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CAMPOSANTO: A TRIBUTE TO THE MISSION CEMETERY HISTORY

SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO, Calif. (Oct. 7, 2013) -- Mission San Juan Capistrano is honored to present "Camposanto: A Tribute to the Mission Cemetery History."

The Tribute will be on display starting Saturday, Oct. 12 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 the Serra Chapel. Historians believe the burials first began in 1781 and continued to about 1850.

It is estimated that 3,400 were buried in the "Camposanto," or "Holy Field." Native American men, women and children, as well as Spanish soldiers and their families were laid to rest in the cemetery.

It was not common practice among the Spanish Missions in the 18th and 19th centuries to use coffins or headstones to mark individual graves. Instead, mass graves often were utilized for those who died around the same time.

Evidence of this practice was discovered in 1992 when cables used to secure the Serra Chapel's east wall were anchored to the ground, and Mission archeologists uncovered stacked bodies laid in an east-west

orientation.

In compliance with the Native American Burial Protection Act of 1990, a Native American monitor was present during the Serra Chapel anchoring project, and all of the bodies were properly reburied during Native American and Catholic ceremonies.

Although precise location of the buried is not known, the identities of every man, woman and child laid to rest in the Mission Cemetery have been recorded. Franciscan padres kept sacramental records within a leather-bound book called a Burial Register. It includes the name, age, name of parents or spouse and the day they died.

Mission researchers consulted the Burial Register for the development of "Camposanto: A Tribute to the Mission Cemetery History."

The Tribute, funded by private donations and membership proceeds, is a temporary exhibit while investigation of building needs for the eventual preservation of the 18th century structure are carried out. The Mission Preservation Foundation currently is raising funds in its conservation effort to restore the building, which has a rich history.

The Sala Building, most recently used as a gift shop, has been used to house priests and as a chapel, and served as the private residence for the Forster family, which owned the Mission from 1845-65. To become involved in the Sala Conservation campaign, contact Mission Executive Director Mechelle Lawrence Adams at 949-234-1312.

About Mission San Juan Capistrano:

Known as the "Jewel of the Missions," Mission San Juan Capistrano is a historic landmark and museum that boasts of quality permanent exhibits featuring original artifacts as well as traveling and temporary exhibits on a wide variety of topics.

The site itself serves as a living outdoor museum with original buildings constructed by Native Americans in the 18th century including the Serra Chapel, Great Stone Church, and the original padres' quarters of the South Wing.

The Mission was founded on November 1, 1776 by Padre Junipero Serra as the seventh in the chain of the twenty-one California missions established by Spain, and is Orange County's only mission. Every year, over 50,000 students visit the Mission and engage in an inspirational learning experience via the Mission Matters programming, as part of their State required California history studies.

Mission San Juan Capistrano is owned by the Diocese of Orange and is supported by the Mission Preservation Foundation, which is comprised of business and community leaders committed to ensuring the long term preservation and viability of Orange County's only Mission. The Mission receives no funding from either the Church or the State of California and charges admission funds as a means of providing public access.

Mission San Juan Capistrano is located at 26801 Ortega Highway, San Juan Capistrano, CA 92675. Open Daily 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Good Friday afternoon. Admission is \$9 adults; \$8 seniors (60 years or over); \$6 children (ages 4 to 11); and children ages 3 and under are admitted free. Free audio guide with senior and adult admission. For more information, call (949) 234-1300 or visit www.missionsjc.com.