

MISSION SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO
26801 Ortega Highway
San Juan Capistrano
Orange County
California

HALS CA-85
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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 SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO

HALS NO. CA-85

Location: 26801 Ortega Highway, San Juan Capistrano, Orange County, California

The Mission is bounded by Ortega Highway on the south, Camino Capistrano on the west, Acjachema Street on the north, and El Camino Real on the east.

Lat: 33.501917 Long: -117.661825 (Southeast corner of site, Google Earth, Simple Cylindrical Projection, WGS84)

Significance: Twenty one California Missions, including Mission San Juan Capistrano, were established by the ruling Spanish kingdom from 1769 through 1823 as a means of providing control over the area and its indigenous peoples, thus converting them to Catholicism. Once established, each Mission developed its own economy through cattle ranching and farming. They also spearheaded early real estate development from ranchos and farms to towns in southern California cities such as; San Juan Capistrano, Santa Ana, San Diego, and Los Angeles.

Description: The enclosed wall Mission was founded on November 1, 1776 as the seventh of the 21 California Missions by Father Junipero Serra, President of the Missions. Partial reinforced ruins of The Great Stone Church are still visible today after an earthquake destroyed it in 1812. The 1788 Serra Chapel is located just northwest of The Great Stone Church, has the original baroque, hand-carved alter with gold leaf overlay from Barcelona, Spain, and was recently renovated in 2008.

The existing rectangular adobe buildings on the site are well preserved and portions of the gardens retain significant representations of the working mission, as well as interpretive sites commemorating the *Juaneno* Indians who inhabited the area.

The surrounding walkways that link the buildings and gardens have various types of ground cover; i.e., decomposed granite, gravel, adobe bricks, red bricks, stones of varying sizes, and stone edges—approximately six to eight inches round.

The 1791 *Cuartel* (soldier's barracks) provides interpretive scenes of life while stationed at the Mission. Several large, square courtyards with central water-fountains are elaborately decorated with trees, plants, grasses and various landscape elements, which help create a romantic atmosphere of past Mission life. Some olive trees look over 50 yrs old, but nothing seems to be from the Mission period.

A *zanja* (water ditch) has been preserved near the Soldier's Barracks. This ditch was used to connect the Mission to the nearby river for everyday Mission use.

The property elevation is mostly flat, but has a slight incline as you approach the rear of the property, walking north toward to the Administration Building.

History: Prior to Spanish Mission occupation, a local Shoshone tribe called "Acjachema" lived in the area for about 10,000 years.

The twice founded Mission: First by Father Fermin Lasuen on October 30, 1775; later by Father Junipero Serra on November 1, 1776 who established it. Local Indians helped build the Mission and were later named *Juaneno* Indians.

The 1788 Serra Chapel is the only original Mission Church where Father Serra was known to have celebrated sacraments in California, still stands today.

In 1794, The Great Stone Church construction begins in the shape of a cross—180 feet long by 40 feet wide, with a 120 foot bell tower. It was completed by 1806; however, an earthquake on December 18, 1812 destroys the Church and 40 souls were lost.

In 1821, Mexico gains its independence from Spain and secularizes the Missions and their lands. This is when many missions were abandoned and fall into disrepair.

During the Mexican Period, Governor Pio Pico sells property to his brother-in-law Juan Forster and James McKinley in exchange for hides and tallow in 1845. The Forster family resides at the Mission until 1864.

After the Mexican-American war of 1848, the United States President Abraham Lincoln returns Mission lands to the Catholic church in 1865. Many European residents and Native Californians live in San Juan Capistrano thereafter.

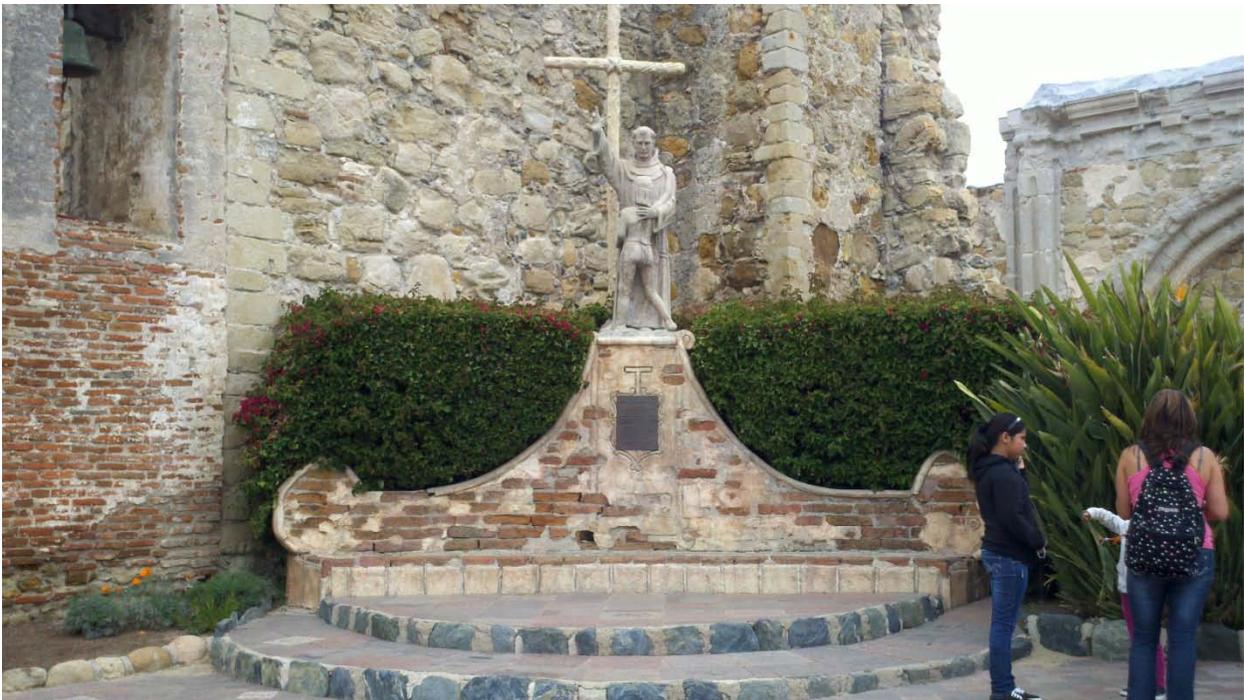
The city of San Juan Capistrano has evolved into a small village-like town in character, preserving open space, ridgelines, and limited development. Many acres are also preserved for the agricultural, along with residential and commercial development.

- Sources:
1. "Today at Mission San Juan Capistrano" brochure—Spring 2012
 2. Mission San Juan Capistrano web site: www.missionsjc.com
 3. Mission San Juan Capistrano Plants and Gardens Guide, Produced by the Gardening Angels Volunteer Group
 4. HABS CA-331

Historian: Elva Gomez
3945 Yellowstone Circle, Chino, CA 91710
July 12, 2012



Front Garden courtyard view of adobe and red brick buildings, walkways, and seasonally blooming flower beds (Elva Gomez, April 2012).



A Father Serra statue in the courtyard next to the Bell Wall of The Great Stone Church (Elva Gomez, April 2012).



The reinforced ruins of The Great Stone Church's east wall (Elva Gomez, April 2012).



Cuartel (Soldier's Quarters) view of arches and Front Garden, facing east (Elva Gomez, April 2012).



View of Central Courtyard and Administration building facing south. Several pathways lead to a water-fountain feature in the center of the courtyard (Elva Gomez, April 2012).



A frontal view of The Great Stone Church Mission Bells, facing south in the Sacred Garden and Bell Wall (Elva Gomez, April 2012).



The Mission Industrial Center where Mission Indians worked the tallow vats and metal furnaces. These were excavated in the 1930s. (Elva Gomez, April 2012).



A diorama shows the Mission San Juan Capistrano grounds as they would have appeared in the late 1700s. Notice the elaborate Great Stone Church on lower right (in ruins since 1812). (Elva Gomez, April 2012).



View of Mission San Juan Capistrano historical marker in Front Garden. Notice the Bell Wall in background (Elva Gomez, April 2012).