of the northern Salian and Native Chumash. Intricate basketry and the ocean-going tomol, their 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." Construction of Mission San Francisco de Asís began in 1788 and was completed in 1790. Native peoples of San Francisco Bay constructed traditional tule balsas, canoe-like boats made 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 lovingly consecrated Mission San Juan Capistrano, "The Jewel of the Missions". The Serra Chapel, the oldest historical building in California, was begun that same year.

**9/ 1777 Santa Clara de Asís**

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

**10/ 1782 Mission San Buenaventura**

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

**11/ 1787 Mission Santa Bárbara, Virgen y Martir**

The "Queen of the Missions" was built as a collaborative effort with Father Ripoll, who supervised construction from 1815 to 1820, a masterwork of architecture. Chumash artisans built the large chapel, creating elaborate entryways, and Native artwork weaves intricate, delicate patterns and colors that decorate the mission walls. Today, Mission Santa Barbara remains one of the few surviving missions in total and houses much of the original historical mission archives.

**12/ 1787 La Purisima Concepcion de Maria Santisima**

At the center of a large scale uprising in the 1830s, this mission represents the struggle for independence further persisted after the takeover from Spain, followed by Mexico's series of broken societal promises, much less equality for the Natives, and a blanket loss of traditions subjugated within the Mission system.

### **13/ 1791 -La Exaltacion de la Santa Cruz**

The twelfth mission of Alta California was located on a hilltop overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Founded by Fr. Fermin Francisco de Lausén on August 28, 1791, over 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 Senora del la Soledad**

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

### **15/ 1797 Mission Del Gloriosísimo Patriarca San José**

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

### **16/ 1797 Mission San Juan Bautista**

A turning point period of the rapid expansion to the Alta California mission chain of colonies, as Mission Presidente Father Fermin Lasuén oversaw establishing of nine additional missions in the following years. Mission San Juan Bautista, the fifteenth mission, was 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 and had an earth-covered roof. The mission colony reached a peak of 1,169 conversions in 1804. The Native Californians were primarily of Salinan and Yokut descent, building the original mission church from wood hewn in Cambria and using the decorative artwork 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 is located midway between San Gabriel and San Juan Capistrano along El Camino Real. The two-story historical Adobe convento building is the largest original adobe structure among California's missions, and was constructed between 1808 and 1822, and used as a stagecoach stop. Today, the recreated Mission Church was rebuilt in 1971.

### **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, and noted that the livestock consumed 395,000 bushels of grain. Harvests included over 2,000 barrels of mission wine, and crops used in various forms of product manufacturing. Nearby fields tilled fields of barley, maize, wheat, and raised livestock, produced hides and tallow goods.

### **20/ 1810 Mission San Antonio de Pala**

With the expansion of Mission San Luis Rey into the eastern and northern coastal corridors, it utilized the abundant water resources and fertile agricultural lands. Irrigated by water from Warner Springs, Asistencia, Mission San Antonio de Pala. The home of the Cupeño, after removal from their highland ancestral home. Founded in 1816, it has become a full mission.

### **21/ 1818-Santa Ysabel Asistencia, Santa Ysabel**

A young baptized neophyte Diegueño of Mission San Diego, who witnessed the Battle of San Pasqual Valley during the Mexican-American War in her homeland, is described for her efforts to provide water to American soldiers in 1846, as California's freedom from Mexico was led by U.S. Army General Kearny.

### **22/ 1804 Mission Santa Inés, Virgen y Martir**

The nineteenth Alta California mission, founded on September 17, 1804, intended to convert the Native Chumash living east of the coastal mountain range in the Santa Ynez River Valley, approximately 45 miles from Santa Bárbara. Thousands of Indigenous people lived in the surrounding foothills, with the mission's population having reached 768 in 1816. Over the next 32 years, 1,411 individuals were baptized. The mission established a gristmill for grinding corn and wheat and constructed a fulling mill for processing wool and softening cloth produced by Native Chumash industries.

### **23/ 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.

### **24/ 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.

#### **TIMELINE**

#### **PHOTO INDEX**

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