

MISSION LA PURISIMA CONCEPCION  
2295 Purisima Road  
Lompoc  
Santa Barbara County  
California

HALS CA-79  
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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  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

## HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

### MISSION LA PURISIMA CONCEPCION

HALS NO. CA-79

**Location:** 2295 Purisima Road, Lompoc, Santa Barbara County, California

Latitude: 34.67152, Longitude: -120.422623 (The Bell Tower,  
[www.itouchmap.com/lalong.html](http://www.itouchmap.com/lalong.html), WGS84)

**Significance:** Between 1769 and 1823, the Spanish Empire set out to colonize California by establishing a chain of missions along the California coast. The spacing of the 21 Missions along El Camino Real was based on the distance one could travel in one day. The missions were established to convert the local natives to Christianity and to support and protect the frontier colony. In turn, they introduced European livestock, fruit and vegetables, horses and grazing to the region. The missions have gone through many phases since their origin as thriving military outposts during the Spanish Empire. During Mexican rule, the missions entered a period of declining population and resources, leading eventually to abandonment of many of the missions. A revival of interest in California history and Spanish heritage in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century led to many of the missions being restored and preserved as historic landmarks. Today, the missions are some of California's oldest and most significant structures and serve as important educational and interpretive centers of the state's cultural history.

Mission La Purisima Concepcion was founded in 1787 as the 11<sup>th</sup> mission in the chain. The site was established as an important midpoint between the missions at San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara. Mission La Purisima is notable among the missions because its extensive and well researched restoration in the 1930's by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). The restoration project involved rebuilding nearly the entire property with original tools and methods. The Mission is now part of the Californian State Parks system. Also of note, Mission La Purisima is one of the only missions still situated in a rural and agricultural area that closely resembles the setting of the mission's early history.

The Mission's **primary period of significance** begins with the start of construction on this site in 1812 by the Spanish, and continues through 1834 and secularization under the Mexican government. A **secondary period of significance**, 1934 to 1941, recognizes the Twentieth Century historic preservation and reconstruction work by California State Parks, the National Park Service, and the Civilian Conservation Corps.

**Description:** The site of Mission La Purisima Concepcion is in the Purisima Canyon (historically called “La Canada de los Berros”) near where it meets the larger Santa Ynez River Valley. One enters the site on an access road that leads to a newly constructed visitor center and adjacent parking lot. From there, visitors take a path through a small riparian corridor where they cross over a creek on a footbridge. Once on the other side, the riparian tree cover opens up to a dramatic view of the Mission with open fields in the foreground and the mission buildings set against the wooded hillside in the background.

The three main buildings of the Mission are set in a row along the base of the valley’s north hills and include the Church, the Shops and Soldiers’ Quarters, and the Padres’ Residence. Visitors first approach the Church and Bell Tower as they walk across the grassy field. With its pink-painted stucco exterior, the Bell Tower is the Mission’s most prominent structure and serves as a focal point. The Bell Tower is part of a larger wall structure that surrounds the historic cemetery. Aside from a small portion of the original church walls that remained when the restoration of the property began in 1935, the Bell Tower, cemetery walls and Church have been reconstructed. Directly adjacent to the church is the restored Shops and Soldiers’ Quarters which includes two courtyards on the north (rear) side of the building that area enclosed by walls and interconnected by a doorway. The courtyards are functional spaces that had served as extensions of the workshops and now include: outdoor ovens called ‘*hornos*’, an olive crusher and vessels for cooking tallow. Next to the Shops and Soldiers Quarters is the Padres’ Residence. When the Civilian Conservation Corps arrived on site in 1935, this building was in ruins with only remnants of the original brick and stucco walls and columns. Still, this building contains the most original wall structure than any other building on site. This building has stone buttressing on its west side and a wide covered walkway with large columns on its south side.

Adjacent (south) of the Mission’s main buildings are open fields, gardens and an olive grove. A portion of the open fields is used as livestock corrals that have been created using rustic wood fences. A small vegetable garden has been built between the open fields and the wooded area. Though a vegetable garden was likely original to the site, this current location and arrangement is not thought to be historic.

As one moves northeast into the valley, the open fields become more wooded with olive trees. This olive grove historically functioned in part as a laundry washing area which is evident by two original *lavaderias* that have been restored and filled with water. A raised stone fountain sits in the center of the grove where several unpaved paths converge. Also in this area a reservoir constructed of brick has been excavated and restored. The reservoir is a remnant of a larger water supply and irrigation system established by the Mission population in the 19th Century. The system included the reservoir, cisterns,

flumes and aqueducts that would carry water from the springs in the canyon, to the *lavaderias*, and then out to the open fields. The aqueduct structure is a stone trench and is still evident running through the fields.

On the south side of the valley is the historic Indian dwelling area. Straw huts have been recreated as an interpretive feature to show how the Chumash Indians lived on the site in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

Several other ancillary buildings are set throughout the site and include a Pottery Shed with outdoor kiln and Kitchen on the north (rear) side of the Padres' Residence, the Blacksmith's Shop situated along the dirt road leading into Purisima Canyon, two infirmary buildings, and a building called *Monjerio*, which was historically the dormitory for neophyte<sup>1</sup> girls.

Pedestrian circulation throughout the site consists of informal paths of decomposed granite.

**History:**

The dedication for the original Mission La Purisima Concepcion occurred on December 8, 1787 (in its first location set in a fertile valley south of the present city of Lompoc). With the leadership of Father Lasuen, soldiers and workmen constructed a series of simple structures. Within three years the Mission flourished and the hastily-erected buildings were replaced by new facilities of adobe and tile roofs. The Mission continued to grow in population as neophytes were baptized in the church. However, on December 21, 1812, two earthquakes damaged the buildings and subsequent floods further destroyed the entire site.

With over one thousand mission inhabitants to shelter and feed, the padres decided to relocate the Mission to a site that would be less prone to flooding on the north side of the Santa Ynez River. They selected a site four miles to the northeast in the 'Valley of the Watercress'. Work soon began on construction of a new Mission using materials at hand: adobe, clay, rawhide, timber and tules. The new buildings were made of four-foot thick adobe walls to withstand future earthquakes. Between 1812 and 1822, the Mission experienced a period of prosperity and population growth. During this time, the church and Padres' Residence was constructed, as well as a series of workshops connecting the two buildings. These workshops included a pottery and carpenter's shop, weaving rooms and even a small hospital.

By 1822, however, Mexico had declared independence from Spain and stopped supplying the Missions with provisions or money for soldiers. The Indian population began to decline and the remaining neophytes were burdened with supporting the soldiers. In 1824, an inevitable Indian revolt occurred at nearby

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<sup>1</sup> The definition of 'neophyte' in this context is: A religious convert; a newly baptized mission Indian. At the missions, neophytes would be required to adopt Christianity, learn agriculture, carpentry, weaving and other vocational skills, and adopt European modes of dress.

Mission Santa Inés. The revolt spread to Mission La Purisima where the Indians seized possession of the Mission for an entire month. Soldiers were sent down from Monterey and quickly regained control of the Mission, killing sixteen Indians and imprisoning others as punishment. The rebellion coincided with the beginning of the period of secularization, where the Mexican government opened up the Mission properties for settlement. By 1834, the plan for secularization and dispersement of mission property was proclaimed. The padres were allowed to remain on site but were given charge of only the church buildings. As a result of the declining Mission population, spurred in part by the revolt, as well as secularization, the Mission was soon largely abandoned and relapsed into ruin. In 1836, the church building collapsed.

In 1845, the Mission was passed into private ownership when the property was sold to Don Juan Temple of Los Angeles for \$1,100. It was then sold from owner to owner and continued in its dilapidated state until the 1930's. In 1933, then owner Union Oil Company deeded the Mission and surrounding land to Santa Barbara County and in 1934 the State of California acquired the 507-acre property under the Division of Parks.

The National Park Service studied the history of the site and developed an extensive set of plans from which the Civilian Conservation Corps (Company # 1951) began restoration in 1935. The CCC established a camp on the site and restored the Mission in its entirety. Upon arrival, the only original structures on site were ruined brick and stucco walls and columns of the Padres' Residence and a few smaller ruins throughout the site. From 1935 to 1937, the CCC completed the initial phase of the restoration project by restoring the Padres' Residence and in 1941, the Church was restored.

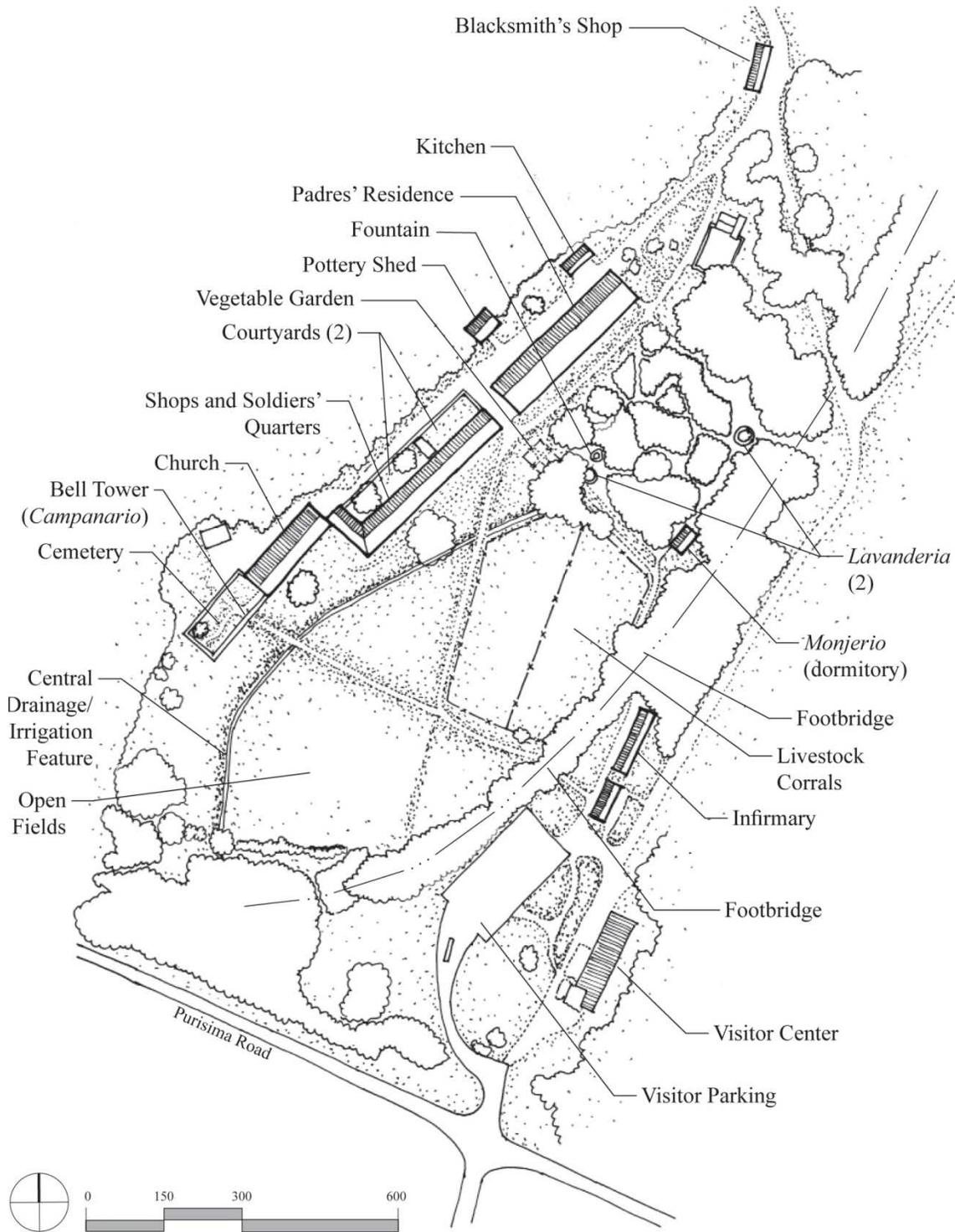
By the end of 1951, the CCC restored the Mission using original tools and methods where possible, such as using clay on site to make adobe bricks and roof tiles. As a result of this impressive and thorough restoration, Mission La Purisima Concepcion is one of the most fully restored Missions in California. Today, the Mission is a State Park operated by the California Department of Parks and Recreation and is visited by many each year.

The site is a California Historical Landmark, No. 340; is a National Historic Landmark; is listed in the National Register of Historic Places, NRIS Number 7800075; and has been documented by the Historic American Buildings Survey, HABS CA-211.

**Chronology of Events:**

December 8, 1787	Mission Founded by Father Fermin Lasuen
March 1788	Construction begins on the Mission (original site)
1801 – 1802	New adobe structures are built following ruin of first buildings.
1802 – 1812	Period of prosperity and population growth
December 21, 1812	Major earthquake resulting in the destruction of the entire Mission site.
1812 – 1822	Mission is relocated to second site 4 miles northeast of the original site. 10-year period of prosperity follows with the Mission becoming self-supporting. Church is constructed.
1815	Padres' Residence is constructed
1816	Series of workshops are constructed between church and Padres' Residence.
1821	Mexico declares independence from Spain and stops sending supplies and money to the Mission.
1824	Indian revolt in nearby Santa Ines spreads to La Purisima. Indians seize possession of the Mission for a month before the revolt is quelled by Mexican soldiers.
1834	Secularization (settlement of government land)
1834 – 1845	Mission is largely abandoned and relapses into ruin.
1836	Church building collapses.
1845	Mission is sold to Don Juan Temple for \$1,100.
1845 – 1933	The Mission property is passed from owner to owner and further deteriorates into a dilapidated state.
1933	Union Oil and Catholic Church deed the property to Santa Barbara County.
1934	State of California acquires the property under the Division of Parks.
1934 – 1935	National Park Service studies the history of the site and develops a series of restoration plans.
1935	Civilian Conservation Corps sets up a camp on the site and begin restoration of the site.
1935 – 1937	Restoration of the Padres' Residence
1941	Restoration of the Church
December 7, 1941	Reconstruction of 3 main buildings complete; mission is dedicated as a State Historical Monument.
1941 to present	Additional buildings reconstructed and Visitor Center added.

- Sources:** *Architecture of the California Missions*, by Kurt Baer, published by the University of California Press, 1958.
- The California Missions*, by Dorothy Krell and Paul C. Johnson, published by Sunset Books, 1979 (1999).
- La Purisima Mission State Historic Park:  
<http://www.lapurisimamission.org/>
- Library of Congress HABS/HAER/HALS Collection, Historic American Building Survey, National Park Service, Western Office, Division of Design and Construction, 1000 Geary Street, San Francisco, CA. Mission La Purisima Mission Concepcion, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/CA0885/>
- The Missions of California*, by Stanley Young, published by Chronicle Books, 1988.
- Missions of the Californias*: [http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page\\_id=598](http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=598)
- Wikipedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La\\_Purisima\\_Mission](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Purisima_Mission)
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July 26, 2012.



**Site Plan** (Douglas Nelson, 17 July 2012).



View of the Church, Bell Tower, and cemetery from the entry path. The setting of the mission in an expansive rural and agricultural landscape is seen in this view. (Douglas Nelson, 12 October 2010).



View of the Padres' Residence looking south. (Douglas Nelson, 12 October 2010).



View from the veranda of the Shops and Soldiers' Quarters. (Douglas Nelson, 12 October 2010).



The expansive landscape setting and views are seen in this view of the Bell Tower and Church. (Douglas Nelson, 12 October 2010).



Drainage/irrigation feature through the central open space. (Douglas Nelson, 12 October 2010).



Vegetable garden enclosed by rustic fence. (Douglas Nelson, 12 October 2010).



Detail of Bell Tower. (Douglas Nelson, 12 October 2010).



Reconstructed Indian Dwellings. (Douglas Nelson, 12 October 2010).