

MISSION CHRONICLES

Information for Locals

Presented by

Mission San Juan Capistrano

Projects Underway to Ensure the
Preservation of Mission History

“Camposanto:

A Tribute to the Mission Cemetery History.”

Mission San Juan Capistrano is honored to present “Camposanto: A Tribute to the Mission Cemetery History.”

The Tribute is on display in the historic Sala Building, which is planned for conservation in the future, but has been made available for museum space thanks to the Gate House Preservation Project.

“Camposanto: A Tribute to the Mission Cemetery History” pays homage to the landmark Mission Cemetery which is located east of Serra Chapel. The camposanto which means “holy field” was a common term Franciscan padres used for cemetery. The Mission cemetery was in active use for nearly 70 years, the first burial most likely was in 1781, and the last around 1850.

Franciscan padres kept detailed records of each person who died and was buried at the Mission. The leather bound Burial Register the padres used, lists over 3,400 individuals between 1781-1850. The cemetery tribute features each name listed in the Burial Registers by year, which include baptized Native American men, women and children, as well as Spanish padres, soldiers and their families.

The tribute also features information on the history of Spanish Colonial burial practices during the Mission period (1776-1834), disease and population decline of the Mission Native American community, the cemetery’s first burial of Monsignor St. John O’Sullivan in 1934, as well as a pictorial timeline of how the Mission cemetery visually changed over time.

Did you know?

In the early 1990s to help convey the space was used as a cemetery, Mission staff allowed ten white crosses to be added. The crosses led people to believe only a few were buried in the cemetery, when in fact thousands had died and had been buried in the Mission Cemetery. In 2012, Mission staff removed the revisionist white crosses in effort to interpret history accurately, and stay within national museum standards. The Mission has added interpretive signs, audio-tour information, and recently debuted Camposanto: A Tribute the Mission Cemetery History display in the historic Sala building.

The cemetery tribute, funded by private donations and membership proceeds, is a temporary display while investigation of the Sala Building’s needs are assessed for its eventual preservation. The Mission Preservation Foundation is currently raising funds to conserve the 18th century building.

Most recently, the Sala Building was used as a gift shop, but has previously been used as a chapel, a private residence for the Forster Family (1845-1865), a padres’ dining room, living quarters for Mission craftsman, and a temporary soldier’s barracks, through its long history.

If you would like to become involved in the Sala conservation campaign, please contact Mission Executive Director, Mechelle Lawrence Adams at 949-234-1311.

“The Immaculate Conception.”

Mission San Juan Capistrano’s museum art collection includes several paintings of “The Immaculate Conception.” Several of these paintings can be seen on display, but one has been kept in storage in recent years due to its extensive damage and fragile condition.

This painting was added to the exhibition, “Mission Treasures: Historical Collection Revealed,” late last year to illustrate the need for conservation of historic paintings. This year, a couple visiting the Mission generously donated the funds needed to conserve this painting. The unsigned oil on canvas painting of “The Immaculate Conception,” c. the early 1800s, has been a part of the Mission’s museum collection for a long time though it is unclear exactly how long it has been here or in what condition it was in, when it arrived.

By the late 1900s, it was in poor condition and in desperate need of treatment. Mission staff contracted the services of local painting conservator, Susan Brown, who began restoring the painting in late July.

The conservation is expected to be complete before the end of the year and the painting will be returned to the gallery shortly thereafter.

To stay up to date on current preservation projects, please visit our website at missionsjc.com.

