

The Carmel Crier

19 February 2012

Carmel, California

On the road to Saint Elsewhere

U.S. 101 follows the route of *El Camino Real* south from Mission San Juan Bautista

From Mission San Diego de Alcalá at the southern end to Mission San Francisco Solano in the north and through the 19 missions in between, the King's road – mostly a mule trail – linked the colonial outposts of *Alta California* in the Viceroyalty of New Spain.

El Camino Real – now mostly freeway but with a stretch of city streets and a preserved bit of dirt path – still does.

During the 151 years it took to establish the strand of missions – where Catholic priests converted the
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On the road to Saint Elsewhere

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native inhabitants to Christianity and tried to recreate a European society in the New World – this royal road carried commerce, communications and travelers up and down its 600-mile length. The missions were a day’s travel by horseback apart, about 30 miles. By tradition the trail was marked by yellow mustard blossoms from seeds scattered by traveling padres.

Today’s El Camino Real is marked by facsimiles of mission bells hung at intervals along the roadside from poles shaped like a shepherd’s crook. But it carries far more than commerce and people.

Like Plymouth Rock in Massachusetts and the land rush of Oklahoma Sooners, El Camino Real and the system of mission settlements it supported forms the basis of this state’s myths.

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Emily stands on the last portion of *El Camino Real* preserved as a dirt path beneath Mission San Juan Bautista, founded in 1797. The hillside traversed by the trail is the western edge of the San Andreas Fault, cause of the 1906 San Francisco and the 1989 Loma Prieta (World Series) earthquakes. This mission had to be restored after the 1906 earthquake because its walls collapsed. Signs here and at Mission San Carlos Borromeo del Rio Carmelo in the town of Carmel, near where we are staying on this trip, warn visitors that they are in unreinforced masonry structures that can collapse in an earthquake.

On the road to Saint Elsewhere



A priest presents a newly baptized infant at Mission San Juan Bautista

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No child escapes California's public school system without doing a mission project. Gordon's was on Mission San Francisco de Asis, now called Mission Dolores, which became the city of San Francisco. All four of state's largest cities – Los Angeles, San Diego, San Jose and San Francisco – grew from mission settlements.

Named for Catholic saints major, minor and, in at least one case, no longer recognized, the missions gave their names to dozens of places and hundreds of streets throughout the state. Mission San José de Guadalupe is located on Mission Boulevard beneath Mission Peak just outside the city to which it gave its name.

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On the road to Saint Elsewhere

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California's car culture comes directly from El Camino and the places it goes. It was the name that Chevrolet gave to its classic pick-up truck.



El Camino was necessary to keep the northernmost of Spain's American territory connected to Mexico. After Mexico's independence

in 1810, the road served to maintain a tenuous connection to the new rulers in Mexico City.

But neither the Spanish nor the Mexicans ever moved into Alta California in numbers sufficient to create a critical mass of settlers.

Only about 8,000 "Californios" – Spanish-speaking settlers – lived in the mission settlements, mostly in the south. Rather, a growing number of new Californians came from the east, crossing the border with impunity and settling in at the northern end of El Camino.

They tended to be people who had failed to make an economic go of it where they had come from. They showed little interest in assimilating. When a Sam Smith and Mary Jones would marry, for example, their children would be Smiths, not Smith Joneses. And they didn't care to learn Spanish.

In 1846 American settlers at the northernmost mission in Sonoma overthrew the Californios without a shot. The California Republic was born.

This new nation lasted barely long enough to design a flag. U.S. soldiers in the area under John C. Fremont quickly came to the American settlers' aid. U.S. Navy and Marines captured the mission in San Francisco, again without bloodshed as Mexican troops fled southward. Supported by the navy, American settlers revolted at missions all along El Camino. San Diego, the southernmost, fell three weeks after Sonoma.

California would never go through the normal statehood process. Gold was discovered in the Sierra Nevada foothills at a mill owned by John Sutter, a Swiss immigrant escaping Old World debts, two years after the Bear Flag Rebellion in 1848.

California was never organized as a territory. It had no constitution. It didn't matter. It was admitted as the 31st state in 1850.



El Camino Real Spanish missions along California's "Royal Road" or "King's Highway"

(Missions listed north to south)

Mission	English translation	Founded	Notes
Mission San Francisco Solano	St. Francis Solano	1823	Francis Solano was a Spanish missionary to Peru from 1549 until his death in 1610
Mission San Rafael Arcángel	St. Raphael the Archangel	1817	The archangel Raphael was a healer in Jewish, Christian and Islamic tradition. The mission was the first sanitarium in California
Mission San Francisco de Asis	St. Francis of Assisi	1776	Francis of Assisi, in what is now Italy, founded the Franciscan order of priests in 1210 based on vows of poverty. The mission, now called Mission Dolores, is the oldest structure in San Francisco.
Mission San José de Guadalupe	The Glorious St. Joseph	1797	Named for Joseph, father of Jesus. The mission is located in the present-day city of Fremont, a suburb of today's San Jose.
Mission Santa Clara de Asis	St. Claire	1777	Claire founded an order of nuns in Assisi called the Poor Claires. The rebuilt mission is the centerpiece of Santa Clara University in the city of Santa Clara. Its street address is El Camino Real.
Mission Santa Cruz	Holy Cross	1791	
Mission San Juan Bautista	St. John the Baptist	1797	John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River. The rebuilt mission was featured in the Alfred Hitchcock movie "Vertigo." An unpaved segment of the original El Camino Real is preserved in the town of San Juan Bautista.
Mission San Carlos Borromeo del Rio Carmelo	St. Charles Borromeo on the Carmel River	1770	Charles Borromeo lived in northern Italy in the 1500s and was a key figure in the counter-reformation. Father Junipero Serra, who established the mission system, is buried in this mission in the present-day town of Carmel.
Mission Nuestra Señora de la Soledad	Our Lady of Solitude	1791	The name is a reference to Mary, Jesus' mother. The mission is in the present-day town of Soledad, location of a large state prison.
Mission San Antonio de Padua	St. Anthony of Padua	1771	Anthony, a Franciscan priest, was born in Lisbon, Portugal in 1195 and died in Padua, Italy.
Mission San Miguel Arcángel	St. Michael the Archangel	1797	Michael was an archangel in Jewish, Christian and Islamic tradition.
Mission San Luis Obispo de Tolosa	St. Louis, Bishop of Toulouse	1772	Louis of Anjou was the bishop of Toulouse, France in the 13 th Century. The town of San Luis Obispo is the site of a significant California university, Cal Poly-SLO.
Mission La Purisima Concepción	Immaculate Conception	1787	Located in Lompoc, it is the only remaining example of a full mission complex.
Mission Santa Inés (often spelled Ynez)	St. Agnes	1804	Agnes was born in Rome in 291 and was martyred at age 12 or 13 when she refused to marry a Roman official's son. She is the patron saint of virgins.
Mission Santa Barbara	St. Barbara	1786	Barbara was beheaded by her father, according to legend, in 3 rd Century Greece for converting to Christianity. The Catholic Church removed her from the list of saints in 1969 because of doubts about the story. The present-day city of Santa Barbara is a major beach resort and site of a branch of the University of California.
Mission San Buenaventura	St. Bonaventure	1782	Bonaventure was a 13 th Century Franciscan priest who studied at the University of Paris with Thomas Aquinas.

Mission San Fernando Rey de España	Ferdinand III, King of Spain	1797	In the 13 th Century, Ferdinand drove the Moors, Muslim invaders originally from north Africa, out of much of southern Spain. The mission is in the Mission Hills section of what is now Los Angeles.
Mission San Gabriel Arcángel	St. Gabriel the Archangel	1771	The archangel Gabriel served as the personal messenger of God, explaining Daniel's visions in Jewish tradition, foretelling the births of Jesus and John the Baptist in Christian tradition, and revealing the Koran to Muhammad in Islamic tradition. The mission incorporated the first hospital in California.
Mission San Juan Capistrano	St. John of Capistrano	1775	John was a Franciscan priest from Capistrano, Italy who led a Crusade against the Ottoman Empire in 1456. This is the mission to which the cliff swallows migrate each spring from Argentina.
Mission San Luis Rey de Francia	Louis IX, King of France	1798	St. Louis, Mo., is named for the same French king, who led two unsuccessful 13 th Century crusades. The mission is in the present-day town of Oceanside.
Mission San Diego de Alcalá	St. Didacus	1769	A lay brother who nevertheless was made superior of a Franciscan convent in the Canary Islands in 1463. He died in Alcalá, Spain. The first mission in the Alta California. Abraham Lincoln signed the proclamation that returned the mission to church ownership.

The most mispronounced name and most misunderstood man

Father Junipero Serra was the founder of the California mission system. The Sierra Nevada, the state's highest mountain range, was not named in his honor.

Sierra = mountain range.
Serra = man's name.
Who? Who-NEEP-air-oh. Oh.

Spain's missions in North America were originally administered by Jesuit priests. But Jesuits in the New World earned a reputation for standing on the side of the native inhabitants and against colonial governments. In 1767, King Charles III removed the Jesuits and put the missions under the control of the Franciscan order.

The Franciscans put a Spanish-born priest, Junipero Serra, in charge of the missions. They were harsh places for the natives upon whom they imposed a new religion and a different



society. Natives were considered children and as such were beaten for misbehavior.

Father Serra is hardly the first historical figure whose reputation has suffered when assessed by a later generation. What is rare is that 2½ centuries after he lived, the Catholic Church is considering him for sainthood based on exercising his responsibilities in a way that the church presumably would condemn today.

Today's picture page

The basilica of Mission San Carlos Borromeo del Rio Carmelo in Carmel. Father Junipero Serra is buried beneath the floor of the basilica at the mission, which was his headquarters in California. This view is from within the mission's courtyard. Missions were more than churches. They were agricultural settlements with lodging for travelers and other buildings necessary to sustain a village settlement such as residences and dining areas for priests, stables and barns.



An organist plays selections for a bride planning her wedding at the mission in Carmel.