



## FRED HENSTRIDGE PHOTOGRAPHY

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Vol.2, No. 10, July 2009

# THE APERTURE

## Mission San Juan Capistrano

In 1775 Father Fermin Francisco Lausen along with eleven soldiers erected a cross in the narrow valley on the California coast about 100 miles north of San Diego. This was the beginning of what is considered by many as the jewel of California missions, San Juan Capistrano. Father Lausen had been ordered by Father Junipero Serra of the Franciscan Order to establish a new mission on the California Coast midway between the San Diego Mission and San Gabriel Mission. No sooner had Father Lausen and his soldiers erected their cross they received news of an Indian uprising at San Diego in which the settlers were violently attacked. Father Lausen and his men fearing that these uprising would endanger Spanish occupation of Alta (Upper) California forgo their new project and returned to San Diego. Before abandoning their new mission site they buried the two bells they had brought with them. In 1776, Father Serra, along with more padres and soldiers returned to the site and found the cross still standing. They dug up the bells and rang them announcing the second founding of the Mission. The date was November 1, 1776.



*Entrance to the Mission on Ortega Hwy.*

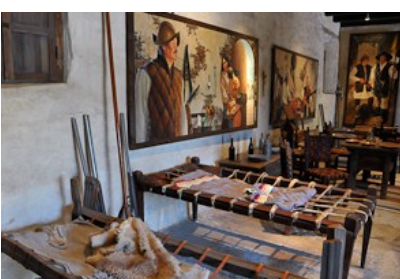


*Map of the California Missions*

From 1769 to 1823 Spain, through the Franciscan Order, established 21 missions along the California Coast. These missions ranged from San Diego to San Francisco, some 650 miles along the California Coast. Spain believed that their hold on California was being threatened by Russian settlements as far south as San Francisco and it wanted to secure its presence in what was then known as Alta California. The Spanish Court being religious in nature entrusted their power to the Padres. Spain settled in Mexico and established many missions under the control of the Jesuit Order. In 1767 under the direction of the newly appointed governor, Don Casper de Portola, the New Spain (Mexico) mission system in Baja (Lower) California was removed from the Jesuits, due to conflicts in control interpretation, and placed in the hands of the Franciscan Order under the direction of [Padre Junipero Serra](#). Padre Serra was assisted in this task by three other priests, Father Francisco Palou, Father Juan Crespi and Father Fermin Lausen. The padres and the governor were directed by the Spanish Crown to settle the unexplored lands of Alta California and the history of present day California began. The plan of the Crown was to build a line of missions along the California Coast with two main purposes:

1. To convert the native Indians to Christianity as loyal subjects of Spain.
2. To prevent further southern expansion from the Russian fur trappers.

There were a total of twenty-one missions founded in the mission chain between 1769 and 1823. Each has its own unique history that is full of excitement, adventure, hardships and drama. Entering a land that was unexplored and encountering inhabitants who spoke unknown languages, and who maintained different values and beliefs from those of the padres and soldiers, led to fear and apprehension for all groups involved. Each [mission's historical importance](#) must be searched more thoroughly to understand the depth of human involvement. The influence of the mission settlements has left a strong mark throughout California and has even reached beyond the boundaries of the State. Architecture, language, music art, apparel, and numerous city and street names are but a few of the innumerable reflections of Spanish culture developed from the mission era.



*The Soldiers Quarters*



*The Spinning and Weaving Room*

Mission San Juan Capistrano was the seventh mission found by the Franciscans under the Spanish Crown's edict 1767. It is called by many "The Jewel of California Missions", due to its location and unique Moorish Architecture. The mission is located just west of Interstate 5 in the City of San Juan Capistrano in Orange County, California. It is situated in low valley 5 miles from the Pacific Ocean between two ranges of low hills. The climate, with its ocean breezes gives the mission the ample opportunity to support the varied flora found in the two patio areas. It is also a very pleasant year round environment for tourists.



*The Ruins of the Great Stone Church*

The mission is laid out with a north-south orientation and consists of [two offsets squares](#). The base square lying along [Ortega Highway](#) (SR-74) consists of the entrance, the ruins of the Great Stone Church, the mission bells and a patio area. [The Great Stone Church](#) was destroyed by an earthquake in 1812 and was never rebuilt. The northerly square consists of the main patio lined with [four corridors](#) surrounding a [beautiful fountain](#). The blend of [bougainvillea](#), cactus, citrus trees, fountains with their [lily pads](#) and palms make for a very attractive and reflective atmosphere.

[The Serra Chapel](#), constructed in 1772, is the only original California Mission Church still standing in which Father Serra is known to have celebrated the sacraments. In the early 1920s Father John O'Sullivan pastor from 1910 to 1933 restored the chapel. The [beautiful baroque retabo](#) is from Barcelona, Spain and is made of hand-carved wood with a gold leaf overlay and is estimated to be over 40 years old. Near the entry to the chapel is the [original baptismal font](#) that once stood in the Great Stone Church.

At the time of secularization in 1833, when control of the missions and their properties were released to the Indians or sold to the Spaniards the mission herded 396,000 cattle, 62,000 horses, 321,000 hogs, sheep and goats. During the mission's peak harvest years, over 120,000 bushels of grain were produced. This was a remarkable achievement considering that there was not one horse, cow, pig, goat, sheep or bushel of grain in Alta California in 1789. When the mission lands were turned back to the native Indians, little remained with the Indians - most became ranchos of the Spaniards who were the political friends of Mexico's first governor after gaining independence from Spain in 1821. Ranchos with familiar names such as Mission Viejo, Rancho Santa Margarita and Santa Ana were created at this time. The Indians suffered great loses, were not prepared to live on their own, and thousands died. In March 1865, Governor Pico's sale of the Mission was declared fraudulent by the United States Land Commission. That same month President Lincoln returned Mission San Juan Capistrano, including 44.40 acres of land, to the Catholic Church.



*The Serra Chapel*

One of the most notable events at the Mission is the return of the swallows to welcome spring every March 19<sup>th</sup> on the feast day of St. Joseph. These swallows spend the winter in South America and make their way back to San Juan Capistrano like clockworks every year. The swallows spend the spring and summer building nests from the sticky clay and dry grasses found along the local creek banks. As soon as the nest is dry, the mother bird lines the nest with soft feathers and starts her family of four or five eggs. The father closes up the nest leaving only a narrow spout which allows them to come and go while protecting the eggs. These birds raise two families each year and predictably leave for their South America flight on October 23, the feast day of St. John Capistrano, the mission's namesake. In 1939 the song writer [Leon Rene](#) was sitting and waiting for his breakfast. He commented to his wife, "The swallows will return before I get my breakfast." This inspired him to come up with the song "[When the Swallows Come Back to Capistrano](#)."



*Looking into the Main Patio*

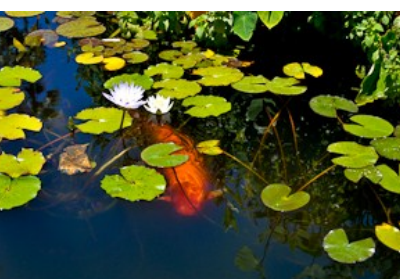
Kathy and I had not visited Mission San Juan Capistrano for quite some time. Our first visit to the mission was in 1961 when we were on vacation in California with my young brother Bob. Our next visit was some time in the early 1970s while showing guests around the Southern California area. We decided to revisit this mission on one of our weekly day trips as it is only about 50 miles from our house taking State Route 74 through Cleveland National Forest. It was one of those July days when the skies were crystal clear and the temperature never rose above 85 degrees. When we reached the mission around 11:00 am the temperature was a very comfortable 78 degrees due to the light breeze blowing in from the Pacific Ocean. It was a great day to take photographs. To see my gallery of photos of the mission [click here](#).



*The Mission Gift Shop*

The [City of San Juan Capistrano](#) is a great place to spend a day. It still retains much of the old Spanish flavor and there are ample restaurants, boutiques, shops, and historic markers. The mission offers numerous [activities](#) during the year including concerts and facility for parties and of course weddings.

After our time spent touring the mission we had lunch at the historic [Cedar Creek Inn](#). They offer a varied [lunch menu](#) at reasonable prices. We took our lunch on the spacious patio where Kathy had the Monte Cristo sandwich and I could not resist the Beef Dip. It was a great lunch and I recommend the [Cedar Creek Inn](#) for a very enjoyable dining experience, day or night. They offer live entertainment every Friday and Saturday night. If you want to spend an enjoyable day surrounded by California history and beautiful scenery you might want to consider a visit to Mission San Juan Capistrano. Don't forget to take the children. California history should be an important part of their education. After you have seen Mission San Juan Capistrano you might want to consider visiting some of the other missions. [Mission San Luis Rey de Francia](#) is only a few miles southerly by Escondido.



*Lily Pads and Koi in the Fountain*

For additional photos of the missions you are invited to visit my commercial galleries at: [Mission San Juan Capistrano](#) and [Mission San Luis Rey de Francia](#).

**Control (Ctrl) Click on any Photo or Link to open a full-size image in a new window or tab.**

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