

# *The Missions of California*

**By Eugene Leslie Smyth**

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August 2012

# THE MISSIONS OF CALIFORNIA



*Eugene  
Leslie  
Smyth.*



S. B. Quayle  
Lover of the Beautiful  
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Alexander Beeson

**The Missions of California**



PIETRO LARICI AT SANTA BIRGIDA

# THE MISSIONS OF CALIFORNIA

EUGENE LESLIE SMYTH



CHICAGO  
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MDCCCXCIX

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The Missions of California

Historical and Descriptive





## THE MISSIONS OF CALIFORNIA

### HISTORICAL



LONG before the Puritans landed on the New England coast an insatiable greed for gold, combined with an inborn love of adventure, had carried the flag of Spain far northwest of Mexico to a land of spring and flowers. Before La Salle and Marquette had discovered the great inland seas and broad prairies of the continent's central section, Coronado, led on by hopes of fabulous wealth, had penetrated into that marvelous combination of dreary waste and abundant verdure that stretches from the headwaters of the Missouri to the blue bay of San Diego. Both the pioneers in the northeast and those in the southwest encountered countless hardships and overcame innumerable difficulties: the one, the cold, desolate, New England winter; the other, the overpowering heat and thirst of an almost leafless country. For, while the English pilgrims had begun their lives anew on a rocky and apparently barren shore, the apostles of the Spanish faith were stationed in a country to which the seemingly inhospitable New England coast was a veritable paradise.

To anyone not acquainted with the trails and passes into southern California it is impossible to convey any adequate impression of the awful desolateness of this country; of the awful metallic sky; of dark frowning mountain ranges, seamed and scarred by innumerable canons; of sand and sand storms; of salt lakes and the mirage. The soldier ex-

plorer who first traversed these deserts and the priest whose zeal and piety enabled him to plant and maintain missions and colonies, command our admiration and wonder.

With tremendous and untiring energy, though hampered by a weak home government, these priests, aided by the labor of thousands of Indians, built up vast estates whose very vastness would have caused their own ruin had their builders been strong enough to have resisted the encroachments of the descendants of the northeastern pioneers, and had they not been despoiled by the hand they looked to for aid. The very traces of these extensive and one-time prosperous establishments are fast fading away. The nomenclature of the country, a few Castilian families, a constantly diminishing Mexican population, scattered Indian tribes, and the old missions, their adobe walls rapidly crumbling to ruins: these are all that remind us of a great colonization system.





SAN LUIS REY



THE founding of the missions on the California peninsula, and the subsequent voyages of discovery up the California coast as far as San Diego and Monterey, together with all connecting incidents, are matters of recorded history.

Yet a brief resumé of those early deeds, which for courage and fortitude stand alone in colonization annals, will not be amiss. The first missions were founded by the friars of the Jesuit order in the latter half of the seventeenth century. Those zealous missionaries managed to continue their work for almost seventy years, yet they were so hampered by lack of means and by political and religious intrigues, those deadly enemies of Spain's progress, that their work gradually grew less and less effective. In 1767 came an order expelling the Jesuit fathers from Spanish soil. The abruptness of the order, the suddenness of the departure of the priests, left the missions in the hands of native converts, who were dazed by the proceedings and were in themselves incapable of maintaining their mission homes. During the next two years the retrograding movement was rapid and all traces of the Jesuits were almost obliterated. Spain's vacillating policy, engendered by jealousy and fostered by home troubles, prevented fresh settlements, in whose favor were urged the economical benefit of contact with the Indian tribes and the protection of the territory against outside conquest. The Russians along the northern coast as far south as

San Francisco, the English in the Puget Sound districts, and the Americans on all sides were constantly pointed to as reasons for prompt and complete settlement by the Spaniards of their territory. Anyone familiar with the peculiar system of colonial control exercised by the Spanish governors, can readily appreciate the need there was of leadership and genius among the churchmen who represented the colonization party. With the retirement from influence of the Jesuits, the Franciscans were placed in power. Governor after governor was importuned to take some action leading to the re-establishment of the California missions, but without avail until Galvez was appointed visitador-general of Mexico. At that time a leader among the Franciscan priests in the New World was Junipero Serra, a most remarkable man. Serra persuaded Galvez to send an expedition to San Diego. It was decided that part of the new colony should go by sea and part by land. The first ship, the San Carlos, sailed from La Paz, January 9, 1769; and the second ship, the San Antonio, February 15, of the same year. Thus started the first of a great movement.





MEANWHILE the preparations for the land expedition were completed and the first division, commanded by Captain Rivera, started on the 24th of March. The second division, after stopping to found a mission at Velicata, began its long march two months later. When we consider this march made by the father-president, then suffering from a grievous malady, and his little band of followers, a distance almost four times that from New York to the extremest point of Maine, for the most part across a desert waste or over high mountains and through a hostile Indian country, we wonder that they could have had the strength to persevere.

Of the two vessels, the San Antonio was the first to arrive at the rendezvous. Deceived by the chart of Viscano, an early explorer, the captain had sailed past San Diego north as far as the Santa Barbara islands where, discovering his mistake, he put the ship about and shortly reached San Diego. The San Carlos had not yet arrived. Then began a weary discouraging wait for the land party or the other ship. For a long time no tidings of either were received. The hardy sailors at last fixed a day beyond which it would be impossible to wait. Before that day, to their joy, a ship was seen coming into the harbor. It was the San Carlos, moving

slowly and silently up the bay. She dropped anchor. Not a boat was lowered—no signal was made. All were sick—many had died.

Again the uncertainty of waiting began; though now their time was occupied caring for the sick and burying the dead. On the 14th of May the first division of the land expedition arrived, and toward the end of June the last party. Thus the whole colony, though sadly depleted in numbers, was reunited. The next day the pioneers celebrated with a solemn mass and firing of guns. This celebration by the one hundred and twenty-six survivors of the two hundred and nineteen who left the Mexican settlements, was indicative of their future.

On Sunday, July 16, Father Serra raised and blessed the cross, and the first Franciscan mission was established in California. Within two years they had established three or four missions, that of San Gabriel being thirty miles inland. In a few years more, twenty establishments reached from San Diego to the northern part of the State.

The Indians were very friendly at first; but soon they began to beg, then to steal, and at length came in such numbers as to become a nuisance and a danger to the camp. They were driven away and subdued only after a fight, in which numbers of the Indians and several Europeans were killed.

After the first settlement was firmly established, an expedition under Captain Portola, in conjunction with the San Carlos, set out for Monterey to endeavor to found a mission and build a presidio. The march was tedious, laborious and discouraging. When at last they arrived at a point overlooking the bay of Monterey, they did not recognize it, but kept on toward the north. That they missed their destination is no wonder; their charts and descriptions were anything but reliable, and being ignorant of the Indian name for the bay they could not make use of the natives as guides.





CONTINUING northward, although many of the party were sick and the stock of provisions low, they discovered the great bay of San Francisco and the Golden Gate. Their search for Monterey proving fruitless, and the San Carlos not coming, they decided to return to San Diego. Although this expedition failed of its object, very much valuable information was obtained which was of great aid to Father Serra in locating his other establishments. Having arrived at San Diego thoroughly disheartened, Portola was for abandoning the work and returning to Mexico forthwith. And, in spite of the remonstrances and prayers of Fathers Serra and Crespi, he partitioned the stores, ordering one part to be set aside for use until the 20th of March, the date he fixed for their abandoning camp, and the remainder to be kept for use on the return journey. As the time appointed for the return drew near, the prospects of the colonists appeared darker and darker.

The ship San Antonio had been sent to La Paz for supplies. She was now due at San Diego. A nine days' fast and prayer ended on the 19th.

On the morrow the camp would be broken and the return begun. All day the fathers watched seaward, hoping against hope and praying that the San Antonio might arrive in time. Their prayers were answered; for as the sun went down, almost as the darkness was shutting out the sea from their vision, a sail was seen. Galvez had not forgotten. The San Antonio had returned, laden with abundant supplies. The first Franciscan attempt to colonize California was a success.

Immediate preparations were made to search again for Monterey and to found a mission there. Perhaps the ease with which they succeeded this time was due to the fact that with this expedition went the valiant and redoubtable Captain Pages, destined to play no unimportant part in California history, and sometime military governor of the province. In a little over a month after leaving San Diego, the party arrived at Monterey and a month later were joined by Father Serra, the surgeon Pedro Prat, and others, in the San Antonio.





SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO



THE missions at San Diego and Monterey being thus established, the progress of settlement went on steadily. Of the twenty-one missions established in California a few are well preserved, others are in ruins, while of the rest scarcely a stone remains to mark their graves. The sites for the missions were carefully chosen, about a day's journey apart. Care was taken to be near a landing for ships and yet not near enough for the Indian converts to be contaminated by the evil influences of the sailors. Water, a few acres for tillage, and abundant pasturage were considered a necessity. In due time, mission buildings were erected and settlers came and clustered around the presidio, or fort; thus forming towns which were the nuclei about which many Californian cities of today have grown. As soon after the founding of a mission as its circumstances would permit, a large mass of buildings were erected in the form of a quadrangle. The walls were composed in part of burnt brick, but chiefly of adobe. A large and substantial church usually occupied one of the outer corners of the pile. In the other parts of the picturesque, red-tile-roofed building was the habitation of the friar; rooms for guests and for the major-domos and their families; hospital wards; storehouses and granaries; rooms for carding, spinning and weaving woolen fabrics; shops for carpenters, joiners, blacksmiths, and other artisans; and cellars for storing the products of the vineyards. A short distance from the church, usually one or two miles, was the presidio, where was stationed a small body of soldiers to hold the neophytes in check, to act as escort to the priest on his journeys, or as government couriers and to carry the mails, as well as to protect the mission from the attacks of hostile Indians.

As has been related, the first mission established was at San Diego. The mission

site was on the river San Diego, a brave enough stream in winter, but sinking into the thirsty sand in summer—but withal as fair a spot as any on earth. The mission's first ministers were Fathers Serra and Fernando Perron. The quiet life of San Diego was only once rudely interrupted, when on a terrible night in 1775 a thousand hostile Indians swept down from the mountains to kill and burn. A gentle priest, Father Jaume, met them with the usual peaceful salutation, but he was immediately set upon, beaten, and his body filled with arrows and so mutilated as to be hardly recognized. All night the howling Indians surrounded the mission and succeeded in mortally wounding two more of the Europeans. At daybreak the savages fled, perhaps fearing that a terrible vengeance might be taken; but instead, the venerable president went out among the neophytes and remaining Indians, and by gentleness and kindness calmed the storm and won back a large number. The burned mission was rebuilt as soon as possible. The new buildings were dedicated November 12, 1777, but were not completed until 1784. In 1804 a new church was begun, and dedicated in November, 1813. The ruins of this church are still standing, a monument to the earnest effort, grand courage, and fortitude of the good fathers.





SANTA BARBARA



ORTHWARD from San Diego the next mission was San Luis Rey, founded in 1798 by Fathers Lassen, Santiago and Peyri. The great success of this mission was undoubtedly due to Father Peyri, who labored there from its inception to the year of the decree of secularization. So much beloved was he that when he departed to take his way to Rome, it is said he was obliged to do so secretly in the night. His going having been discovered, five hundred Indians rode after him the forty-five miles to San Diego, where they arrived just in time to see the good father, greatly affected, being taken to the ship. Four of the Indians succeeded in swimming out to him, and through their earnest lamentations and prayers were taken away to Rome, where one of them became a priest.

The site for the next northern mission, San Juan Capistrano, was selected November 1, 1776, but the news of the attack on San Diego coming before ceremonies were begun the necessity for the return of Father Serra and the soldiers

became so urgent that the bells were buried and the founding of the mission postponed until the next year. In 1813 an earthquake cracked the walls and shook down the rafters and dome, killing forty-three and wounding many others. This beautiful structure, built by the Indians under the direction of the priests, parallels in many ways the work of the people of far eastern countries. There is the same force of design, the same lack of equality, suggesting inspiration rather than the yardstick and spirit-level; the same intricacy, and yet the unit of usefulness is everywhere apparent.

Beautiful in its ruins this mission should be cherished as much, perhaps, as any of our romantic monuments.

North of San Juan came San Gabriel, founded at royal expense in 1771. This was the most prosperous of the missions; the total number of baptisms up to the end of 1850 reached nine thousand one hundred and twenty-three. "This mission occupied one of the most charming spots in Southern California. Its gardens abounded in all kinds of fruits and flowers."





SAN FRANCISCO



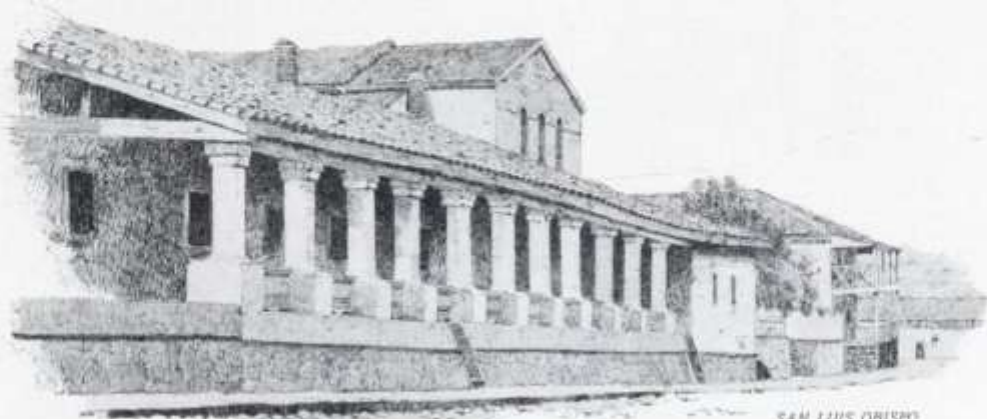
THE San Gabriel mission is reached after a pleasant ride from Pasadena, through avenues lined with pepper and eucalyptus trees or bordered with orange groves. The church is at the lower end of the village. It is a narrow, low-gabled structure, stuccoed, with a red roof. The long side, which faces the street, is intersected, at intervals of perhaps ten feet, by buttresses which are capped very prettily with slabs of reddish stone. Following the contour of the building and buttresses, about two feet above the ground, is a wide stone bench. At one end, arranged beautifully against the building, is a flight of crumbling stone steps leading to a railed gallery, moss-covered and dark. The entrance is about one-third of the way from the lower end of the church, its half-opened door shadowed, giving a glimpse into the dark, cool interior of low-toned white walls and of brown well-worn benches. There is a little niche above the door, with two small pilasters, crumbling with age, so as to give an impression of exquisite detail. The flat pavement within and without the church makes the whole complete. Often the picture presented at San Gabriel is strikingly beautiful. The groups of people standing in the luminous shade of the pepper trees, or seated on the bench along the church; the flecks of sunlight on the pavement; the dark olive-faced, red-cheeked Mexican girls,

with their blue-black hair and eyes, laughing and animated; flocks of circling or resting pigeons; the lower part of the mission in shadow, the upper part a broad mass of brilliant, sunny yellow; the red roof; the intensely blue sky, unite in forming a rare picture.

In 1802 the three southern missions, of which San Gabriel was the chief, had attained a high degree of prosperity and numbered in Indian converts over twenty-five hundred. In 1831, when they had reached the height of their prosperity, the herds of cattle, droves of horses, and flocks of sheep covered the major part of the lands in Los Angeles county and parts of the Sierra Madre mountain range, while the number of neophytes was over four thousand. By the labor of the subjugated and converted Indians, the missionaries cultivated large fields of wheat, corn, barley, and produced wine and cattle in abundance.

In a beautiful plain, north of San Gabriel, was the San Fernando mission, established in 1797. Here were distilled annually two thousand gallons of wine and fine brandy.





SAN LUIS OBISPO



THE mission of San Buenaventura, forty-eight miles north of San Fernando, owned about fifteen hundred square miles of land and had in 1835, besides stock, orchards and vineyards, thirty-five thousand dollars in other property. This mission was founded in 1782, and the church built in 1809.

Santa Barbara, famous for its choice wines and profuse hospitality, was located thirty miles north of San Buenaventura upon a picturesque elevation, three miles inland. Santa Barbara was founded in 1782.

The mission of Santa Ynez, thirty-nine miles north of Santa Barbara, held less land than any of the others, but possessed beautiful horses and vast herds of other stock. In 1823 the property of this mission was valued at eighty thousand dollars.

Then came Purissima (1787); San Luis Obispo (1772); and San Miguel (1797).

In a plain called Llano del Rey, forty-five miles southwest of Monterey, stood Soledad, the indefatigable father of which, in order to obtain a plentiful supply of water, constructed with Indian labor an aqueduct fifteen miles in length, by means of which two thousand acres of fertile land were annually redeemed from the summer drought.

Next northward was San Antonio de Padua, dedicated on July 14, 1771.



In the valley of Carmelo, four miles south of Monterey, stood the imposing mission of San Carlos, founded in 1770. "It was in an undulating grassy country, over which were scattered oak, pine and birch trees, the whole carpeted and perfumed with flowers in the springtime." Under this noble monument and surrounded by this peaceful country, reposed the body of the venerable founder of the missions, Junipero Serra.

Other missions were those at Santa Cruz (1791); San Juan Bantista (1794); Santa Clara (1777); San José (1797); San Francisco (1776); San Rafael (1817); and San Francisco Solano (1825). The estimated wealth of all the missions at the time of their opulence was about one-half million dollars; San Gabriel heading the list with one hundred and ten thousand, while San Rafael had but five thousand dollars.

The credit for projecting and establishing these missions belongs to Father Serra and Galvez, the visitador-general. These two, working together in perfect harmony, effected results which, when viewed with understanding of all conditions, must be acknowledged as nothing short of marvelous. Galvez furnished the necessary funds and supplies to the first expeditions, but the maintenance and subsequent growth were undoubtedly due to Father Serra. Zealous and sincere, Serra not only attempted to teach his Indian charges the duties and rites of the church, and the principles and practices of the faith, but he also taught them to reap the material benefits of civilization in its simplest and best forms.





PURISSIMA

## THE MISSIONS OF CALIFORNIA

### MISSION LIFE



SEVERA established the Indians on land which they were instructed to regard as their own, provided them with cattle and sheep, farm implements and seed. All the alms received at mass and his own salary was spent in obtaining seed and supplies. He also showed them, when the product of the harvest exceeded the wants of the family, how to sell the surplus and thus obtain with the proceeds blankets, tools, clothes, animals, and household utensils. Many were taught useful trades. The women and children were taken into the mission buildings and taught to weave, spin and other employments. The missions became veritable hives of industry. Of San Luis Rey, and generally speaking the explanation applies to all the missions, De Mofras says: "The young Indian girls dwell in the halls called monasteries, and they themselves are called nuns. Placed under the care of Indian matrons, who are worthy of confidence, they learn to make cloth of wool, cotton and flax, and do not leave the monastery until they are old enough to be married. The Indian children mingle in the schools with those of the white colonists. A certain number, chosen from among the pupils who show the most intelligence, music, chanting, the violin, the flute, and other instruments. Those who distinguish themselves in the carpenter shop, at the forge, or in agricultural labors, are appointed *alcades* (overseers) and are charged with the direction of a squad of workmen."

There were two priests to each mission: the elder for the religious and secular instruction, while the younger had charge of the mechanical and agricultural work. At sunrise the bells called the Indians to prayers and mass in the chapel; then came breakfast, which consisted of a preparation

of roast barley, after which the squads of workmen, under the charge of the *alcades*, were led to their different tasks. Dinner came at eleven; then rest until two, when work was again resumed until an hour before sunset, when the *angelus* summoned all to prayer. After supper they were free to carry on amusements until bed-time. Their diet consisted of an abundance of beef, mutton, vegetables, fruit, tortillas (flour and corn meal cakes); and for drink they had *atole* or *pinole*. The *alcades* dressed like the Spaniards. Women received each year two sets of underclothing, a smock and a gown.

In time there grew up a considerable Spanish population, aside from the priests and soldiers. These owned separate ranches and lived a peaceful, happy life, of a kind that the world has never seen elsewhere. There was constant gaiety and social life, although the people were widely scattered. Horseback was the principal mode of travel. Young people would ride from ranch to ranch, and whoever found his horse tired would let him go and catch another. This horse in turn would be ridden twenty, thirty or even fifty miles and left at a ranch, where in his own time the owner would reclaim it. In this way a person could travel from one end of California to another. The fathers of the missions, while they often rode horseback, generally used a carriage, called a *volante*, drawn by mules, of which they owned hundreds.





MONTEREY

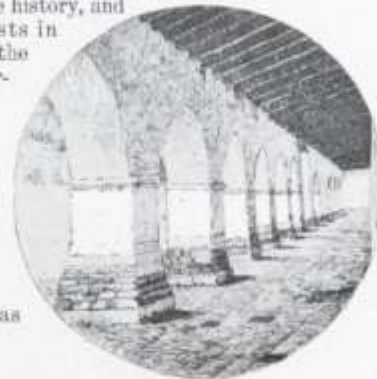


Of all animals in California in the early part of the nineteenth century, the horse was the most numerous. In 1806 there were so many horses in the valley about San Jose that seven or eight thousand were ordered killed. Nearly as many more were driven into the sea at Santa Barbara in 1807, and the same thing was done in 1810 at Monterey. In 1825 the number of cattle and horses had so increased that the pasturage of the country was insufficient for their support; and thousands of them were driven into Lower California to feed. It is said that the mission of San Gabriel alone possessed over one hundred thousand of all kinds.

The old Spanish residents lived in houses of a style as picturesque almost as the mission quadrangles. These dwellings were built of adobe and roofed with red tile. The clay used in making the adobe bricks was dark brown. It was mixed with straw and trodden by the Indians. When the bricks were laid they were set in clay as in mortar. Sometimes small pebbles from the seashore were mixed with the mortar to form ornamental bands across the house. All the timbers of the floors and rafters and the cross beams and windows were built in as the house progressed. When finished it was plastered within and without as a protection

against rain. A great deal of trouble was often taken to obtain stones for the door steps. Curious rocks were sometimes brought a long distance for this purpose, or to use for gate posts in front of the dwelling.

The family life among the residents was an affair of dignity and ceremony, but it did not lack in affection. Each of the old families taught the children the history of the family and respect for religion and for their elders. A few books, some in manuscript, were treasured in the household; but the children were not allowed to read novels until they were grown. Those were the days of open-handed hospitality, such as is written of in Bible history, and such as still exists in some countries of the far East. Entertainment was furnished without expectation of reward. The stranger was made welcome and protected. Of these times and these people one historian has said:





PALA



THEIR kindness and hospitality has not been overestimated. Up to the time the Mexican regime ceased in California, they had a custom of never charging for anything, that is to say, for entertainment, food, care of horses, etc. You were supposed, even if visiting a friend, to bring your blankets with you, and one would be very thoughtless who traveled and did not take a knife with him to cut his meat. When you had eaten, the invariable custom was to rise, deliver to the hostess, or servant, the plate from which you had eaten your meat and beans, and that was about all they had, and say 'Many thanks, madam,' to which the hostess invariably replied, 'May it do you much good.'

These customs of the residents were but the result of the simplicity and generosity of the Franciscan fathers, whose faithful labors will ever be remembered; to whose memory the missions of California will ever stand as monuments; and for whose sake those beautiful ruins should be allowed to remain, reminders of a magnificent past.

They should be preserved as they are, their ruined walls and mossy roofs indicating their age and calling to mind by their very decay the past, the days of Serra and Galvez.

To the traveler of today who visits these ruins, there invariably comes to mind the memory of those men who first discovered and made use of California's wealth. How different might have been the reception accorded the gold seekers of the '40's had these Christian pioneers not secured with kindness a way, that in after years, no doubt, warfare alone could have won. To their great credit, it is said that their self-denial and voluntary exile from the land they loved was not from sordid desire for gold, but for good, and that the good of their fellow men.

In these pages it has been the object to recall the greatness of the men who built the missions of California, the wonderful work they accomplished, and to put in fitting form, views of their mission homes. Of many of those church fortresses not a stone remains, but of the rest sufficient stand to remind the world that the Spanish conquest of one country, at least, was by love.



S a n A n t o n i o





S a n G a b r i e l





S a n t a Y n e z







S a n t a B a r b a r a





SANTI DOMINGO.

S a n G a b r i e l S t a i r s





SAN GABRIEL.

S a n F e r n a n d o





SANT'ERCOLE

S a n B u e n a v e n t u r a







MR. HENRY

S a n L u i s R e y





S a n C a r l o s





S a n J o s e



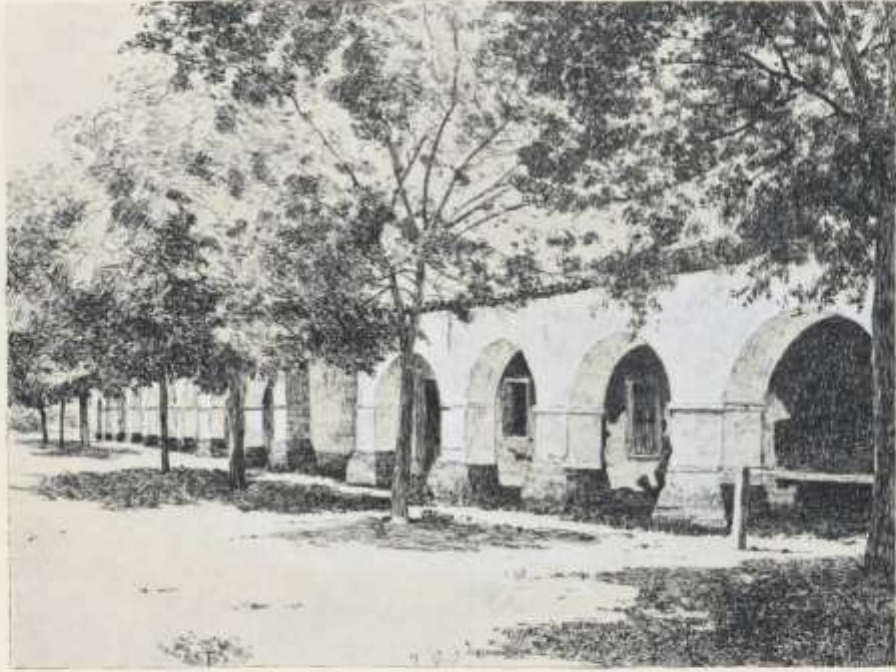


田園

S a n J u a n B a u t i s t a







SAN JUAN, GUATEMALA.

S a n J u a n C a p i s t r a n o







SANTA CRUZ.

