

MISSION CHRONICLES

Information for Locals

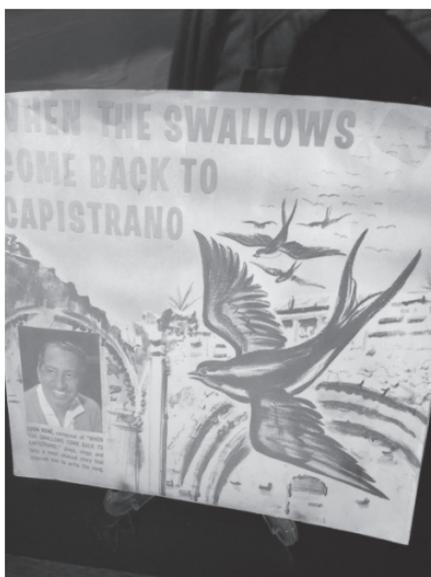
Presented by Mission San Juan Capistrano

Projects Underway to Ensure the Preservation of Mission History

ABOUT THE SWALLOWS IMAGE

The meaning of the swallow to San Juan Capistrano – symbolic, educational or a reflection of our community?

During this time of the year, all who love and support the historic landmark, Mission San Juan Capistrano, are indebted to songwriter and composer Leon Rene, who put Mission San Juan Capistrano and the city on the map in the 1930s when his “When the Swallows Come Back to Capistrano” chart-topping hit celebrated the idea of unrequited love and its hope for return. As a result of the hit, generations of Americans flocked to the Mission in the 20th Century to discover a place founded in faith and still relevant today as a rich California landmark. Without the song, or the birds, perhaps the fate of the Mission or the town would have been different.



Leon Rene's "When The Swallows Come Back to Capistrano"

Ever since the 1930s, this bird has served as an avian ambassador. Symbolically, it is a reflection of the idea of “homecoming,” “freedom of flight,” “freedom of faith,” “stamina,” “renewal,” “love” and “family building.” It has been well over 80 years since the swallow image was first used on the cover of Leon Rene’s hit album (pictured above). From there, as the small agricultural community emerged as a town and over the decades, the birds’ image has been re-envisioned in a variety of forms and styles. For the Mission, the signature swallow depicted in graphic form always has been the in-flight fork tail swallow. This swallow is also the one used in Father O’Sullivan’s Little Chapters book.

What matters in this discussion is ensuring that we do our part to protect the habitat, the traditions and the meaning of the birds and their relationship to the identity of this community. This effort can be successful if we as a people realize that the city-wide use of the swallow image is as diverse and eclectic as the history and people of this community.

