



*The missions are California's cultural treasures. Working together we can ensure their future.*



## California Missions Foundation

Aug.-Sept. 2011

### Latest News from California Missions Foundation

Dear Friends,

In this newsletter, we continue our series of articles on the archaeological exploration of California's missions. ([See our previous newsletter](#) for the first in the series.) This time, we're taking you to the beautiful [Royal Presidio Chapel](#) in Monterey.



*Dr. Mendoza and his crew during an excavation at the Royal Presidio Chapel.*

In 1770, Fr. Serra founded Mission San Carlos Borromeo at the Presidio of Monterey. It was the second Spanish mission in what was then known as Alta California. The following year, Mission San Carlos was relocated to its present site in Carmel, but the church remained as a Royal Chapel for the troops stationed at the Presidio.

In recent years, restoration and landscaping work have required extensive excavation on the grounds around the chapel. Overseen by archaeologist Dr. Ruben G. Mendoza, these excavations resulted in many fascinating discoveries about the chapel's history. Dr. Mendoza has been kind enough to write a firsthand report of his work at the Royal Presidio Chapel, which you can [read below](#). I am grateful to Dr. Mendoza for his time and eloquence in communicating not just the scientific aspects of his work, but also his passion for discovery and for the history of the California missions.

We'd also like to share a few thoughts from Cathy Leiker, Project Manager for the Royal Presidio Chapel work, on the importance of understanding and preserving these historic treasures. See Cathy's wise words [below](#).

### "All Aboard the Bus" Program Extends its Reach

In other news from Monterey, the California Missions Foundation has just been awarded a \$10,000 grant from The Monterey Peninsula Foundation Youth Fund to support the expansion of our "All Aboard the Bus" program to Monterey County. This program, which is already successful in Southern California, puts elementary school children in touch with the vital history of California's missions through field trips and in-class activities. ([Read more](#) in our April 2011 newsletter.) The one-year grant will give approximately 1700 4th graders from Monterey County Title 1 schools the opportunity to visit a local California Mission as part of their California history study. If you would like to sponsor a school so that

more 4th graders can visit a mission, contact the California Missions Foundation at [info@carmelmissionsfoundation.org](mailto:info@carmelmissionsfoundation.org) or at 831-622-7500 and join others who have become school sponsors.

## Breaking News

The California Missions Foundation Board of Directors met at Mission Santa Barbara on September 16 and awarded \$130,000 in grants to California missions and mission sites. The Annual Mission Directors and Curators Conference was held on September 17. We'll have more details on both of these meetings in our next newsletter.

As always, please feel free to [share this email with a friend](#). And if you have questions, comments, or ideas for topics you'd like us to address in future newsletters, please don't hesitate to reply to this email. We love hearing from you!



-Knox

Dr. Knox Mellon  
Executive Director  
California Missions Foundation

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## Archaeology of the Serra Chapels: Investigations at the Presidio de San Carlos de Monterey by Ruben G. Mendoza, PhD, RPA

My work as an archaeologist has taken me from the jungles of Central America to the high and cold mountains of the Colorado Rockies in pursuit of the past. Archaeology is a discipline of wide-ranging scope and demanding interdisciplinary parameters. Having undertaken archaeological investigations throughout Mexico and the Southwest U.S., some of the most exciting revelations and personally rewarding discoveries made to date have come from my work within the Diocese of Monterey.

In 2006, I was contacted by representatives from the Royal Presidio Chapel Conservation Program about their efforts to restore the San Carlos Cathedral. Originally constructed as the first stone-built chapel for the Presidio Real de San Carlos de Monterey between 1791 and 1795, the Presidio Chapel (as it has come to be known) was the third chapel built on the site to serve the soldiers and civilians of Monterey. One of the oldest buildings to survive from the era, the Presidio Chapel was the first California structure designed by an architect and approved by an architectural review board. Today, it is the longest-serving, continuously occupied house of worship in the State of California.



*Dr. Ruben G. Mendoza, Project  
Archaeologist, Royal Presidio  
Chapel Conservation Program*

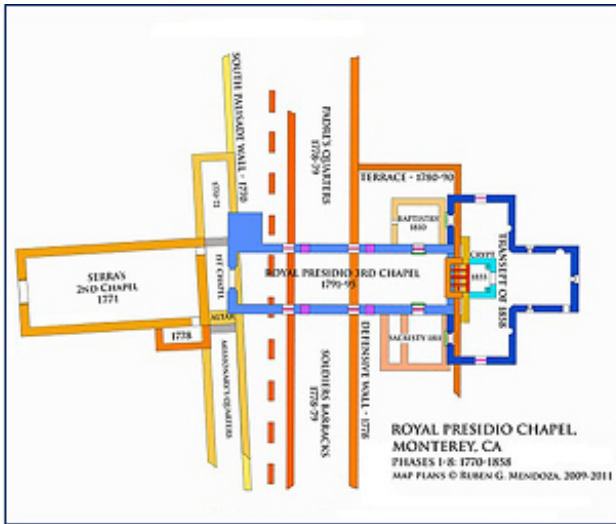


*Archaeology of the Chapel of 1771-72  
(Click for larger image.)*

Significantly, the first two chapels constructed at the Monterey Presidio were built under the direct supervision of Fr. Juan Crespí and the Blessed Fr. Junípero Serra, the Apostle of California. The first chapel on the site was formally blessed and dedicated by Fr. Serra on June 14, 1770, just 11 days after the founding of the Presidio of Monterey. The original chapel consisted of little more than a pole and thatch structure, or *jacal*. At that time, Fr. Francisco Palóu noted that "a chapel of poles and mud was erected, to serve as a temporary church." The dedication took place on the Feast Day of Corpus Christi. Prevailing weather conditions and rain on that day required that the mass be held under a makeshift canopy (made from the flags of various countries) within the warehouse portion of the structure, as the chapel remained unfinished. Within a year of the construction of the First Chapel, Fr. Serra and Fr. Crespí undertook the construction of the adobe Chapel of 1771. Measuring roughly 19 x 41 feet, this Second Chapel initially consisted of wood-plank, earth, and a lime-plastered roof and ceiling.

Despite the extensive historical records, we were left with many questions as to the original location and preservation of these earliest of California's houses of worship. Beginning in the fall of

2006, my students and I undertook the archaeological investigation of the footings and substructures identified with the San Carlos Cathedral.



*Serra chapels and other archaeological features of Monterey's  
Royal Presidio Chapel (Click for larger image.)*

These investigations soon bore fruit (in the area immediately adjacent to the east side of the nave) with the discovery of a massive granite pavement at the juncture of the 1790s-era nave and the 1858 transept. This same area produced lime-plastered floor features later identified with the original Baptistry of 1810.

Excavations at the juncture of the east transept and apse demonstrated that the 1858 transept was built atop a foundation of coursed masonry walls situated over the bedrock escarpment that cascades into the area now occupied by Fremont Street. Investigations adjacent the west wall of the nave in turn produced initial findings pertaining to the discovery of the Sacristy of 1810.

Subsequent investigations in 2007 determined that these wall footings had served as an interior cross-wall into what likely constituted the Vestry or robing area of the Sacristy. Among the most intriguing artifacts recovered during the 2006 season were gunflints, an obsidian projectile point, and significantly, a Spanish silver coin dated to 1779, which served to date the platform and south terrace feature to the period of circa 1780-90. The massive terrace feature in question was clearly built to accommodate the construction and expansion of the Chapel of 1791-95, which today serves as the oldest portion of the San Carlos Cathedral.

The 2007 field season was perhaps the most exciting aspect of the work. During this period, the archaeology crew monitored the trenching of the entire perimeter of the cathedral. These trenches were intended for the installation of a French drain and required the excavation of some fourteen soundings, each 22' to 25' long and 18" wide, excavated to the bedrock. The excavations produced thousands of artifacts ranging from earthenware ceramics and butchered cattle bone to military buttons and other artifacts of the Spanish, Mexican, and American eras.



*Spanish colonial ceramics from the Royal Presidio Chapel excavations of 2006  
(Click for larger image.)*

More importantly, the trenching operation was invaluable in more fully elucidating the architectural history of the Presidio Chapel and those ancillary structures. Significant discoveries of the 2007 field season included: the southern perimeter defensive wall of 1778, the massive terrace of 1779-80, the stone Baptistery of 1810, the adobe Sacristy and Vestry of 1810, the arcade footings of the Padres' Quarters of 1778, the foundation footings and ridge-pole of the Soldier's Quarters of 1778, and a finely dressed masonry platform located beneath the northwest corner of the San Carlos Cathedral. This latter structure would prove to coincide with the location of the First Chapel of 1770. As such, it is likely that this platform once served as the altar platform of this early and provisional chapel built by Fr. Serra and Fr. Crespí.



*Presidio Chapel Rededication of 2009  
(Click for larger image.)*

In July of 2008, I was again called upon to monitor the recovery of a buried feature accidentally exposed by contractors during landscape modifications in the forecourt of the San Carlos Cathedral. Upon reaching the site, I noted granite boulders and cut-shale blocks that proved to be none other than the foundation footings of a building that I was most interested in exploring further. With the assistance of CSU Monterey Bay archaeology students, ten days of archaeological investigations soon revealed the granite and shale foundation footings of a building approximating those dimensions noted for the Chapel of 1771-72. I was excited at the prospect that my team was now hot on the trail of recovering one of the most significant early buildings in California history: one of the two earliest Christian houses of worship identified from the archaeology of that era.

As we exposed the granite boulder and Roman mortar pavements of the original chapel structure, I was struck by the realization that I was standing atop the very floors of a sanctuary whose hallowed spaces once entertained the likes of the Blessed Fr. Junípero Serra, Fr. Juan Crespí, Fr. Francisco Palóu, Commander Pedro Fages, Pedro Font, Juan Bautista de Anza, Governor Juan Bautista Alvarado, and many, many other notable personages and parishioners who helped shape California and US history.

The discovery of the Serra Chapels of 1770 and 1771-72 will remain one of the most significant undertakings, and perhaps one of the most thrilling episodes, in my lifelong career as an archaeologist. As a Catholic parishioner and a descendant of the earliest Hispanic pioneers and Amerindian peoples of the US Southwest and northern Mexico, that moment within the Serra Chapel was filled with awe and reverence for my ancestors. Ultimately, just before it became necessary to backfill the foundation footings and floors of the Serra Chapel, my reverence for that sacred place overcame my scientific objectification, and I dropped to my knees and made the Sign of the Cross.

*All Royal Presidio Chapel images copyright 2006-2011 by Ruben G. Mendoza*

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**Passionate Stewardship in the Preservation of California History**  
by Cathy Leiker, Project Manager for the Royal Presidio Chapel work

As the Project Manager for the three-year effort (and an original member of the Royal Presidio Chapel Foundation for the ongoing maintenance), I can attest to the fact that while this "project" may be completed, the work is never finished! These California mission-era buildings, whether they are made of adobe or stone, are priceless links to our past that require regular monitoring by passionate stewards and knowledgeable conservation experts. With the support and guidance of the California Missions Foundation, more of this work is being performed on a regular basis than ever before.

Thank you, Ruben -- and everyone who works so tirelessly on these structures -- for your passion and your knowledge, and for showing us the beauty and secrets of our past so that we can pass them on to our future!



*Statue of Guadalupe at RPC*  
*Click on larger image*

**You can help us to preserve California's historic missions and all their cultural treasures!**

Call our office at (831) 622-7500 to donate by credit card, or click the button below to [donate via](#)

[PayPal!](#)



### About California Missions Foundation

Nothing defines California's heritage as significantly or emotionally as do the 21 missions that were founded along the coast from San Diego to Sonoma. Their beauty, stature, and character underlie the formation of California. All 21 missions are California Historical Landmarks; many have also been designated National Historic Landmarks. The missions are among the most popular tourist destinations in the state, attracting millions of visitors each year.

Founded in 1998, the California Missions Foundation was established with the objective of preserving and protecting the missions. The Foundation is the only statewide organization dedicated to the long-term preservation and restoration needs of all California missions and their associated historic and cultural resources for public benefit.

Visit us online at [www.californiamissionsfoundation.org](http://www.californiamissionsfoundation.org).

