

MISSION SANTA CLARA DE ASIS  
(Santa Clara University College Chapel)  
500 El Camino Real  
Santa Clara  
Santa Clara County  
California

HALS CA-73  
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
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HALS NO. CA-73

Location: 500 El Camino Real, Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, Santa Clara County, California

Lat: 37.349369 Long: -121.941197 (Center of the plaza in front of the mission church, Google Earth, Simple Cylindrical Projection, WGS84)

Significance: The chain of 21 missions built in Alta California between 1769 and 1823 represents some of California's earliest European habitations. Mission construction began while California was controlled by Spain, to come under the control of Mexico in 1821 and ultimately, in 1846, to become part of the United States. As part of the Spanish frontier, each settlement usually had three components; a pueblo or civil settlement, a presidio which provided military protection, and a mission which was responsible for spreading the catholic faith and the well-being of the native population.

Since its founding on January 12, 1777, Mission Santa Clara de Asis has had three sites within the Santa Clara Valley. Floods and earthquake lead to successive relocations. Founded as the second in the pair with Mission San Francisco de Asis (Mission Dolores) in San Francisco, Mission Santa Clara, is named for the childhood friend of San Francis of Assisi, Saint Clare of Assisi. It is the eighth mission in Alta California and the only California mission to honor a woman.

Now on the campus of Santa Clara University, this is the only college in the state to be the successor of a Spanish-era mission. The overall site layout of the church with plaza, quadrangle to the south, enclosed church yard to the north (first as cemetery, later as rose garden,) and major tree plantings is intact and significant. The remnant adobe wall and Adobe Lodge are original fabric dating to the early mission period. The church was built or had significant remodels six times. The extant church dates to 1928 and is loosely based on the 1825 mission church design.

Description: The approach to the mission is via a road known today as Palm Drive which bears directly on the front (northeast) facade of the church.

In addition to the plaza in front of the church, there are landscape spaces on each side of the church, to the right as the visitor faces the church (north side) is a walled rose garden, on the left side of the church (south side) is a park-like setting of paths, lawns and plantings. Together these three areas define the Mission Santa Clara de Asis grounds that are addressed in this HALS documentation. The generally flat site has its edges defined by the wall of the rose garden, the path that hugs the rear (northwest side) of the church, the adobe building known as Adobe

Lodge the remnant adobe wall, and the west facade of the campus building known as St Joseph's Hall.

In front of the church a road called Alviso Street runs at 90 degrees to Palm Drive. Opposite the front facade, across Alviso Street there is a large wooden cross commemorating the founding of the mission. At its base is a glass-fronted case and plaque that reads: "preserved herein is a portion of the original cross first erected by Fray Tomas de la Pena O.F.M. Before the entrance to the first Mission Santa Clara de Asis, January 12, 1777".

The cross is approx 15-feet tall and is made of 12"x12" unfinished redwood, mounted on a concrete base and set in a small area of brick paving, edged with a bed of shrub roses.

The front façade of the church and associated plaza is comprised of three elements. The paving in front of the main door of the church (24'x27'), and two side areas of paving (24'x16'each) are made of pink, concrete, unit-pavers (1'x1'sq.). These paved areas lead to three flights of stairs (6 stairs in each) at the doors of this main facade. At the top of each of these stairs is terra cotta tile paving. Lawn panels and planters with standard roses separate the panels of paving in front of the church. A standard concrete sidewalk runs next to the curb of Alviso Street. Located in the south east corner are two hitching posts from the early mission period and a block of stone with two steps on one side and the inscription "SCC" on the other; a carriage mount from the early years of Santa Clara College. Near the hitching posts is a mission bell marker similar to those placed throughout the state marking El Camino Real at the turn of the twentieth century. In the lawn near the northeast corner of the front façade is a granite boulder with a bronze plaque, placed January 12, 1981, identifying Mission Santa Clara de Asis as a California Registered Historical Landmark (#338).

Standing back and looking at the front façade of the mission church, each is corner is anchored by colossal trees. One on the right near the rose garden is a spectacular cork oak (*Quercus suber*), on the left next to St Joseph's Hall is a pair of weeping Nootka cypress (*Chamaecyparis nootkatensis*). Foundation planting includes Australian tree ferns (*Cyathia cooperi* and *Dicksonia antartica*), clipped laurel and boxwood hedge plants (*Prunus laurocerasus* and *Buxus sempervirens*), sword fern (*Nephrolepis cordifolia*), *Bergenia sp.*, *Fuschia sp.* and elephant ears (*Calocasia sp.*). In front of church, near the sidewalk there are Indian hawthorn shrubs.

Approaching the southeast side of the church, the visitor passes through a roofed arcade, through a pair of heavy wooden doors with decorative wood screen in each. Before them is the quadrangle.

The quadrangle, measuring 210'x200', has four paths that follow its edges and two that cross it. The main path from Alviso Street runs through the roofed portal and parallel with the south facade of the church; it is separated from the latter by a strip of lawn and planting. Once through the portal, it is covered with a stout trellis. This

main path has a side path connecting it to the rear door of the church. Moving in a counter clockwise direction, the other three edges are defined by paths including one that runs under the loggia of Adobe Lodge, another that runs along the north face of the remnant adobe wall, and a fourth that runs in front of St Joseph's Hall. The two paths that cross the quad run parallel with the west facade of Adobe Lodge, dividing it roughly into thirds. Together these paths and their associated buildings define the edges of this quadrangle.

Paths are made of concrete and range from 7-foot wide at the main arbor-covered walk on the southeast side of the church, to 16-foot wide at the eastern of the two paths crossing the lawn. The arbor-covered path has a section of finely finished concrete with a border of dark gray and a diamond checker board pattern dark and light gray concrete. This 40'-long section marks the path into the courtyard through the east wing of the 1822 mission building. Elsewhere in the quadrangle, stone flagstones are used where desire-lines at the junctions of paths and to lead to benches and wall-mounted commemorative plaques on the church.

The southwestern of the two paths across the quadrangle has a Sacred Heart statue with the path dividing around it to form a circular event along the path. The perimeter of the circle is planted with roses and annuals, and one large, mature Sago Palm (*Cycas revoluta*). The statue marks the site of the old mission well. In the center of the circle, the statue is mounted on a granite base with ivy around it. The sculpture stands 6-feet tall above the base.

The wood arbor along the main path is 150' long and near its west end there is a crossing of the trellis, 60-foot long and asymmetrically positioned. It is made of 6"x6" unpainted redwood and supports a pair of vine species: Lady Banks rose and wisteria. The latter dominates; the trunks of the wisteria in particular are massive, and date to the 1880s.

The southern corner of the mission quadrangle has the Adobe Lodge on one side and the remnant adobe wall at 90-degrees to it. Along the length, of the Adobe Lodge loggia are with Lady Banks rose vines (*Rosa banksii*) and plantings of camellias (*Camellia japonica*), giant chain fern (*Woodwardia fimbriata*), and annuals that separate it from the quadrangle. The remnant adobe wall also has a roofed loggia, though this one faces away from the quadrangle. The adobe wall encloses two-thirds of the southeast edge of the quadrangle. These two structures are the sole buildings from the early nineteenth century mission to remain after the 1926 fire.

Small-scaled features within the quadrangle include two wooden English-style benches located under the trees near the church, a wood-framed, glass-fronted sign illustrating the features of the courtyard and several commemorative plaques.

The quadrangle is a virtual arboretum dominated by palms including, Chilean wine palm (*Jubaea chilensis*), Canary Island date palm (*Phoenix canariensis*), California and Mexican fan palms (*Washingtonia filifera* and *W. robusta*),

windmill palm (*Trachycarpus fortunei*), blue Mexican palm (*Brahea amata*). Trees in the quadrangle are predominantly against the south wall of the church and include primrose tree (*Lagunaria patersonii*), sweet shade (*Hymenosporum flavum*), Norfolk Island pine (*Araucaria heterophylla*), saucer magnolia (*Magnolia x soulangeana*), and jacaranda (*Jacaranda mimosifolia*).

The shrubbery of the quadrangle is eclectic tending towards a quasi-tropical character. Species include birds of paradise (*Strelitzia reginae*), roses (shrub and standard), camellia, giant chain ferns, princess flower (*Tibouchina urvilleana*), big-leafed hydrangea (*Hydrangea macrophylla*), Chinese fringe flower (*Loropetalum chinensis* 'Razzle Dazzle'), elephant ears (*Calocasia sp*), oleander (*Nerium oleander*), lily of the Nile (*Agapanthus africanus*), daylilies (*Hemerocallis sp.*), *Clivia miniata*, *Lriope spicata*, ivy (*Hedera helix*) and impatiens.

The character of the quadrangle is peaceful. Birds are abundant. Planes heading to or from San Jose airport nearby are also apparent. The open lawn dotted with palms has clearly defined edges. Buildings serving the campus lie beyond on all sides and are visible from the quadrangle.

Travelling northwest around the rear of the church on an 8-foot wide concrete path, the visitor walks by a landscape space that is not associated with the mission. Rather it serves as an entry forecourt to an adjacent university building. The path hugs the church and leads to a rear door on the north side of the church. The path is flanked with fan palms (*Washingtonia sp.*) with *Pittosporum tobira* 'Wheeler Dwarf' at their bases. Clipped Indian hawthorne shrubs (*Rhaphiolepis sp.*) lie between the path and church.

Continuing in a clockwise direction around the mission, the visitor passes a walled rose garden. The rose garden measures 130'x80' and is enclosed on all sides by a stucco wall. On the northeast side the wall is 7-feet high topped with red, clay, leg-tile, on the northwest it is 4-feet high topped with the same terra cotta tile, while on the southwest side of the rose garden, it is 8-feet high and has no cap. The church forms the fourth side of the rose garden. The entry to the rose garden is on the northeast side, next to the front façade of the church. In the gabled entry portal, there is an ornate wrought iron gate with a lock on it. This is the only means of access into the garden. The rose garden marks the location of the cemetery of the mission. It is symmetrically laid out with lawn paths between the beds. A great variety of roses are evident. Like all plant beds in the mission grounds, planting beds are edged with recycled plastic lumber header boards.

History:

In 1797 King Carlos III of Spain suspected the Jesuits, who had established 14 missions in Baja California, were withholding payments due the royal treasury. He established career soldier Don Gaspar de Portola, as Governor of the Californias and sent him to evict the Jesuits. The priest who took over the Jesuit chain of missions was Father Junipero Serra. About the same time, Jose de Galvez, the

king's inspector general, had devised a plan to extend the missions to the north into Alta California. Galvez wanted to establish positions in the known bays of San Diego and Monterey to forestall the advancing British, Dutch and Russians who threatened the frontier of the Spanish empire.

Don Gaspar de Portola's 1769 land expedition from San Diego continued beyond Monterey up the coast towards San Francisco bay. They and others who followed the next year described the Santa Clara Valley, then known as the Llano de Los Robles or Plain of the Oaks, as fine agricultural land, a broad grassy plain with trees marking the courses of the many streams.

Spanish Viceroy Antonio Bucareli ordered expeditions be sent to select sites for future missions and when Juan Bautista de Anza and Father Pedro Font visited the region in 1776, they identified a site in the vicinity of the river they named Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe (Our Lady of Guadalupe) as one of these.

Viceroy Bucareli intended to establish a pair of missions to strengthen New Spain's northern frontier, the first at San Francisco de Asis (Mission Dolores) was founded in September 1776. The second Mission Santa Clara de Asis, was founded 46 miles south on the banks of the Guadalupe River on January 12, 1777 when Fray Tomas de la Pena said the first mass. Today the location of the first Mission Santa Clara de Asis church is near Highway 101 immediately west of the Guadalupe River.

Two missionaries were assigned to the mission, Fray de la Pena and Fray Jose Murguia. Amongst their responsibilities was converting the local Indians from the 40 Indian settlements in the vicinity. Aided by the labor of the Indians building on the mission began. By the end of 1777 they had constructed the first church, a priests' residence, a structure for cattle, sheep, and goats, a wooden bridge across the Guadalupe River, and irrigation ditches for the grain fields.

Two years after the founding of the mission, in January 1779, the flooding of the Guadalupe River caused the inhabitants of the mission to salvage what was possible and move to a temporary location while a more suitable permanent site was selected. At this temporary location the padres established a second wooden church which was blessed by Father Junipero Serra on November 11, 1779. Today the location of the second church of the Mission Santa Clara de Asis is on Martin Avenue near the San Jose airport.

In 1781, de la Pena and Murguia found a site sufficiently far from the river that they would be safe from floods while close enough to allow an irrigation canal to bring water to the fields. On November 19, 1781, Father Serra blessed and laid the cornerstone of this third church of Mission Santa Clara de Asis. Work began immediately on its construction which, owing to its sturdy nature, took two and a half years to build. It was 100-feet long, 22-feet wide, and 20-feet high, built of

adobe with four-foot thick walls, white-washed inside and out. First mass in the third church of mission was said on May 16, 1784. The location of the third church of Mission Santa Clara de Asis was identified as being at Franklin and Grant Streets. Today it lies within the campus of Santa Clara University.

This church was home to the Mission Santa Clara de Asis for 34 years. The period of calm was ended by the 1818 earthquake that severely damaged the mission. Fray Jose Viader and Fray Magin Catala, who served at the mission from the 1790s to the 1830s, built the fourth mission church. This temporary structure was made of adobe and housed the church for six years from 1819 to 1825. The building remained for years after the fifth church was built and, after serving various community uses, was razed in 1867. Today, the location of the fourth Mission Santa Clara de Asis church lies within the campus of Santa Clara University, a short distance south of the third church site.

During the time of Viader and Catala, Mission Santa Clara de Asis was prosperous. The Indians of the mission farmed wheat, corn, beans, and tended the orchards. In 1827, their herds had 14,500 head of cattle and 15,500 head of sheep, enough to supply the neighboring pueblo and presidio. During this time the mission had more baptisms than any other in Alta California. They also lead the other missions in burials, in part due to disease. The cemetery was located immediately next to the church on its north side. Between 1777 and 1851, more than 6000 Native Americans, Spaniards, Californios, and Americans were buried here.

In 1822, the fifth and final mission compound was begun. The church was a simple stout structure built of adobe with a single bell tower in the Spanish Colonial style. The church had a gable roof and a long row of single-story adobe dwellings on its south side. A large wooden cross sat opposite the front façade of the church. Several poorly-defined circulation paths in front of the church can be seen in historic images in the HABS listing. The buildings defined a quadrangle on the south side of the church; the space's edges were defined by the church, workshops, residences, store rooms. The fifth church was completed and dedicated on August 11, 1825 and was to stand for over a century. The location of the fifth church of the Mission of Santa Clara de Asis is the same as today's church, on the campus of Santa Clara University.

Though the rhythm of mission life and associated patterns of land use were entrenched, events on the larger world would soon change these routines. In 1822, Mexico gained independence from Spain and set about secularizing the missions. This meant handing over the mission from its founding missionary order to a diocesan clergy and distribution of the mission lands. Mission Santa Clara de Asis was secularized on December 27, 1836.

As California had few diocesan priests, the Franciscans frequently stayed at the

missions as parish priests as was the case at Mission Santa Clara de Asis. Under secularization law, half the lands were to be distributed to the Indians, the other half to a lay administrator. At Mission Santa Clara de Asis, squatters lived on mission lands and as was widespread, Indians were quickly defrauded of their land and livestock. Throughout California, mission buildings fell into disrepair.

For much of the next two decades, Mission Santa Clara de Asis served as a parish church for San Jose. When gold was discovered in California, San Jose's population grew rapidly. With this growth came a need for social and educational institutions in the Santa Clara Valley. In December 1850, the Bishop of California, Joseph Sadoc Alemany, recognized this need and offered the then decrepit buildings of Santa Clara de Asis to John Nobili, S.J. to establish a school. On March 4 1851, Bishop Alemany appointed Nobili as the pastor of Santa Clara and by May of that year students were receiving instruction at the new Santa Clara College.

The new school struggled with the primitive facilities, and shortages of teachers and money. In 1861, a new college president, Burchard Villiger, S.J., set out to transform the college. This included covering the 1825 structure, adding a new wooden façade with quoins to simulate stone, to the mission church, and a symmetrical pair of bell towers. Further changes were completed under president Robert Kenna S.J. when he remodeled the church's interior to increase seating capacity.

After standing for more than a century this church with its 1884 facade was destroyed by a fire started on October 24, 1926, the result of faulty wiring. While many of the liturgical objects, statues and paintings were save from the blaze the building was a compete loss.

Following the fire, there was a groundswell of support to rebuild the church. It was rebuilt with a steel frame, clad in adobe recalling the 1825 mission church before its many remodels. The façade was designed in the Spanish Colonial style with the original one-tower design, wider than the original, to accommodate the demands on a college chapel. Its embellishments included more lavish detailing, carved statues, painted decoration, and a color scheme dissimilar to the original. This sixth mission church, located on today's Alviso Street on the campus of Santa Clara University, was dedicated on May 13, 1928.

The Adobe Lodge and remnant wall were restored in 1981 and are the oldest structures on any college campus in the west.

The mission church remains in use today as the college chapel.

Sources: *Historic American Building Survey*, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 (HABS CAL, 43- SANCLA, 5--), 1933.

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pp.print>

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[www.scu.edu/visitors/mission/history.cfm](http://www.scu.edu/visitors/mission/history.cfm)

Interpretive Signage:  
*Mission Santa Clara Self-Guided Tour*. Pamphlet. [www.scu.edu/mission](http://www.scu.edu/mission)

*The Mission Quadrangle*. Interpretive sign on campus.

Historian: Cathy Garrett, historic landscape architect

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Front façade of the mission church with the quadrangle on the left and rose garden on the right (Cathy Garrett, June 3, 2012).



View looking north to the bell tower across the palm-studded quadrangle (Cathy Garrett, June 3, 2012).



View towards the northwest to the Sacred Heart Statue, vine-covered trellis and rear of the church. (Cathy Garrett, June 3, 2012).



View to the south past the Sacred Heart Statue to the remnant adobe wall on the left and Adobe Lodge at right. (Cathy Garrett, June 3, 2102).



Portal to the rose garden with cork oak at right. (Cathy Garrett, June 3, 2102).