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MISIÓN SAN FRANCISCO SOLANO
(SONOMA MISSION)

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by

Chester Lyle Guthrie

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One thing forever holds men enchanted - the romance and promise of an unknown frontier. Peace, safety, comfort, loved ones, all are exchanged for the danger and hardships, yes, even the disappointments of that magic thing called the frontier. Men love to be on the edge of things. The ragged soldier of fortune takes his impetuous way to the primitive forces at the cutting edge of civilization; the grave, idealistic missionary, with his prayers and burning zeal, works among the lost heathen; the staid business man puts aside his efficiency and well-ordered routine for contact with markets as yet untapped. Each has his ostensible reason - fame, Christianity, or fortune. Still, underneath the logic, lies his fundamental urge to do and dare and create in the unknown.

Much has been written about the peace and calm of the Spanish missions. Peace was there, to be sure, but it was a strange, militant peace which strove mightily and courageously to still the unbridled passions of the savage. This was so, at least in San Francisco Solano, where, throughout its short active existence, the pagan Indian prowled before

its very gates. Reliance on the precarious power of dignity and reverence kept the padres alert and active in their Christianizing and civilizing labors. It was as though they were constantly in a storm at sea, and only faith, charity, and good works could reduce the threatening swells into smooth if ominous pulsations. The primeval fights with its last spark of vitality against force and violence, but it stands baffled and disarmed before a quiet, unruffled advance, and finally, not knowing why or where to strike, ends by being tamed and conquered.

Such must have been the feeling of the young friar, José Altimira, when he was stationed at Misión San Francisco de Asís where now stands the city of San Francisco. As he looked around him he realized that the edge of the frontier had receded to the north. Little opportunity remained for making conversions among the pagans. Even the spot itself seemed to the young padre to be unattractive and unhealthy, and the mission moribund. True, there was a branch beyond the northern side of the Golden Gate at San Rafael, but it too appeared to Fray José Altimira to have passed its period of usefulness. Beyond, to the north and west, existed virgin territory. There the heathen, lost and untamed, passed his dark and Godless life without missionary light and guidance. There broad valleys and clear streams gave promise of fast growing herds and generously yielding acres. Young Fray José Altimira

made a firm resolve to open the new field.

Another consideration entered into the founding of San Francisco Solano, and this proved to be one of the most powerful aids to the designs of Fray José. From the cold wastes of the north, the intrepid Russian hunters and traders had forced their way ever southward until finally they had established themselves at Fort Ross, uncomfortably close to the California settlements. A check to these encroachments was needed. A new mission would help to solve the problem.

To be sure, there were many obstacles for the young friar to overcome. In the first place, he was not supposed to make any such move until he had obtained the permission of his religious superiors. Also, there was the necessity of obtaining secular aid and soldiers for the project. Finally, the padres in charge of San Francisco de Asís and of San Rafael were naturally hostile to any new project which would draw supplies and converts from their own fields of labor. Did they not hold in sacred trust the welfare of the bodies and souls of their devoted bands of neophytes? The difficulties were almost insurmountable.

Young Fray José Altimira breathed the spirit of the true pioneer. He had seen his vision and was consumed by his ideal. A mission he would have, come what may. The first step was to obtain the consent of his superiors in the

Franciscan Order. This was unusually difficult, for the revolutionary era had set in for Hispanic America, and Mexico had obtained her independence. There was some doubt as to how the new régime would treat the missions. Fearful rumors were abroad that the missions were doomed to be abandoned and sold for the benefit of the state. Notwithstanding this, Padre Altimira approached his elderly prefect, Fray Payéras. He obtained what he deemed sufficient encouragement, although there was some question as to whether the aging friar had any real jurisdiction over the case.[1]

Next, early in 1823, Fray José approached Governor Argüello. The enthusiastic young priest completely won over the support of the governor. He was told to draw up a petition and present it to the provincial legislature, then called the Diputacion. On April 9, Fray José Altimira obtained the consent of the legislature not only to establish a new mission, but to absorb the Misión San Francisco de Asís and its branch, San Rafael. Copies of the decree were promptly forwarded to Mexico City and also to the new prefect, Señan - for old Fray Payéras had just died.[2]

Since no order was forthcoming from the prefect,

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1. C. A. Engelhardt, The missions and missionaries of California, III, 175.
2. H. H. Bancroft, History of California, II, 497.

Padre Altimira concluded that there were no objections, and organized his exploring expedition. This included the young friar, the deputy Don Francisco Castro, and Ensign José Sanchez, with nineteen soldiers.[3] The group set out for the little known northern country. For Fray José Altimira, it was indeed an adventure. At last his dreams were coming true, and his mission would soon be a reality.

By the evening of July 25, the little party had arrived at San Rafael. It was probably a very cool and a very polite reception which they received. Only a short time previously Fray Amoros, who was stationed at San Rafael, had sent an indignant protest to the prefect against Fray Altimira's project. In any case, by five-thirty o'clock the next morning breakfast was over, preparations were completed, and Fray Altimira and his companions had started for the northern country. About four hours later they arrived in the neighborhood of Olompali. There the heat of the summer sun and the normal pangs of hunger from their exertions bade them halt. Luncheon was soon disposed of, and the midday hours passed in peaceful repose, while young Fray Altimira musingly contemplated the hills and valleys of the country he had come to occupy.

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3. Engelhardt, Missions, III, 178.

When the early afternoon had passed by, Fray Altimira called his party from their dozing, and once more pushed towards the north. Soon they rounded the Petaluma Creek and continued until they came to a little brook called the Lema. There Fray José had his first real contact with the primitive elements of his new domain. First they encountered and killed one of the very dangerous bears of the region. Then they met with eight or ten Petaluma Indians who were hiding from the fury of their enemies, the Libantiloyami.

There is little doubt that the young friar made the Indians welcome, for it was such as these whom he had come to the wilderness to protect, care for, and Christianize. On the banks of the Lema, Fray Altimira, his party, and the Indians spent the night. The next morning they broke camp and made their way northeast, carefully, examining the valleys and hills as they went. It doubtless seemed like a good land to the party. There was grass for forage, timber for firewood, and plenty of water. Two small lakes were sighted, evidence of abundance of water in the region. The first lagoon was a small tule-covered one, less than fifty yards wide and a hundred yards long. The other was a somewhat larger one, called Tolay after an Indian chief who had once made his home on its shores. It was more than one-half mile long and about two hundred yards wide.[4]

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4. Bancroft, History of California, II, 497-498.

By ten o'clock in the morning, they entered the valley of Sonoma. There Fray Altimira felt that he had reached the end of his journey. Camp was pitched on a stream near the main creek which flowed into San Francisco Bay. About three in the afternoon, after another pleasant siesta, the men began a detailed examination of the country around them. It was all Fray Altimira had hoped. The climate was warmer than at San Francisco de Asís. The soil was excellent, and everywhere there was an abundance of vegetation, giving promise of a prosperous agricultural enterprise. To the north and south the fertile plain sloped away to hills which sheltered the valley from the winds. Nearby was a growth of small trees sufficient for firewood, and on the surrounding hills was an abundance of pine and redwood for building purposes. In the foothills were many varieties of stone suitable for use in constructing the new mission. Two large streams with a year-long supply of water emptied into Sonoma Creek. This was especially important to the padres, who believed that vineyards and orchards could not be grown successfully without irrigation. In the streams was found an abundance of fish, especially salmon. These would prove to be a very valuable and highly acceptable addition to the diet. Finally, the concern over problems of transportation was dissipated when a launch, sent to support the expedition,

successfully ascended Sonoma Creek to a point appropriate for a mission site.[5]

Although Padre Altimira felt satisfied with the location, it seemed prudent to him that the country beyond be explored in order to make sure that there was no better place for his mission. Consequently, next morning, June 28, the camping equipment was once more packed and the party started for the northeast. They followed the ridge of the hills in order to have a better view of the country. The panorama which unfolded before their eyes gave great promise for the future. Lands were seen which appeared excellent for pasturing cattle, sheep, and horses; beautiful streams promised an unfailing supply of water. To the dreamy eyes of Padre Altimira, already on the hills and valleys roamed his numerous flocks and herds, while in the little valley of Sonoma grain waved in the fields, grapes purpled on the vines, and a thousand Indian converts knelt in the mass, saying their Christian prayers.

Many more wonders unfolded themselves before the enchanted gaze of the padre. A warm spring was found which was bordered by a fine white soil. Fray Altimira decided the

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5. A. M. Cleaveland, The north bay shore during the Spanish and Mexican régimes, 68-70.

soil resembled a similar substance, found near Barcelona, Spain, and used for cleaning brass and copper. Farther along, upon ascending a small hill, the party sighted a large herd of elk. About six o'clock in the evening the little party arrived at Napa Creek, which Fray José recorded as being as large as Sonoma Creek. However, in other respects the valley did not compare favorably with that of Sonoma. The men camped for the night, and the next day being St. Peter's, mass was said at sunrise and the stream named San Pedro.[6]

By one o'clock in the afternoon, Fray Altimira had reached the Suisun valley. There the first conference with the Indians was arra nged. Five neophytes, who had been brought from San Francisco, were sent to invite the natives to Padre Altimira's camp. It was known that Indians were in the district in considerable numbers, for there was constant evidence that the party was being watched. The next morning, June 30, was spent waiting for the outcome of the summons. However, all was not uneventful waiting; during the time, ten bears were killed. Finally, about three o'clock in the afternoon, nineteen savages stalked into camp. There were five chiefs and fourteen braves. They sat down in a circle, according to

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6. J. Altimira, "Journal of a mission-founding expedition north of San Francisco, in 1823," Hutchings' illustrated California magazine, V, 59-62.

rank,and showed obvious mistrust of-the white men. This was soon dissipated, however, by some polite conversation. Food was served, and after the meal, presents were given the Indians. The gifts were pounds of dried beef, a quantity of fresh meat, cotton shirts, cloth, glass beads, and elk tallow. By eventide, Fray José Altimira felt that he had done the first part of his missionary labors well. The Indians were friendly and no doubt would soon become converts. It was with satisfaction that the padre took his much-earned rest that night with his own company and his new Indian friends.

Next day the camp was astir before sunrise. Breakfast was soon disposed of; the Indians were given a few more parting presents; and the trek began back towards Sonoma. Everywhere the country was carefully scanned for potentialities: stone, timber, grass lands, watering places - all were noted. By ten o'clock in the morning, two days later, on July 3, the party was back at their original camping place near Sonoma Creek. In a conference between Fray Altimira, Señor Don Francisco Castro, the government representative, and Alferez José Sanchez it was agreed that no place was better suited for the new experiment than the valley where they were. About three o'clock in the afternoon the camp was moved to the location on Sonoma Creek determined upon for the mission. During the rest of the afternoon exploration of the valley continued.

July 4, 1823, was a great day for young Fray José Altimira. It was a day of festival. By six o'clock in the morning the camp was awake - if, indeed, Fray Altimira had slept at all. A field altar was erected, and the Holy Cross, made of redwood, about twenty feet long and nine feet wide, was blessed by the padre. Then the ground, at the very spot where an Indian village had once been, was also blessed. There a hole for the cross was prepared. As the cross was raised, the soldiers were drawn up at attention and the order was given for a volley of musket fire. The padre with the neophytes sang Pangue lingua and Crux fidelis. Then mass was celebrated and the place was named New San Francisco. By eight o'clock in the morning the mission had been dedicated.

Padre Altimira and his company then returned to San Francisco de Asís and took leave of his companions.[7] Only the approbation of the prefect was wanting. Since nothing had been heard from Fray Señan, Altimira wrote to him again on the subject, explaining what had been done, on what authority, and why. He insisted once more that San Francisco de Asís had served its purpose and was fast failing, and that San Rafael

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7. Altimira, "Journal" Hutchings' illustrated California magazine, V, 115-118.

could not subsist alone, whatever might have been said in support of belief that it could. He hoped that Fray Señan would not delay in approving of so beneficial a measure, or listen to the unfounded objection of Padre Amorós. Furthermore, he threatened, respectfully but firmly, to leave the field and return to Spain if permission to carry out his plan were not forthcoming.[8] Indeed, Fray José Altimira could be eloquent in defense of the project so near to his heart. What boldness, persuasion, and action could do, that he assuredly would try.

During the next few months, Fray Altimira had need of all his powers of debate and activity. A storm of protest to his precipitate and not entirely authorized proceedings vexed and baffled him and threatened to defeat his plans. Señor Argüello, the governor, inquired at the end of July as to why Fray Altimira had not begun operations at the new site. The padre replied that he had not received any cooperation as yet from his colleagues. The governor sent orders to begin at once. Consequently, Fray Altimira, in company with a certain Lieutenant Martinez, crossed over to San Rafael, and took inventory of the property under the lowering gaze of Padre Amorós. On the twenty-third of August, Fray Altimira,

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8. Bancroft, California, II, 499-500.

with an escort of twelve soldiers, set out for Sonoma Valley. With him he took a small two-pound cannon and a force of neophyte laborers. Two days later, on the twenty-fifth, the company arrived at the spot dedicated for the new mission.

Work was begun at once. It was a huge undertaking to carve out of the wilderness a new home, a new spot for civilization. An irrigation ditch had to be dug, a corral erected, and many other structures of immediate use had to be built. For one week, under the enthusiastic guidance of the young friar, good progress was made.

Official troubles were brewing for Fray Altimira--even greater ones than he had yet encountered. His superiors, although so slow to act previously, now bestirred themselves. Prefect Señan, just before his death, wrote to his immediate subordinate, Fray Sarria, opposing the transfer of San Rafael. Fray Sarria at once wrote to Fray Altimira refusing to authorize the new project. On August 31, the new order fell like a thunderclap about the dismayed ears of Padre Altimira. Great was the impetuous young friar's indignation. He sat down immediately and wrote to the governor, bitterly denouncing the turn of affairs. He even went so far as to complain that his confederates were blind to the circumstances and had exerted themselves in the _oficio de Satana_ (in the interest of Satan)!' He concluded by saying:[9]

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9. Altimira to Argüello, August 31, 1823, in Bancroft, _California_, II, 501-502

> I wish to know whether the diputacion has any authority in this province or not, and if these men can over-throw your Excellency's wise provisions. I came here to convert heathen and to establish new missions, and if I cannot do it here, where as we all agree is the best spot in California for the purpose, I will leave the country.

For some time a heated correspondence took place between the various parties involved. The governor stood firm. He insisted that there was a matter of urgent public need in establishing the new mission. A compromise was finally arrived at whereby New San Francisco remained a mission in regular standing, and Padre Altimira was appointed its regular minister - subject to the approval of the Franciscan order. However, neither San Rafael nor San Francisco de Asís was suppressed, while Fray Altimira remained associate minister at the latter. Neophytes might go voluntarily to the new mission, if they had originally come from that region. Also, those from San Rafael might return within a year if they so desired. New converts might be made in any direction so long as force was not used.[10]

Even after the compromise, there were some things which vexed Fray Altimira. He insisted that the padres in the nearby missions were hindering their neophytes from going to

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10. Bancroft, California, II, 503-504.

New San Francisco. Also, false rumors were being circulated of an Indian attack - perhaps it would have been better if Fray Altimira had investigated this possibility. Also, the new mission had not received the aid and support customary. Then, too, a greater military force was deemed necessary in order to impress the natives with the power controlled by the new establishment. Finally, the neophytes were allowed too much liberty in choosing their place of residence, and consequently, would change their minds every day or two. Fray Altimira must have found it a little difficult to build his mission with Indian labor which could always transfer whenever a particularly laborious task became imminent. On the whole, however, progress had been satisfactory, and the establishment was rapidly taking on the aspect desired.

By spring, the first buildings had been completed. The granary, the fathers' house, and seven houses for families had been built of wood. On Passion Sunday, April 4, 1824, proud Padre Altimira was ready to open the mission church.[11] True, it was a crudely built and temporary affair, but it represented a dream - a zealous young priest's vision of religious development on the frontier. Everything had struggled against him. Even his confederates in his own order of friars had obstructed the new project. But the will

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11. Cleaveland, North bay shore. 79.

of Altimira would not be denied, and the rude church twenty-four by 105 feet, built of whitewashed boards, stood as a tangible monument to his ideal. The furniture and ornaments of the church were ample. Much had been donated by the Russians at Fort Ross - showing that that ominous power so feared by the governor at least wished to maintain good relations with the infant mission.

In the dedication, Sunday, April 4, the mission was named San Francisco Solano, after the great apostle to Peru. The old fiction that San Francisco de Asís was being moved to Sonoma Valley was dropped, as indeed it had been in fact some months before. As Padre José Altimira went through the dedication service, with his neophytes around him singing or praying as the moment called for, and the rough soldiers in the background, more or less uncomfortably doing their part, perhaps he thought of that former day when he viewed the untouched wilderness and dreamed of the scene now before him. Five hundred Indians in all were in Fray Altimira's care. Sixty-nine of these were settled in the mission.[12] As Fray Altimira took cognizance of his fairly large congregation again, surely he felt a glow of satisfaction over the most outstanding pieces of his furniture and decorations. Around the walls were three crosses with candles over them. In front stood a well-built altar, and above it a canvas painting of San

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12. Cleaveland, North bay shore, 80.

Francisco Solano presented by the father-president. Furthermore a relic of the patron saint, to be put on the altar, had been promised.[13]

Misión San Francisco Solano soon developed under the care of Fray Altimira. Ranchos were established as far away as Suisun. Upon these outposts the flocks and herds of San Francisco Solano grew. By the end of the year one large adobe structure, thirty by 120 feet, and seven feet high, with a corridor and a tiled roof, had been completed. Two other buildings had been made ready for roofing, but unfortunately the rains set in before the work was finished. The rainy season was especially hard that year; so the new construction melted down into amorphous piles of mud. A lawn had been set up; a garden fenced with willows contained from 150 to 300 fruit trees; a vineyard of more than 1,000 vines had been set out; 1,100 cattle, 400 horses, and several thousand sheep roamed the hills, watched by their Indian herdsmen. Even the neophytes increased to 693 by the end of 1824. By all indications, the new venture would be a prosperous one.

Although the beginning looked bright - like the roseate promise of a new dawn - the future held only disillusionment, decline, and failure. The first blow came in 1826. Hardly had the largest crop ever to be produced at

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13. Cleaveland, North bay shore, 81.

San Francisco Solano been secured, when the natives began showing signs of hostility. One of those periodic storms, when passions unbridled and unreasoning carry death and destruction in their wake, broke upon the newly formed mission. In but a few minutes it seemed to the anguished eyes of Fray Altimira that his labors and plans of more than three years were cast to the earth. The mission was in ruin. The unhappy padre barely escaped with his life, and retreated, a broken man,to Santa Barbara.[14] The memory of California always remained close to the heart of the good padre. Years later he was reported as living in the island of Teneriffe of the Canary group, still recalling the days spent at his beloved mission, and known by his parishioners as the "returned Californian."

All had not been entirely lost in the Indian uprising. Padre Buenaventura Fortuni went to San Francisco Solano after the tide of savage fury had receded. Temporary structures were erected in place of those which had been torn down. Once more the flocks and herds were collected. The neophytes returned, and crops were planted. It was a blow difficult to overcome, but even though the mission's creator was gone, his work remained and lived. More permanent buildings arose under Padre José de Jesus María Gutierrez, who

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14. J. P. Munro-Fraser, History of Sonoma County, 45.

replaced Fray Fortuni in 1830 and continued to minister to the needs of the mission until 1834, just before all the missions were secularized and liquidated under the Mexican government.[15]

Although the mission of San Francisco Solano did not prosper as greatly as had been hoped, nevertheless it did attain to some prominence. Late in 1839 the last baptism was recorded. This bore the number 1,494. Also, 875 burials were entered in the mission register. Converts were drawn from a number of tribes. The Aloquiomic, Atenomac, Canoma, Carquin, Canijolmano, Caymus, Chemoco, Chichoyomi, Chocuyem, Coyayomi, Huiluc, Huymen, Lacatiut, Loaquiomi, Linayto, Locnoma, Mayacma, Muticolmo, Malaca, Napato, Oleomi, Putah Creek, Polnomanoc, Pague, Petaluma, Suisun, Satayomi, Soneto, Tolen, Tlayacma, Tamal, Topayto, Ululato, Utinomanoc, and Zaclom, all were represented.[16] In material wealth, some advance was made. The largest number of cattle, 3,500, was reported in 1832. Five thousand head of sheep, goats, and pigs were recorded in 1829. Horses reached their maximum in 1831, with 725 head.[17] Although the numbers varied below those sums, there was never a very great difference. Outposts for

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15. Munro-Fraser, Sonoma, 45.
16. Bancroft, California, 506.
17. Engelhardt, Missions and missionaries, III, 637.

grazing were established as far away as Santa Rosa, Petaluma, and Suisun. It was a start giving great promise, but the whole system became outworn and secularization came.

Not Indian uprisings, not agricultural or missionary difficulties, but the Mexican government gave to San Francisco Solano its fatal blow. In theory, the missions were to last ten years, during which time the Indians were to be christianized, civilized, and prepared to take their place in society. It was a beautiful plan, dating in essence back to Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, when Queen Isabella decided that the Indians had souls to be saved. In practice, however, it was hardly possible to take a heathen savage out of the forest, and so rebuild and so direct his character and habits that he could go in one grand leap through more than a thousand years of cultural evolution. The project took time. Furthermore, there was very little done to make the Indian a self-reliant member of the community. The mission world was an unreal one when compared to the actual state of society. For a coldly competitive, complicated social system the neophytes on the whole remained unprepared. Future in the after life was stressed rather than the future in this one.

For some years there had been movements in the official circles for placing the missions under secular authority. The priests in the missions were to concern themselves

only with religious affairs. The economic organization was to be liquidated and the lands divided among settlers. Undoubtedly the Californian ranchers approved that last part of the program. Finally, in 1834, under Governor Figueroa, the long expected law was passed. The missions were to wind up their business, as institutions which had served their purpose. The dispute was loud and acrimonious. Both sides had a great deal of foundation for their contentions. However, the government stood firm and the missions had to go.

San Francisco Solano was assigned to curacy of the first class, which paid 1,500 pesos a year (a peso was then worth approximately one dollar). Señor Don Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo was appointed to the curacy as the first administrator. Antonio Ortega was named major-domo, and between the two of them, the new law was put into effect. All of the movable property was given to the neophytes, many of whom took advantage of their new freedom to return to their own people. It was not long, however, before the neophytes discovered something had changed. Their tribes did not receive them open-armed. Coolness, friction, and even open hostility made their lives unbearable. Consequently, one by one they straggled back to their old home, the mission. They placed what remained of their property under the control of General Vallejo. Señor Vallejo then undertook, like the padres before him, to protect and care for the returning

neophytes. In fact, General Vallejo even proposed the founding of a new mission to the north, but the friars were suspicious, resentful, and refused to coöperate with him.[18]

As could be expected, the clash between the old and the new, between the pious padres and the rough soldiers, was very great. Padre Guijas, who replaced Padre Gutierrez just before secularization, complained very bitterly about the new order. In a letter to his superior he wrote that his position was almost unbearable. The assistants of General Vallejo -- some of them not even officials - constantly treated him with insolence, and even refused to let the Indians carry out any of his orders. The launch was withheld as much as possible from the good padre's use, he claimed. Horses and other livestock were refused, and even food grudgingly provided. Also, he pointed out that Major-domo Antonio Ortega, he had been informed, had ravished many of the Indian women.[19]

Padre José Lorenzo Guijas was an interesting character. He was large, and of great strength, resolute and fearless. He was a very good speaker and did not hesitate to denounce from the pulpit whatever seemed to him immoral, whether the offender was an aristocrat or a beggar. Often he was in collision with the Mexican authorities over points

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18. Bancroft, California, III, 719-721.
19. Guijas to García Diego, August 2, 1835, in G. Tays Revolutionary California, 431-434.

in which the bold friar took an interest. In all he was very human. As a youth he had earned his living as a muleteer, carrying freight from Mexico City to Santa Fe. At Santa Fe the warm hearted Guijas fell in love with a beautiful young señorita. The girl proved untrueand jilted her amorous muleteer. Guijas, in despair became a friar. However, it was always a struggle for him to forget his old life. When young, insolent officials insulted him, Padre Guijas had to exercise all his store of Christian humility to keep from breaking the tormenters in two.[20]

Many attempts were made to settle the land left vacant by the mission. One of the most outstanding of these was an enterprise organized in Mexico known as the Cosmopolitan Compamy, or more commonly as the Hijar colony. In June, 1834, the group left Mexico under a certain Señor Hijar and Señor Padrés. Much misinformation has been circulated about conditions in California. Soldiers, friars, closely guarded convicts, and submissive Indians were thought to form the whole population. Consequently, when the party under Señor Padrés, a group of more than one hundred, landed at Monterey, they were amazed to learn that a ball had been arranged by the local aristocracy in their honor. In fact, the ladies of

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20. Bancroft, California pastoral, 218-220.

the Padrés party insisted upon returning to ships in order to obtain more suitable dress than that which they had worn upon landing in the supposedly barbarous country. The colony was moved on to San Francisco Solano, where they stopped a short time in the mission. They soon pushed on a little north where they established a town called Santa Anna y Farias after the president and vic-president of Mexico. In the end, the colony was a failure, and the group scattered.[21]

When the Hijar colony failed, Vallejo, in 1835, established a pueblo at San Francisco Solano, which he named Sonoma. The town was laid out with a pocket compass. Town lots were assigned, and what had once been a mission community became a secular town. Fray Altimira had chosen the site well, and General Vallejo saw no reason to change it.

Difficulties at the mission by no means abated. Padre Guijas soon decided to withdraw to San Rafael and administer San Francisco Solano merely as a mission station. Also, to the horror of Fray Guijas, Major-domo Ortega was made administrator. General Vallejo still was in control, but Ortega had more and more authority.[22] After Padre Guijas withdrew, the mission rapidly fell into disuse. In 1844 and

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21. Bancroft, California, III, 255-257; also see Munro-Fraser, Sonoma, 45-46.
22. Engelhardt, Missions and missionaries, III, 591.

1845 there was no priest in attendance at all. By the fifties there was once more a minister there, but ruin had set in. It seemed as if no hand would be raised to keep the old building from disappearing altogether. In describing it in 1853, the San Francisco Alta California said that:[23]

> The walls of the old mission are still standing, but sadly in a dilapidated condition. The title is in dispute: the communicants of the church have dwindled away....The splendid bells now lay [sic] dismantled, and the only sounds heard in the building are when a lot of goats scamper over the tiled roof, or when some jovial fellows meet to laugh and joke at Leyden's, and old type of 'Frisco, who is here for his health, and has established a periodical depot in part of the Mission buildings. The main portion of the church has long been uncovered, and the old walls are slowly crumbling away.

Around about, the other adobe buildings were also going to ruin and even the wild oats which had been used in the bricks had begun to sprout.

Not long did the title to the property remain in doubt. On February 19, 1853, Archbishop Joseph Sadoc Alemany filed claim on behalf of the church. It was confirmed by the land commission on December 18, 1855, and settled by the courts on March 16, 1857. The mission was recognized as

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23. Alta California, July 22, 1853.

owning 14.20 acres of land - a considerable reduction since the time when Padre Altimira rode over the hills, laying claim to all he saw.[24]

As the sixties wore on, a brief revival came over the mission. The church was supplied with seats, cushions, carpets, gas lights, and most of the modern improvements in ecclesiastical decoration. Music was provided by a well trained choir and a small orchestra. The rest of the buildings continued to fall into ruin. At last, after the building had for many years served the rapidly growing community as a church, it was decided to abandon the old mission for a newer and better location. In 1881, San Francisco Solano was sold to one of the nearby ranchers for $3,000, and it was with this money that the new church was built. For the next twenty-five years the historic mission was used as a barn. The old church was used for storing hay and the adjoining long, low structure was used as a winery. In front was a prosaic wooden fence cutting it off from the road.[25] San Francisco Solano had reached the ultimate in secularization.

It was not long before the old mission, so long neglected, once more received the attention of society. In 1903

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24. Munro-Fraser, Sonoma, 158-159.
25. C. J. Carter, The missions of Nueva California, 180-182.

the Landmark League of California purchased it, and two years later deeded it over to the State of California, so that the historic old structure would be preserved. Restoration proved to be a difficult and expensive task.

Misfortune still hovered over the buildings, for but a few years after the state received the mission a season of heavy rains undermined it partly and washed out one corner: "disembowelling it, as it were, like a picador's horse after a bull-fight."[26] However, $5,000 was appropriated by the state legislature in 1911 and an additional $2,000 in 1913 in order to rebuild the mission. By the centenary year of 1923, the original chapel and padres' house had been well restored. San Francisco Solano was once more worthy of its name - even if preserved as but a respected memory.

No longer do the heathen savages roam the hills around Misión San Francisco Solano. The bells no longer call the numerous neophytes to prayer. Nor do the cattle in the hills or the corn in the fields belong to the mission. The old buildings are kept only as a cherished memory of days gone by. After the years of struggle, of disappointment, despair, and neglect the mission has at last found - peace.

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26. E. Peixotto, Romantic California, 96.

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