PREFACE

The following pages are a guide for visitors to Mission San Buenaventura. Founded on Easter Sunday, March 31, 1782, Mission San Buenaventura is the ninth and last mission in the chain of twenty-one founded by Saint Junipero Serra. In 1843 the newly appointed first bishop of Baja and Alta California, Bishop Francisco Garcia Diego y Moreno, designated this mission as the first canonical parish in the southland of the Los Angeles-Monterey diocese.

Much of the information in the narrative comes from the knowledge and experience of docents John Eggler, Peter Chapa, Geoffrey Shields, James Antonioli, and Kyra Samaniego.

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Thank you for your interest in California history and the missions and for visiting Mission San Buenaventura.

Important Dates in the History of Spanish and Mexican California and Mission San Buenaventura

1492: Columbus explores Caribbean.

1513: Ponce de León explores Florida.

1519-1521: Hernan Cortez lands on the Yucatan coast and wins a bloody battle with the natives of Tabasco. Here is where he becomes a friend to Malinche, an Aztec woman, who guides him inland where he conquered the Aztec empire of central Mexico.

1533-1536: Cortez discovers Baja California

1542-1543: Spanish Viceroy, Mendoza, sent Juan Cabrillo, a Portuguese navigator in the service of Spain, explored the lands north and west of Mexico. He discovered Alta California or the State we now know as California.

1602-03: Sebastian Vizcaino explored the Bay of San Diego, then sailed north to Monterey Bay.

1769: One hundred and sixty-seven years after Viscaino, Father Junipero Serra, traveling overland with military commander Gaspar de Portola and a number of soldiers, reached
San Diego in early June and sighted two ships, the San Carlos and the San Antonio, anchored in the bay, as preplanned.

1782: Serra founded San Buenaventura Mission.

1786-1790: The first mission is built with surrounding sheds and corrals.

1791-1795: The original mission church is destroyed by fire in ’92, yet in ’93, British explorer Vancouver visits and is very impressed by the agricultural wealth of the mission lands surrounding the mission under repair.

1809 Napoleon seized Spain; Mexico and other Latin American nations revolt against Spain and become independent countries. The mission Church was completed, only to be badly damaged by an earthquake within three years.

Gift Shop Photographs
The ten or so photographs reveal what the mission looked like in the 1800s. The oval photo is the earliest photo dating. The picture is a view of the front of the church. The buttress was built sometime after the earthquake of 1812. Notice the long hoop dresses worn by the women.

The other photos are a good view of the front of the quadrangle. Along the mission front, we see the smaller buildings that separate the interior patio and fountain from the street. The rooms were used for meetings of all sorts. We also know these were storage rooms for grains, vegetables, fruits, and animal farming. Because they are without windows, we recognize that they are storage buildings.

The 1879 photo shows the interior of the church. One will note that the church was in need of repairs as many adobe bricks are shown where the plaster has fallen from the walls. There are very few benches or pews. The benches in the back appear to be home made.

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Museum

Vestment Case to the left of the top stair
This vestment display case holds the earliest chasubles used at Mass in the Mission. Originally, the chasuble was the same as the outer garment used by Roman citizens in their movements about the cities and towns of the empire. Before the time of Christ and the early church, priests used distinctive garments for tabernacle and temple services, but Christ or members of the early church used no special garments. However, in not too long a time, garments used by priests of
the early church, though typically Roman became distinguished by the richness and beauty of their decorations and their use at the altar.

**Case Opposite the Vestments**

**Top Half**
The wooden bells are the only ones known among the California missions to have survived. According to the book, The Bells that Never Rang, four bells were placed in the tower as decorations to give the appearance of many bells in the tower.

**Bottom Half**
Looking at the display case from the side, if we bend far down, we find a model of the mission and its properties as it looked in the 1820’s. Richard Senate, a local San Buenaventura historian, made this mission model.

**Case by Main Street Window**
This case contains mortars and pestles (molcajetes) and grinding stones (metates) used by the Indians and others to grind acorns or corn. The painting on the left is St. Francis of Assisi with Angel, the founder of the Franciscan Order. The painting on the right is that of Saint Buenaventura, the patron of the mission and a great Franciscan theologian of the 13th century. Bonaventure was a contemporary of St. Francis and wrote the first biography of the Saint of Peace.

The rather large, beautiful eagle looks like a weather vane but is, in fact, a memorial. It was given to the museum because of its age and craftsmanship, but it is not essential to the mission’s history.

**The Camarillo Case**
One of the most interesting items in the case is a “Solideo” a small white cap - a form of skull cap fitting on the back of the head. Pope Pius X wore this particular one. The crucifixes are made of wood and were used at the mission. The lowest shelf has a letter from Thomas Jefferson, admitting to a debt of $558.00 that he hopes to pay in installments. *Heirs who had it in their possession donated it to the mission*

**Mission library books – Bibliotheca Sancta Bonaventura**
Case to the right of the door
This is a most wonderful case because it has in it a collection of books that were the mission library through the years. This library was organized in 1942. It has 146 volumes, half of which are in Spanish, twenty-four in Latin, some in French and Italian, and two in English. All are from European cities with the oldest book from Madrid in Spain and printed in 1639 - more than 100 years before Serra founded the mission. Fray Francisco Suner collected most books, pastor from 1824 to 1831, who, ironically, was nearly blind. Many volumes he gathered from the
Apostolic College of San Fernando in Mexico City - where Serra trained to be a missionary in 1750.

**Case right of the Library Books**
This case contains various items including the 1782 date, which was used in front of the mission before the current numbers were put up. A piece of the original mission wall shows the colors and the decoration used in the origin mission. There is a violin used by a Chumash orchestra that played for services in the choir loft. The mission also has a viola used by the Chumash orchestra. The case also contains two original tabernacles used in the church. One was used at the side altar dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe. A tabernacle is where the special bread (or host) is kept, then given to the people during the masses they attend. Catholics believe that this host is the real body of Christ.

**Confessional**
This is one of the original confessionals from the early mission. A confessional was used by church members to talk privately to a priest about their worries and concerns to seek God’s mercy. This particular confessional was crafted from a wooden shipping crate. Two movies are shown on the life of St. Junipero Serra on the television in the confessional.

**Mission Doors**
These are the original mission doors probably from the 1809 period. Notice the rivets and hinges, as examples of early ironwork and carvings in the door that symbolized the rivers of life that the Indians felt everyone must travel.

**Basket Case**
While some of the baskets belong to other Tribes, most are Chumash. To really begin to understand the culture of the Chumash Indians, we would have to study their homes, igloo shaped wickiups but made of river reeds. Their baskets are considered the finest of known tribes who practice the art. The baskets were used for food gathering, or to eat from, and to carry water when they were covered with pitch. Their canoes, tomols, were also the finest along the California coast. These were used to exchange items with the Chumash who lived on the islands. Baskets from other tribes are also in the collection.

**Case opposite the Baskets**
This case contains sacred vessels and other appointments used in the celebration of the Mass. In the center is a gold chalice use by Fray Junipero Serra to celebrate the foundation Mass on Easter Sunday, March 31, 1782. The three monstrance’s look like a star of a ray of the sun. A host or the sacred Body of Christ consecrated at Mass is displayed in the monstrance for public adoration of Jesus present in the. Saint Junipero Serra used the middle one at the end of the foundation Mass. In the corner is an altar stone, which was used by Serra at the same Mass. The
altar stone contains relics of saints. The chalices were used during Mass for the wine, which Catholics believe, becomes the blood of Christ. The round pattens were used to gather crumbs from the hosts. A thurible is also found in the case for incensing the altar. There are other religious articles in the case.

In the Garden

Five information stations are found in the garden area. The first one is at the exit from the museum. This station gives information about Chumash life at the mission. The women are weaving baskets, making food or doing other domestic duties. The men are planting or harvesting crops or tending the animals.

A second station shows the types and amounts of animals found at the mission. Some of the grains and fruits grown at the mission are shown. They are not named so one can guess what they are.

The olive press provided oil for cooking. Animals were tied to the yoke to crush the olives and make olive oil.

The station with the statue of Fray Junipero Serra was donated by the Hammond Foundation. It is a life-sized statue of Saint Junipero Serra. It is given to churches and or other institutions that study the life of Saint Junipero. The maps display his journey from Spain to Mexico and his journeys in Baja and Alta California.

The station near the aqueduct-settling tank is another map, this one shows the path of the water coming from the nearby mountains to furnish the mission with a constant supply for all living and farming needs in the mission quadrangle. Fr. Cambon, who came with Serra, was the “engineer” of this famous aqueduct.

Finally, the station near the side entrance path to the garden is about Fernando Librado, or to use his Chumash name “Kitwepowit.” Born in 1839 at the mission, he is one of the primary sources of historical information about the Chumash and the mission. Notice the drawing of the quadrangle that was the center of mission activity up until 1895 when the quad was demolished.

The most colorful man-made fixture in the garden is the mosaic tile covered fountain built in 1976, duplicating a Mexican style. It looks nothing like the original fountain built by the Chumash that had a sculptured boar’s head as its fountain release. The old mission had an extensive water system that began in the mountains and included a seven-mile aqueduct that carried water to a reservoir on a hill behind the mission and from there to a settling tank still visible from behind the church. The settling tank acted as a filter to clean the water.
Looking around the garden, one sees the large two story rectory which houses the priests’ living quarters, private rooms, dining room, etc. This building was finished in 1929. The padres of the old mission lived in what was a quadrangle of the single story buildings that made a square around the garden and water fountain. The primary quarters of the padres then included a receiving room for visitors, offices, living quarters, kitchen, bakery, and dining area that ran along the back of the garden. Other buildings for storage and animal stock continued along the back to today’s boundary at Palm Street.

To the right of the pine trees is the mission bell tower. During the earliest days of the mission, the bells were used to call people to worship on Sundays and other festive days as well as to call the community together if danger threatened. There are four bells in the tower’s lower level and the two oldest are inscribed with the date 1781. One is dedicated to St. Francis and the other to St. Peter Alacantara, who was also a Franciscan. The Canet family cast the bell in the upper level in 1956. It is called the Verbum Domini Bell or “The Word of God”. It is this bell that we hear daily from the bell tower. A fourth bell was cast in 1825 and is dedicated to the Blessed Mother and it is on the lower level.

The double side doors to the mission have the same wavy carvings as the front doors (the original doors are in the museum). The carvings symbolize the rivers of life and are found in many of the missions. However this side entrance is designed in the Moorish fashion, perhaps because the pastor at the time of the building, Father Senan, had been raised in the part of Spain that had been under Moorish influence. The Moors and Islamic in religion were in Spain for over 700 hundred years, and influenced the history of Spain. The first thing to notice is the arched or horseshoe shape of the doorway - that is Moorish style. Secondly, notice the design over the door. It was done with plaster moldings to represent two rivers, the Ventura and the Santa Clara Rivers that flow near the mission to its west and east. The Chumash did this in plaster.

**In the Mission**

As we walk into the mission we first see an iconic image of St. Junipero Serra. The image is one of two beautiful tapestries designed by the famed artist John Nava from Ojai and woven in Belgium based on an 1810 painting by Fr. Jose Mosqueda who copied it from a painting of Serra at the Collegio in Queretara where Serra lived and was stationed. The original was likely painted in the 18th century but lost sometime during the Mexican Revolution. The Mosqueda portrait is among the few 18th-century depictions of the missionary and the most authentic image known of St. Junipero Serra.

What may surprise some are the many statues and paintings that are in front of and to the side of the altar area. The use of paintings and statuary is actually a method of teaching that should be explained. It must be remembered that centuries ago, before man had any forms of writing, he taught the history and beliefs of his ancestors to his children by the use of paintings on the walls of caves or on the skins of animals hanging in the wigwams or lodge houses of his tribe. The Chumash, for example, had hundreds of rock paintings, or pictographs in caves and remote areas
from Morro Bay south to Malibu. These are symbolic designs of beliefs or supernatural beings that were most important to the Chumash. The same can be said of most paintings and statues that one sees in museums and national buildings all over the world. They are a way of reminding the people of their national stories and history.

In this mission, for example, the statue at the center and top of the reredos, or background, is of St. Bonaventure, the bishop and cardinal for whom the mission is named. Reredoses were not always as elaborate as the one here in the mission. Originally, in the early history of Christianity, in the Middle East and into Western Europe, they were little more than cloth hangings that served as a backdrop to the altar table. In time they became paintings or tapestries of scenes pertinent to the history of the church of that local. However, by the 11th century, they had become permanent structures of the altar area and essential to the religious community. This reredos was built in Mexico, then shipped to and installed in the mission. The pilasters, or columns, are painted to resemble marble in imitation of the neoclassical style, which, in turn, was an attempt to imitate the grandeur of the Roman Empire.

To Saint Buenaventura, the purpose of human knowledge, or we could say of going to school, is to learn how to help others. When he was an infant, and very ill at the time, his mother had him blessed by St Francis of Assisi who, once the young boy recovered, called out “Buenaventura” or “good fortune,” and the named stayed with him throughout his life.

The statue to the left is of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and is referred to as the Immaculate Conception, which is the celebration of Mary’s freedom from sin from the time of her conception. The origin of this title for Mary goes back to the 600’s in Palestine. However, in 1858, when she appeared to the farm girl Bernadette in Lourdes, France, she referred to herself as the Immaculate Conception.

The statue to the right is of St. Joseph, the husband of Mary. He was a carpenter by trade and taught Jesus that skill. But more importantly, he was considered the protector of the infant child and young boy during times of danger. He is believed to have died before Jesus began his public ministry.

Central to this reredos is the tabernacle where the blessed unleavened bread, (considered by Catholics to be the presence of Jesus Christ) is kept. The door scene of the tabernacle is of the Good Shepherd. The six silver candlesticks to the sides of the tabernacle were brought from Mexico in the 1840’s, as was the silver crucifix and the sanctuary lamp that is always burning with light because of the Host in the tabernacle. In 1976, the mensa, or top, and its support that makes up the entire altar were brought forward so that the celebrant could face the people and speak directly to them and they could respond to his prayers. All of the flat pavers or stones that we see as flooring are original to the early mission.
The **ambo or pulpit** we see to our left is newer as the original was located high on the wall, just beyond the side altar of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Steps would rise from the floor along the wall to the pulpit, where the speaker could look out over the congregation and from where his voice would carry more clearly. It was there, until 1957, when it was incorporated into the present setting by Mr. Fred Rolla.

Behind the ambo is the glass case with the **Holy Oils of the Church** used for the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders.

On the side altar to our left we have the **Shrine of the Crucifixion** with the **crucified Jesus** as the centerpiece. This work was sent to the Mission in 1808 from the Philippines. However, artist Mary Moran, although copied from the original, did the backdrop scene, in 1976.

The statue in the black dress is **the Virgin Mary** who stood at the foot of the Cross—Mother of Sorrows (Nuestra Senora Dolorosa) This title is to remind viewers of the pain Mary suffered during the lifetime of Jesus, especially as she followed him to Calvary. She was at the crucifixion.

On the other side of the crucifix is a statue of **St John the Apostle and Evangelist**. This is appropriate because he is said to have been at the foot of the cross with Mary during the crucifixion and that Mary was given into his care following Jesus’ death. John and his brother James were known as the Sons of Thunder because of their temperaments. He is credited for the fourth Gospel and lived to his ninety-fourth year.

The small statue nearest to us is of **St. Anthony of Padua** (1445-1505). He, too, was a Franciscan like Serra, and famous as a preacher during his life, but more famous today for being the finder of lost articles.

The other small statue is of **St. Thomas Aquinas**, a great scholar who lived in the 13th century. He was a Dominican friar known as the Angelic Doctor because of the scope of his knowledge, and openness, and generosity to those whom studied with him. *(However, the statue isn’t quite accurate because we know that Thomas was so large a man that a half-circle had to be cut from his table in front of him so that he could enjoy eating.)*

Directly across the center aisle is another altar commonly referred to as **The Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe**. This painting was done in 1747 by Francisco Cabrera. The story is well known of the Indian Juan Diego who told of four visitations he had of the Blessed Mother. She was seen as a young, dark-skinned Indian woman with the face of a mestizo. The image was
imprinted on his tilma or cloak. This was in 1531, two hundred years before the founding of this mission.

The statue to the left of the painting is of St. Dominic, who lived 400 years before Juan Diego, but who is known for teaching followers the recitation of the Holy Rosary, a series of prayers in honor of Mary so, in a sense, there is a strong connection between the Dominicans who followed Dominic and the devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe.

The statue to the right of St. Dominic is of St. Gertrude, a cloistered nun— that is one who lived a secluded convent life. She was known for her writings explaining the love of Jesus for his followers because of His Sacred Heart.

Then we have the statue of St. Isidore, the patron of farmers. *(See the old fashioned, ancient tool for hoeing in his right hand?)* He was a hired worker on the estate of a wealthy landowner in Spain. He also had a small plot of land for his own little farm. He is famous for his stewardship and generosity because all the while he was honest in caring for the crops and income of his wealthy patron, he would also distribute food from his little farm to those in need.

The last statue of the group is of St. Francis of Assisi, the founder of the order of priests that began the California missions. He is equally famous for his life of holiness in caring for the poor and sick. *(He is said to have started the tradition of duplicating the Christmas Manger scene for people to visit during the season and figures or painting of the Stations of the Cross…Christ’s journey to Calvary.*) His love for all creatures led him to give sermons to the animals and birds that he encountered during his walks between towns and villages.

Finally, it should be noted that most of the art and statuary we see was collected by Fr. Jose Sean, Pastor, 1806-1826.

The pictures hanging on the walls on both sides of the interior that are similar in size and shape are called The Stations of the Cross. These individual “stations,” each one with a story of its own, are seen together as the story of the last day of Jesus’ life. These paintings are about 250 years old and were done by a master artist and his pupils. Art authorities tell us that they can see the different brush strokes and techniques in the paintings. The original master is unknown, but Franz A. Trevors did the final restoration that we have in 1966.

Against what is our back wall, are confessionals where people can discuss sins and private concerns with a priest. As one can see, they are much roomier than the confessional in the museum. These confessionals were rebuilt in 2017.
The small room next to the confessional is the former Baptistery (where people are baptized with water to become Christian). The original copper baptismal font/pot from the late 1700’s is now housed in the Museum. A pedestal font is located in the rear of the church with the Pascal Candle representing Christ the Light of the World. The marble font dates to the late 1920’s or early 1930’s

**Chapel of the Pieta (pity)**
A Vatican licensed marble-cast of Michelangelo’s 1498 masterpiece *Pieta* is added to the sacred art collection at Mission San Buenaventura. The Mission acquired the Vatican licensed No. 73/100 marble-cast Pieta statue in 2018. The statue is so lifelike that the viewer can almost feel the curls of the dead Christ’s hair and the softness of the Madonna’s lips.

Within the walls of the Pieta Shrine is a large display of relics of saints of the church. A first class relic is a tiny chip of the bone of the saint. A second class relic is an item used or worn by the saint; a third class relic is something that touched the grave of the Saint. The relics in the Mission are all First Class. There is a relic of the True Cross, relics of St. Junipero Serra.

**Mission History**
This is the ninth mission in the chain, and last mission of the seven personally founded by Fr. Serra before his death in 1784. There are 21 missions in Alta California: first is the mission in San Diego in 1769. He spent 17 years in California and became the most famous of the founding missionaries. However, as old as this building is, it is not the same “first” mission church Serra knew. Like the original shelter in San Diego, the first celebration of thanksgiving was held in the open, beneath a shelter of tree limbs and blankets, with the wind blowing off the ocean.

Construction of the first San Buenaventura church began in 1782, along with other buildings for the priests’ quarters and soldiers’ barracks. These were built with a mixture of wood, adobe and stone. The buildings were designed by the padres and built by the native Chumash people under the oversight of the Spanish guards. It should be remembered that soldiers, padres and civilian immigrants had already been working for 167 years throughout Mexico, Baja California, and parts of what are today’s States of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona with the native Indians of those areas, building missions and pueblos that would become towns and cities.

Sadly, the first mission was destroyed by fire eleven years after it was finished. Undaunted, the same mixture of Chumash Indians, padres, and soldiers began building again, but at the same time continued to till the fields for growing crops, cared for orchards of fruit trees and watched over large herds of livestock.

They were so successful that in 1793, the English navigator, George Vancouver, for whom the Canadian city is named, loaded twenty pack mules with food supplies for his ship anchored in Santa Barbara. And, just a few years later, in 1806, Fr. Fermi de Lausen, “Presidente” of the
missions, reported to the Spanish government that the mission, under construction, was more than halfway to completion.

This mission is a stone and adobe structure with walls six and a half feet thick. The ceiling beams and the rafters supporting the roof were hand crafted by ax from pine and oak trees growing in the San Cayetano mountain area. These were dragged and hauled to the mission site by oxen over the dirt and rocks that carts couldn’t manage. Once the beams and rafters were in place, tiles fired from clay dug from the nearby hills and held in place by mortar and lime, as were the rocks and adobe bricks used in smaller structures covered them. The mortar and lime were from the Cañada San Buenaventura. It took 17 years of hard labor and artistry to finish this building by 1809.

The mission had troubles in 1812. There were earthquakes during that year and the bell tower collapsed damaging the roof. Piles of rubble were all around the quadrangle and the threat of a tidal wave, what we call a Tsunami today, was so real that the entire mission population moved up into the hills and camped there for three months. It took more than a year to repair the damage and to reinforce the mission walls with the buttress of stone and mortar to the left of the entrance as you walk up the stairs.

Within four years, by 1816, the mission peoples had continued to be very active in agriculture, animal husbandry, and trade with coastal seafarers, and the padre’s task of religious education. Very important to the mission’s agricultural success, was the seven-mile long aqueduct that was the source of an extensive irrigation system that brought water to a reservoir in the hills behind the mission. This project was begun very early in mission history, in 1782, under the direction of Fray Benito Cambon, a contemporary of Serra. One can still see a holding tank and photos of the aqueduct behind the church.) This remarkable system allowed the development of wheat, corn, and barley for the granaries; orchards of apples, peaches, plums, and even bananas for trade with seafarers. By 1822, mission reports to Spanish officials in Mexico claimed 10,000 sheep, 13,000 cattle, and 150 mules on a mission ranch covering many acres to the four points of the compass, all spreading from the center point of this mission building and the mission quadrangle.

We have to picture the quadrangle from the front of the mission from across Main Street. To the left of the church, where the old Holy Cross School building now serves at the parish offices, was the cemetery. Then, there is the mission church and the attached bell tower. Next, across from the front entry were adobe buildings. The buildings across the back of the quad—facing the patio—were living quarters for the padres, other offices, single women’s living quarters, dining rooms, a kitchen, food storage facilities, and a candle shop.

It must be remembered that the property and buildings of the quadrangle and the hundreds of acres of farm and livestock land extending out and around the mission belonged to Spain and
was under the management of the priests both here and at the other twenty missions. They reported yearly facts of growth in agriculture and religious development to the Viceroy in Mexico who, in turn, submitted reports to the king of Spain. From these reports we know that the early 1820’s were historically the most successful for Mission San Buenaventura.

These early days in mission history, 1772-1836 are referred to as the Spanish Period. A second time period is titled the Mexican, 1821-1846; and a third, 1846-1862 the American period.

**Spanish Period**

As for the history of the mission in the Spanish Period, it had many successes, but also some trials. For example, when Fr. Senan was pastor in the early 1820’s, the pirate Borchard was sighted offshore. He dropped anchor and the mission rang its bells in warning. Fr. Senan and his followers gathered up all the church valuables that around. They were loaded on oxcarts and pack mules and moved to the mountains inland from the mission. The people stayed hidden in mountain caves for more than a month, until the pirate ship sailed away.

On another occasion, and a sad historical fact, is that Indians of the Mohave Tribe came to trade but, distrusted by the soldiers of the mission, were jailed overnight. Upon release of the Indians the next morning, a fight broke out resulting in twelve deaths and the undying distrust of the Mohaves against the mission and its inhabitants for many years. Distrust continued with acts of vandalism and robberies to keep the feud going.

The Chumash history at San Buenaventura was considerably different than that of the Mojave. As mentioned, the Chumash territory extended from today’s Ventura County, north through Santa Barbara, to San Luis Obispo. Speaking only of the historical events of the San Buenaventura Mission lands, we know the following: in the beginning, the padres befriended the local Indians and together they began a new life for the Indians based on the Spanish Colonial rule that placed the padres in charge. However, remember that only those Indians, who chose to do so, came to work, live, and study under the Padres. Large numbers chose to remain away but those of the mission were taught the art of making adobe and from that “small brick” marked the beginning of a labor force that built the mission’s foundation, outer walls, and the shaping of giant timbers for the rafters, as well as the roofing and ceilings of today’s mission.

Beyond construction labor, the Chumash were taught the farming skills to plant and grow crops for food—something they earlier had no need to learn as a gathering culture. This agricultural community expanded rapidly from grains like corn, a basic crop, to exotic fruit trees such as bananas. The growth of grain crops were originally used as feed for animals that, in turn, provided meat, milk, cheese, and clothing. Later they became food staples in their own right.
Clothing, as the Spanish used it, was a totally new cultural direction for the Chumash and best symbolized the totally different life that was being imposed upon them by the Spanish. Also, over the early and middle years of the mission system, the Spanish organized a work schedule that began with the ringing of church bells an hour after sunrise, stopping work at noon, again the bells, then, a short work period in the afternoon.

Along with labor education was a vigorous indoctrination into the Christian religion. Over the years, a large number of Chumash were converted and that led to their leaving their villages to build new adobe houses near the mission and to adopt a Spanish colonial life style.

Yet, the worst that was to happen came unexpectedly. European diseases like small pox and measles infected the native population that had no immunity to this new attack. The Chumash population began to die out rapidly and, by the time of the Mission Mexican period. The Chumash were a much smaller entity that had lost much of its united strength.

**Mexican Period**

This Mexican period was also the time of the disbanding of the mission system to secularization, leaving the Chumash with no center of life. Many sought jobs as cowboys or as domestic servants employed by the New Mexican landowners. Those who did seek to return to the Chumash ways moved away from the coast to the southern San Joaquin Valley, where they joined with the Yokuts and Kitanemuk Indians to live a life incorporating all that could be remembered of the old ways. Chumash religion and culture continued down to the present.

Mexico’s independence from Spain was successful for the people of Mexico on the mainland, but was not successful for what might be called its “colony” in Alta California. In short, the government did not have the money to support the California Missions. Thus, in 1834, the government enforced an earlier written law known today as the “secularization law” that took the missions away from the missionaries and was to return the land to the Indians. However, if the Indians did not want the land, it was to be sold to anyone who wanted it. Historically, we know what a bad law and bad time secularization came to be.

Mission lands were much larger by hundreds of acres than they are today. But after only fifty years of training, the Indians were not prepared for the agricultural task. As soon as it was known that the Indians did not wish to continue the larger farming enterprises, the land, according to the secularization law, could be sold to anyone. Now greedy and dishonest men entered the picture. Much of the land was taken without the Indians receiving money for the sales. Then neglect, decay, abandonment, thievery, fire, and earthquakes destroyed the mission buildings and profiteering owners divided the many acres into smaller parcels of land.

**American Period**
The first great change in Mission restoration to historical accuracy came in the mid 1850’s, when the U.S. Government returned the mission buildings to the Catholic Church and a second step was taken when President Abraham Lincoln invalidated certain sales of mission property, as in the case of the San Buenaventura Mission lands, which had been sold away by Mexican Governor Pio Pico. Consequently, one refers to the beginning of the American Period as being 1848.

Even though the American Period continues today, it is better understood divided in two parts: 1849-1900 and 1900- to today. The first part of the American Period, 1849-1900, was a holdover from what we described as the loss of property and neglect. However, it was this neglect that began attracting interested persons to help preserve and restore the missions and their history for the future.

Mission San Buenaventura never fell into the severe decline suffered by some other missions in the chain. There are reasons for this: especially the growth of the City of Ventura as a center of agriculture and petroleum, as well as the use of the mission as the Parish Church for the Catholic citizens of the community. Consequently, this mission was never without pastoral leadership from the time of its founding, by the Franciscan missionaries, through the Mexican period with appointed diocesan priests, to the American period, with appointments made by governing bishops, especially in modern times from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

Two well-intended pastors, Fr. Compala (1861-1867) and Father Cypriano Rubio (1867-1900), attempted to modernize the mission by elongating the windows and adding stained glass, whitewashing the interior art of the mission, and covering the floor tiles and the ceiling beams.

True restoration came under the influence of priest historians and citizen groups working to restore all the missions in the chain and, in the case of San Buenaventura in the 1970s

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**Final Thoughts**

What we have been able to describe and explain to you is the very special history of this mission that is unique among the 21 missions along the El Camino Real (the King’s Highway) that actually begins much farther down the peninsula of Baja California…at a city called Nuestra Virgin de Loreto Concho, the mother and first of all missions in the Californias and the beginning of the El Camino Real. This first mission is now the Sister Mission with Mission San Buenaventura. Our Mission is unique because this building has been in continuous use since its construction in 1809, except for a short time following the earthquake and tidal wave of 1812.

Perhaps when leaving the mission, the visitor will have time to visit the archaeological site referred to as the Albinger Museum. Peer through the fence when the site is closed to the
public to see the plank boat that is an example of the Chumash craftsmanship, a boat called a tomol, and the top of an excavation pit where evidence of human habitation goes back thirty-five hundred years. Equally important are the foundations of the first mission church and barracks of the troops in use before the final development of the more permanent quadrangle. They too are also seen through the fence.