



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



## California Missions Foundation

July 2011

### Latest News from California Missions Foundation

Dear Friends,

Visit any one of California's 21 missions, and you'll be struck by a palpable sense of history -- in the buildings, in the grounds, in the traditions, and in the artworks, documents, and furnishings preserved therein. But the full historical wealth of the missions is not visible to the naked eye. Much of the history at these sites lies underground, buried for decades or even centuries and waiting to be rediscovered.

That's where the science of archeology comes in. The missions are of great interest to archeologists, providing them with a chance to study the economy, ecology, art, technology, and daily lives of those who inhabited these sites in the past.



*Crew working on the Mission Soledad North Wing*

One mission that has recently been the subject of archeological research is [Mission Nuestra Señora de la Soledad](#). Located in Soledad, CA ([MAP](#)), the mission was founded in 1791, but may harbor secrets about an even earlier habitation on the site.

For this newsletter, I've asked John Foster, the head of the archeology team from Greenwood and Associates that conducted the recent research at Mission Soledad, to give us an overview of the project -- its goals as well as its findings -- and to help

us understand the project as it relates to the state's other historic missions. [Read below](#) for John's very informative summary, complete with photos illustrating some of the more intriguing discoveries. I also asked Carlene Belle, President of the Board of Directors of Mission Soledad, to share [her reaction](#) to what was uncovered by Greenwood and Associates.

In future newsletters, we'll be discussing the archeological work under way at Mission San Rafael and at the Royal Presidio Chapel in Monterey.

Finally, on a related note, I just ran across an interesting article about the Carrillo Adobe in Sonoma County. One local archeologist believes that the Carrillo Adobe site was originally intended as the site of the 22nd -- and northernmost -- California mission. I'll let you [check out the article](#) for yourself and draw your own conclusions.

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

## Just Below the Surface: Investigations at Mission Soledad, 2011

by John M. Foster, RPA

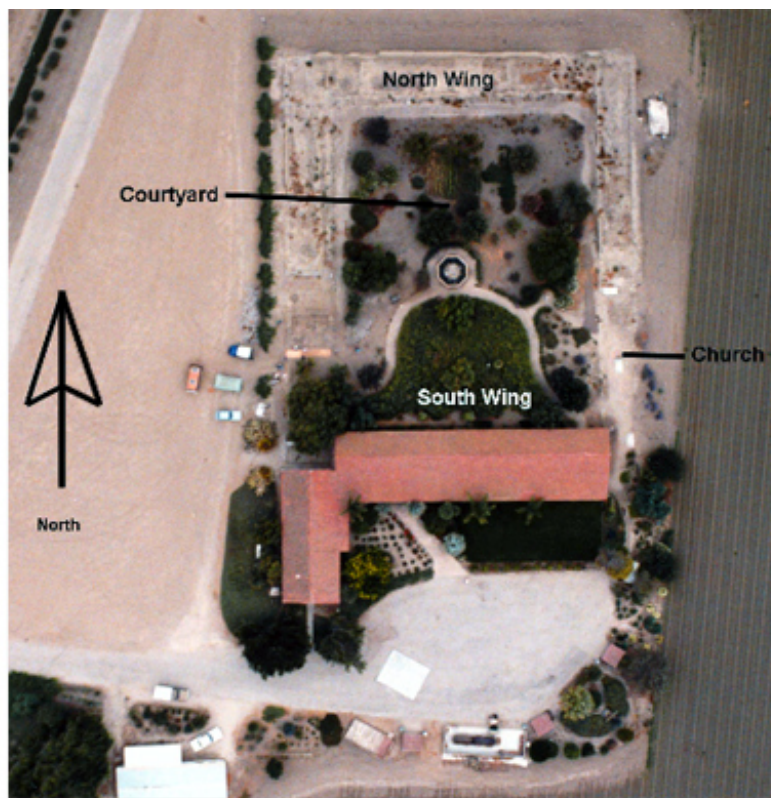
The construction of the California missions followed a generalized template in their organization of space, certain types of structures and facilities, and materials and methods of construction -- to name just a few of the similarities. However, adaptation to local conditions and environments often called for variations in design, differences in construction methods and materials, and changes in size and placement of mission buildings and features. Archaeological investigations provide the means to detect both major and minor changes in design, usage, materials and methods, and to fill in all the details lacking in written history. An earlier colleague once remarked that "every adobe was the same," but in our experience they are all different. It is the degree and direction of their distinctions that is important, as well as "why" they are different. This is the path that archaeologists follow when they work on remnants of the past.



*Archeologist John Foster*

It is a given that almost any archaeological excavation at one of the California Missions will provide new information, but recent work at Mission Soledad by Greenwood and Associates has opened so many new opportunities for study that it's difficult to know where to begin. The investigation was designed to establish baseline data on the courtyard and the north wing of the quadrangle, which will be used in preparing the master plan for eventual restoration of the mission.

While it was our objective to address questions about the depth of floors, the original surface of the quadrangle, and the size of foundations, what we found was that Mission Soledad was far more complex than previously documented.

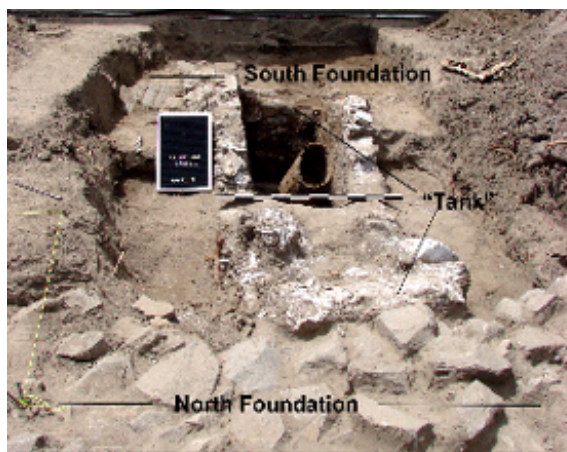


*Aerial photo of the Mission Soledad site*

One of the more enigmatic features was a "tank" in the north side of the south wing (Figure 1), lined with Roman cement. (Roman



cement -- never actually employed by the Romans -- is created by burning clay minerals and calcium carbonate, grinding the burnt material to a powder, and mixing it into a mortar with sand.) The tank measured 3.0 m long by 0.9 m wide by 0. m deep, and extended from the north foundation to a smaller foundation to the south.



**Figure 1: the "Tank"**

Although the structure was seemingly meant to hold water, its function is unknown and is currently under analysis.

Another question raised was the differential width and depth of the foundations of the south wing. (The north foundation is 1.0 m wide and 60 cm deep, vs. 0.6 m wide and 20 cm deep for the south foundation.) The unequal width and depth of the foundations lead to the hypothesis that the south wing contained an interior hallway separating the structure on the north and south sides.

It was also found that there were two foundations on the west side of the church separated by a gap of 40 cm. The larger outer foundation was 1.9 m

wide, and the interior foundation was 0.9 m wide. Both foundations were 1.5 m deep.

One question, currently unresolved, is whether the mission was built on the location of a Native American settlement dating back to the prehistoric period. The investigation of the north wing found compacted floors at approximately 30 to 40 cm in all rooms. Remnants of a hearth (Figure 2) containing burned seeds, charcoal, and other materials were found in the easternmost room between 40 and 50 cm. This hearth may predate the Mission occupation. It was also found that Native American artifacts, mostly lithics (stone tools), increased at 50 cm and then declined in numbers to 150 cm, suggesting an earlier -- possibly prehistoric -- occupation. The plant material will provide a unique opportunity to study changes in subsistence, plant utilization, and botanical succession.



**Figure 2: Hearth**



**Figure 3: Tile surface at 0.25 m.**

Other features included a courtyard surface of roof tiles, fragments of a steatite (soapstone) slab used for cooking, foundations whose bases tapered to a V, foundations with ledges on the interior, a adobe brick surfaces on the exterior of the west foundation of the church, and trenches filled with adobe brick fragments. The last feature, found on the last day, was a carefully made surface of small roof tile fragments (Figure 3). This was on the north side of the south wing with dozens of Mission Period ceramics and large fragments of mammal bone. This assemblage differs greatly from the rest of the site by virtue of the large size of the bone elements and the unusual assortment of ceramics. It is known that the deposit is just outside the quarters of the padres and may be associated with their day-to-day living. It is intriguing and may lead to more significant finds just below the surface.

# Knowing the Past Will Shape the Future at Mission Soledad

by Carlene Bell, President of the Board of Mission Soledad

Saving the remaining original adobe walls on the north side of the quadrangle was recently identified by members of the Soledad Mission Board as their number one priority. In order to pursue this path, the County of Monterey requires an in-depth historical report to be researched, written, and documented with photographs. Archeological excavations are required if the proposed project has the potential to cause physical damage to the site. For this reason, a full-scale archeological dig was initiated.

A great deal of excitement prevailed as, day by day, observers witnessed the uncovering of artifacts, foundations, and other remnants which, when peeled back layer by layer, provide a unique view of the Mission's earliest beginnings.

As funds permit, it is the Board's intention to expand and leave in place portions of this archeological interpretation, allowing future Mission visitors to experience "what was" as it is unveiled and delight in "living history."



*Mission Nuestra Señora de la Soledad*

---

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

Call our office at (831) 622-7500, 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).

