300 Years of Father Serra

Mission San Juan Capistrano will host a celebratory event on Wednesday, September 28th, to honor the legacy and contribution of Father Junipero Serra on the 300th anniversary of his birth.

Father Serra (1713-1784), known by every fourth grader studying California’s history, founded the first nine missions in California, including Mission San Juan Capistrano. His historical significance to California is even more pronounced with the building of U.S. Capitol Building’s West Hall. Father Serra represents California as one of the most historically significant people to represent the state.

Serra was a man of uncompromising optimism. His personal motto was “Always look forward, never look back.” Despite hardships, lack of supplies, squabbles with military and government officials, Father Serra was able to establish nine missions and convert 5,000 Native Americans to Catholicism before his death in 1784. His legacy and contribution can be experienced firsthand while visiting Mission San Juan Capistrano. The founding document monument and the Mission’s sacramental registers bearing his signature are on display for guests to enjoy. Historical Serra Chapel, which was named in his honor, is the only remaining church in California in which Father Serra celebrated Mass and administered the Sacraments of Confirmation. Simply walking and exploring Mission San Juan Capistrano allows guests to immerse themselves in the life of Father Serra. During Father Serra’s last visit to Mission San Juan Capistrano, October 10th, he likely stayed in the South Wing building, and celebrated Mass in the newly built Serra Chapel.

Throughout 2013, Mission San Juan Capistrano has been celebrating the 300th anniversary of his birth with a new opening tradition, educational programming, and planning a celebratory event on his birthday November 25th. Each month during the year, the Mission’s largest bell is rung seven times at 9:00 a.m. in honor of Father Serra founding Mission San Juan Capistrano in 1775 and the seventh of the nine missions he personally founded.

In addition to the daily bell ringing, a new Sunday Serra Chapel tour has been offered to guests interested in the history of Serra Chapel and its connection to Father Junipero Serra. This November 24, 2013, Mission San Juan Capistrano celebrates Father Serra’s 300th birthday at 9:00 a.m. The celebratory event will feature a historic bell ringing ceremony, complimentary station tours by volunteer docents, and children’s story hour.

Please be a part of this celebratory year by experiencing Mission San Juan Capistrano and Father Serra’s legacy in California.

Fellow Father Junipero Serra’s Footsteps at Mission San Juan Capistrano

Serra Chapel

Completed in 1782, and the only church that remains in California in which Father Serra celebrated Mass. View the 18th century artwork, personal pieces and Stations of the Cross painting collection.

South Wing Building

Completed through the early 1780s, Father Serra most likely stayed within one of the rooms during his 1783 visit.

Mission Treasurer’s Exhibit

Features sacramental registers in which Father Serra signed and dedicated for the Mission’s use. The exhibit also displays “The Serra Vestment,” a 18th century vestment Father Serra likely used when celebrating Mass in 1783.

Founding Document Monument

This monument features the declaration Father Serra wrote which officially established Mission San Juan Capistrano on November 1, 1771.

El Camino Real

Simply driving along interstate 5 follows the original route Father Serra would have taken on his mission journey. It is know as El Camino Real or the Royal Highway.

If you have any questions about Mission Chronicles, please contact Steve Akin, the Mission’s Director, at (949) 234-3311.