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SITES of MISSION SANTA CLARA de ASIS

Santa Clara County

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by

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SITE of MISSION SANTA CLARA de ASÍS

The romantic background of the University of Santa Clara is sometimes lost sight of in the present standing of that institution as one of the leading centers of education in the United States today. Santa Clara University is the direct outgrowth of Mission Santa Clara established by the Spanish Franciscan padres on January 12, 1777. This was one of the first missions founded in the northern part of the state. Because of the great fertility of the soil, the equable climate, the proximity of the San Francisco Bay and the ability of the padres stationed here, it became one of the richest of all the missions and the finest in this region.

The Spaniards who selected sites for the missions were expert in their choice of locations; they had an immense territory to chose from, it is true, but they unerringly found the best part of each section as site for their church. Santa Clara is a fine example of their wisdom. The productivity of this valley is famous today, and it was immediately noticed by the first explorers. Father Crespí, in his diary, states the land is "all black, mellow soil, well covered with several sorts of herbs and grass

with many oaks and live oaks."[1] Lieutenant Fages, who with Rivera and Anza were the first to open the way into the valley, writes in his diary that this was "a good country covered with oaks, redwoods and other trees."[2] Many flowing rivulets and springs assured the early settlers an abundant water supply.

There were two primary reasons for establishing the California Missions: the necessity of the government of Spain to insure its claim on the country and the desire of the Church to further the Christian religion. On the whole the combination worked well; the missions provided the food, and the soldiers of the government gave protection to them. Of great importance to Spain was the discovery of more harbors. The rich galleon from Manila, laden with treasure, passed by this coast each year; fortified harbors would help Spain to protect this prize from pirates, or from a hostile country.

Portolá reported his discovery of San Francisco Bay and the viceroy immediately ordered the establishment of a presidio and two missions in the vicinity. In 1776

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1. H. E. Bolton, ed. Fray Juan Crespí, missionary explorer of the Pacific Coast, 285.
2. C. A. Engelhardt, "Fages' diary of 1770," Missions and missionaries of California, II, part 1, 210-218.

Anza surveyed the sites for the two northern missions and the presidio. The sites were approved by Father Palóu who accompanied the expedition. San Francisco Mission and presidio were built, but several unfortunate events hindered the foundation of Santa Clara. There was discord between the Father President of the missions, Junipero Serra, and the military commander. There was a lack of Spaniards, both military and religious to start the mission. For several years before the founding of Santa Clara food was scarce and the Mission of Monterey had to assist San Diego and San Gabriel. It was hoped that the new mission in its fertile location would relieve this strain on Monterey. In 1776 Anza brought two hundred and fifteen people who settled in California; twenty-eight of these were soldiers; he also brought eight hundred and twenty-five head of livestock. Fathers Tomás de la Peña and José Murguía had arrived to take their post as spiritual leaders for the Mission of Santa Clara.

There was no longer reason to delay, and Rivera, the military commander, had received a letter from the viceroy, Bucareli, referring to the Santa Clara Mission in terms that showed he believed the mission to have been established. This forced Rivera into prompt action. Father Peña was left in San Francisco to proceed later to the site fixed by Anza while Father Murguía was to bring up the supplies necessary for the

new mission from Monterey. Lieutenant José Moraga of the San Francisco Presidio was ordered by Rivera to assist Father Peña with the founding. They left San Francisco on the sixth of January 1777, to find the location decided upon by Anza and approved by Father Palóu. They were protected by a company of soldiers and one of the colonists that had come with Anza..

They halted on the bank of the Guadalupe River and "having found three leagues from the beach of the bay an arroyo which ran with a good stream of water along the surface of the land from which plenty of ground could be irrigated without any trouble," they selected the site for the settlement near it and near the river, and planted the standard of the holy cross.[3] This ceremony was the first act performed at the beginning of each new mission; an arbor was built to protect the cross, bells were rung and mass was said. This took place at Santa Clara on the twelfth of January 1777, with Father Peña officiating. The formal ceremony of founding[4] took place on the eighteenth of January 1777. The mission was dedicated to Saint Clara, the patroness of the Franciscan

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3. Bolton, ed. Historical memoirs of New California, by Fray Palóu, IV, 160.
4. Frederic Hall, History of San Jose, 418, from Palóu's Life of Junípero Serra, published in Mexico, 1787.

Order. The "Lady Clara" was the founder of the religious order named for her. Like St. Francis for whom the Franciscan order was named and who was their patron saint, Saint Clara was born in Assisi, Italy. Followers of her order strictly kept the vows of poverty and were lovingly known as the "Poor Claras."

The region of the Santa Clara Valley north of the Santa Theresa hills was known as "Thamien" and the lands of the mission were in this locality. It was called "Tares" by the natives. "Tares" was the native word for man. A newspaper scrap says the exact site was called "Socoisuka" from the abundance of laurels;[5] this was also the name of the northernmost tribe near Santa Clara. This original site is now a part of Laurelwood farm about two miles north of San Jose. It is near the present town of Agnew. A cross marks the probable place of the church; this is near the Bayshore highway where it crosses the Guadalupe River.

At the time of the founding of Santa Clara the surrounding country abounded in game; deer and elk were plentiful and many varieties of wild fowl. The streams and bay provided fish and shellfish - the latter being

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5. Bancroft, History of California, I, 305.

one of the chief articles of the native diet. The padres felt that Santa Clara Valley would be "hardly inferior to the country of San Gabriel, but it was feared and with reason as it proved, that the mission site might be liable to occasional inundations."[6]

The work of building was begun as soon as the first mass was said. A square of seventy yards was cleared and the first buildings started. It was understood that these first buildings were only temporary. Father Murguía arrived from Monterey on the 21st of January and Moraga went back to San Francisco. Father Murguía brought with him the cattle promised by Rivera together with the mission supplies consisting of vestments, altar linens, paintings, statues, wax candles, banners, incense, chocolate, sugar, kitchen utensils, cloth, farm implements and seed for planting.

Near the new mission were four "rancherias" - small Indian encampments. At the beginning the Indians showed little interest in the labor of the fathers, but they were friendly and soon developed a taste for beef; this led them to steal cattle. Moraga had to be called back, some of the Indians were flogged and three killed.[7] This punishment however, did not

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6. Bancroft, History of California, I, 305.
7. Governor Neve in Report of September 19, 1777, Provincial Records, M.S. i, 19-20.

stop the thieving and throughout the missionary period of Santa Clara the padres were troubled with the theft of food and cattle. Stealing reached a climax when the Indian outlaw Yoscola, who had been a convert, a student and alcalde, but tired of good behavior and fled to the forest with a few companions. He took also horses, cattle and women. He twice repeated this raid as more horses, cattle and wives were needed for the raiders, but the third time the soldiers were too quick for them. They were pursued, captured and Yoscola promptly beheaded. In the memory of the Indians he became a popular and sinister figure, the open shame but secret pride of Santa Clara's less adventurous Indians.

It was the desire for beef that brought the first Indians, but they did not want to accept the white man's religion. It was not until May of that first year that there were any baptisms. A severe epidemic occurred at that time and Father Murguía and Father Peña baptized as many as possible, hoping in this way to save their souls. The natives in their distress were agreeable and their indifference to the Christian religion gradually disappeared. According to the ministers' report at the end of the year, there had been sixty-seven baptisms, including eight adults, and there had been twenty-five deaths. Thirteen Christians and ten catechumens, or Indians studying to become Christians, were living

at the mission, and the rest were at the rancherias with their parents.

By the end of the year several of the temporary buildings were completed. The seventy-yard square included the church, the mission house, the offices and shops, the barracks and jail, and the storehouse. The church was six by twenty varas; two of the dwellings six by twenty-two and five by thirty-one varas respectively, divided into the necessary apartments. All these buildings were of timber plastered with clay and roofed with earth. There were likewise two corrals and a bridge across the stream.[8]

It is fortunate that the padres intended these first buildings to be only temporary for their fear of inundation was soon realized. "The winter of 1778-1779 was an exceedingly wet one. The water stood nearly three feet deep in the houses of Santa Clara Mission."[9] On March 30, 1779, Father Junípero Serra writes:[10]

> The Guadalupe River which they [the fathers] idolized (so to speak) has overflown and it was necessary to flee. Fr. Peña with the youths and movables which it was possible to save withdrew to a place a quarter of a league

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8. Bancroft, History of California, I, 306.
9. Hall, History of San Jose, 46.
10. Engelhardt, Missions and missionaries, II, 387.

> distant which they called El Robler. Fr. Murguía amidst the mire, not being able to move the provisions, maintains himself in a little place which he found less disagreeable ... Poor Fr. Peña has erected his huts there. What is worse, though convinced and acknowledging that it is necessary to move the mission, they know not whither.

It was decided to erect the new buildings about a quarter of a mile west of the old site on higher ground. This second church building was just south of what is now the Southern Pacific depot at Santa Clara. The place is marked by a cross. The cornerstone for this adobe church and mission buildings was laid November 19, 1781; these buildings were intended to be permanent. Fathers Junípero Serra, Crespí, Palóu and Murguía were present at this ceremony and Alferez Lasso de la Vega from San Francisco acted as secular godfather.

Father Murguía was the architect for this structure which was the most imposing church building in California at that period.[11] Not only did he design the mission, but he also worked on it as a laborer. The fathers Peña and Murguía invited Father Serra to be present at the dedication of their new church, the date of which had been set

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11. Engelhardt, Missions and missionaries, II, 399-400.

for May the sixteenth, 1784. Father Serra stopped a few days at Santa Clara on his way to San Francisco and intended to dedicate the new edifice on his way back to Carmel. Father Murguía died on May 11th, before he could witness the dedication of the structure he had reared. He was buried on May 12th in the presbytery of the new church. Father Palóu, hearing of Father Murguía's illness, arrived from San Francisco before Father Murguía passed but Father Serra did not reach Santa Clara until May 15th. With Father Serra were Commander Fages and Moraga, the former acted as padrino, or secular godfather. In the afternoon of the same day he blessed the church, and on the following day, the fifth Sunday after Easter, he sang High Mass and preached to the multitude. Father Serra stayed on for some days at the mission to make a retreat and prepare for death before going on to Monterey. This was to be the venerable father's last journey. Father Palóu in his Life of Junípero Serra says: "He made the spiritual exercises ... and a general confession." Upon Father Serra's return to Monterey he sent Father Nóboa to take the place of Father Murguía at Santa Clara.

At this time, 1790, Santa Clara was considered superior agriculturally to any other mission except San Gabriel. There were huge herds of cattle. Two years later Vancouver tells us that twenty-four oxen were killed each week for beef. Santa Clara was third in the number of converts. Baptisms had been 1,279, many more than elsewhere, but deaths had been 639, a

proportionally large figure; yet with an increase from 338 to 927.[12]

The year 1792 is of great historical interest for this mission, as it was in this year that the English explorer and writer, George Vancouver, made a visit to Santa Clara and gives us our best picture of the mission in his book Voyage to the North Pacific Ocean. There was another flood in this year and the friars resolved to move the mission buildings some five hundred yards to higher ground. There is no further direct record of the removal, and it is not likely that the new church was ever moved, but a report of 1797 that the ministers' house, guardroom, storehouse, and soldiers' dwellings had been completed indicates a transfer of such buildings as were on the lowest ground.[13] Vancouver also refutes any possibility of the removal of the buildings in this year. On November 21 he spent the day at Santa Clara and writes:

> The particular spot which had been selected by the reverend fathers, for their establishment, did not appear so suitable to their purpose as many other parts of the plain within a little distance of their present buildings, which were erected in a low marshy situation for the sake of being

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12. Bancroft, History of California, I, 477.
13. Ibid., 724.

> near a run of fine water; notwithstanding that within a few hundred yards they might have built their houses on dry and comfortable eminences.

Vancouver gives an excellent description of the country he passed through from San Francisco to Santa Clara describing the huge oaks and luxuriant herbage. The hospitality of Fathers Peña and Sanchez at Santa Clara receives his praise, then begins his description of the mission - the most complete description of Santa Clara in this early period:[14]

> The buildings and offices of this mission, like those of San Francisco form a square, but not an entire enclosure. It is situated in an extensive fertile plain, the soil of which, as also that of the surrounding country, is a rich black productive mould, superior to any I have before seen in America ...
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> The church was long and lofty, and as well built as the rude materials of which it is composed would allow; and when compared with the unimproved state of the country, was infinitely more decorated than might have been reasonably expected.
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> Apartments within the square in which the priests resided, were appropriated to a number of young female Indians. Their occupations were the same, though some of their woolen manufactures surpassed those we had before

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14. George Vancouver, Voyage to the North Pacific, III, 30-34.

seen ... The upper story of their interior oblong square, which might be about one hundred and seventy feet long, and one hundred feet broad, were made use of as granaries, as were some of the lower rooms; all of which were well stored with corn and pulse of different sorts; and besides these, in case of fire, there were two spacious warehouses for the reception of grain detached from each other, and the rest of the buildings, erected at a convenient distance from the mission. These had been recently finished, contained some stores, and were to be kept constantly full, as a reserve in the event of such a misfortune.

They cultivate wheat, maize, peas and beans; the latter are produced in great variety, and the whole in greater abundance than their necessities require. Of these several sort they have many thousand bushels in store, of very excellent quality ... The wheat affords in general from twenty-five to thirty for one, according to the seasons, twenty-five for one being the least return they have ever deposited in their granaries from the field. The product of the other grains and pulse bears a similar proportion to that of wheat ... Neither barley nor oats were cultivated ... as the superior kinds of grain could be plentifully obtained with the same labors.

Here were planted peaches, apricots, apples, pears, figs and vines, all of which, except the latter promised to succeed very well. The failure of the vine here is ascribed to a want of knowledge in their culture, the soil and climate being well adapted to most sort of fruits. The priests had a guard of a corporal and six soldiers.

Vancouver deplores the general condition of the Indians and extolls the labor of the padres. The most intelligent, tractable and industrious were selected at this time and directed by the fathers, building "a range of small, but comparatively speaking comfortable and convenient habitations." These buildings faced the mission and consisted of two rooms below and garrets over them. Each house was to contain one family only. The Indians evidently enjoyed this new form of dwelling. Fourteen of these, thatched, were completed in 1793, nine more in 1794, and before 1798 nearly all the married neophytes were thus accommodated.[15]

Several changes were made in the mission buildings before the end of the century. We have noted the report of 1797 where the buildings that were on the lowest ground had been transferred and completed.[16] These consisted of the padres' houses which had eight rooms of five yards each; guardhouse, 8x5 yards; storehouse,5 yards square; soldiers' houses, each 5½ yards. There was also a corral 36 yards square with walls 6 feet high built of stout timbers and adobe. The church had been lengthened twenty-five feet in 1795, and had a roof of tiles. This same year a trench was dug half a league long, nine feet wide, and five feet deep.[17]

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15. Bancroft, History of California, I, 725.
16. See page 11 of this monograph.
17. Bancroft, History of California, I, 725.

The padres in charge of these operations were two famous missionaries, the saintly Maguin de Catala and the active Father José Viader. For three decades these two priests were to be in charge of Santa Clara.

Authorities differ greatly on what happened to the second church, the origin of the confusion might be explained in part by the preceding paragraph; however both John S. Hittell and Franklin Tuthill, eminent chronologists of early California, state definitely that the mission church at Santa Clara was thrown down by an earthquake in 1818,[18] while H. H. Bancroft and other historians disagree. Bancroft tells us that the biennial mission report for 1817-1818 shows that a fine new church of adobes with a tule roof had been completed at that period, but thinks there is no authority for the statement of Tuthill and Hittell that the old church was destroyed by an earthquake.[19]

An article published by The Owl, the Santa Clara University magazine, in 1934 upholds the earthquake theory. This was written by Señorita Encarnación Pinedo, whose father built the first family residence outside of the mission buildings in 1844. Señorita Pinedo says:[20] "The second church was

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18. J. S. Hittell, Resources of California, 43; F. Tuthill, History of California, 116.
19. Bancroft, History of California, II, 377.
20. E. Pinedo, "Early days at Santa Clara," The Owl, Serra Number, 9. (Official Santa Clara University magazine).

built near the depot, but an earthquake destroyed it, causing the death of young Alvino Alviso, son of Don Ignacio Alviso. The young man was standing by the side of the church when the wall fell upon him." The Alviso family is well known in Santa Clara but I find no reference as to the death of this son.

Frederic Hall whose History of San Jose was published in 1871 gives the following version:[21]

> In 1812 an earthquake cracked the church considerably, but did not cause any portion of it to fall; but in the year 1822 the shock of an earthquake was so severe as to injure the church very materially, though it was not thrown down, as has been stated; the damage being so great, however, it was thought best to take it down, rather than attempt to repair it.

Bancroft treats with the confusion in this paragraph:[22]

> We have seen that a new mission church had to be contemplated in 1818. Hall, who knew nothing of that fact, tells that the old church was so badly damaged that it was thought best to take it down rather than attempt repairs; and a new church, the one still standing, was built in 1825-6. As Hall gives no exact date for the earthquake, and therefore apparently obtained his information from no

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21. Hall, History of San Jose, 423.
22. Bancroft, History of California, II, 601-602.

definite document; as he does not imply that a new church was taken down; as I find no contemporary record whatever of either destruction or rebuilding; and as visitors of the period would be very likely to notice such events, I suppose that nothing of the kind occurred. As a mere conjecture, however, it may be that after the church was completed, or nearly so, in 1818, it was damaged by an earthquake and not fully repaired until 1822.

It is unfortunate that the missionaries did not keep a record of events at the missions other than baptisms, marriages and deaths. We can rely only on the communications of the fathers to their superiors, or between one another, and the reports in the provincial records from the officials. Several diaries, such as Crespí's, Fages, Palóu's and others are of great assistance as are the reports of travelers. Mr. Bancroft has been thorough in his research and because he had more material at hand, writing at a later date than other of the early historians, it is perhaps wise to follow his assumptions in regards to this second church of the mission of Santa Clara.

A cross marks the spot of this second building. It is located at Franklin and Campbell streets in Santa Clara, some several hundred yards northeast of the site of the present church.

The third mission church was built on the same place where the present church stands within the grounds of

the University. Despite the arguments advanced to account for the building of this third church we do know that it was dedicated on August 11, 1822.[23] The church has been much altered since that time. The original work was done under the direction of Father José Viader. The foreman was Don Ignacio Alviso, for whom the town and estuary of Alviso is named. In front of the church was a well from which Indians drew water by means of a wheel upon which an endless chain revolved with leathern buckets emptying into troughs. The design of the third church followed closely that of the second, built by Father Murguía. Many of the movable parts of the second church were used and the tiles from the roof were the original. The grand high altar which had been obtained in Mexico and was consecrated on August 12, 1802, the day of the titular saint, was safely placed in the new church with the other sacred relics.

Father Maguin de Catala, who with Father Viader presided over Santa Clara until his death in 1830, is one of the most interesting characters in American Catholic missionary history. This is because he is relatively so close to us in time, and because he and Junípero Serra are the only men connected with the past of the American continents who have been

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23. Bancroft, History of California, II, 602.

suggested for beatification in the Roman Catholic Church. Father Catala gave the beautiful avenue called the Alameda extending from Santa Clara to San Jose. He directed and assisted two hundred Indians in the planting of three rows of willows and poplar trees along this way so that the people coming from the pueblo of San Jose to the church of Santa Clara would be protected from the sun. At the date of planting, 1799, there was no church in San Jose and the Californians must make the trip of four miles to the Mission Chapel on holy days. It has been suggested that the trees were for the protection against cattle, for these semi-wild beasts of old California were liable to attack a person not on horseback.

The center row of trees ran beside a canal that brought water from the Guadalupe River to the mission orchards. In those days the willows and other safeguarding vegetation had not been removed from the banks of the river and there was a constant flow of water for irrigation. In later years the canal was filled in to make way for a street-car line. Today the original willows are gone but beautiful trees have replaced them and the sentiment of Father Catala continues. He had the Stations of the Cross erected along the Alameda halfway to San Jose. Every Friday, Father Maguin de Catala with the Indians, would begin the Way of the Cross before the altar of the church at three o'clock and then

visit every altar in turn. The great Crucifix at this time was borne in the procession by Don Ignacio Alviso.

This Crucifix, one of the most prized holy relics at Santa Clara, is intimately connected with the life of Father Maguin. Many miracles were attributed the saintly man but one of the most beautiful stories was told in a Catholic court of investigation in regards to the holy life of Father Maguin by José Alviso. Alviso said that the father was accustomed to keep vigil before the Crucified Christ, and one night when he came to call the father from his watch he saw the Christ lower His arms from the Cross, embrace the father and said, "Soon thou shalt see God in glory." Many other people related stories of miraculous deeds by Catala; he was accredited to have caused a plague of locusts to leave the Valley, to cause water to flow from a rock, as did Moses; to be understood by animals, as related of St. Francis. He prophesied the coming of another flag from the East and a different language and religion and said that the Indians would be dispersed and so many people would come to California that it would create scarcity - something unimaginable at that time. Gold nuggets were brought to him by Indians not long before his death in the presence of John Alexander Forbes, the former British consul, but the father would not touch gold or silver and told the Indians to shun the yellow metal. Father Catala died in 1830 and was buried

at Santa Clara.[24]

The period following the death of Father Maguin saw the rapid decline of Santa Clara Mission. Secularization took place in 1834. In 1846, Father Real, the last Franciscan padre to act at Santa Clara, was authorized to sell mission lands to support himself and the church and pay off debts. In 1850, Archbishop Alemany of San Francisco desiring to save the remnants of the mission, invited the Society of Jesus to establish a college at the mission site. Father John Nobile, the first Jesuit, arrived in 1851 and used the old mission buildings for a school. In 1855 a charter was granted to make the school a college.

Earthquakes ruined the old church between 1856 and 1858 but a portion was still used as a chapel. Because it was necessary by 1885 to almost completely remove the old walls as a safety measure, scarcely any of the old nave remains. Portions of the sanctuary are still in place. Traces of the cloister remain and some of the old buildings are the foundation of the teachers' residence of the college. The plan of the University of Santa Clara follows the original grouping of the buildings about a quadrangle which encloses an old garden. Here are a few trees that were part

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24. Engelhardt, The holy man of Santa Clara, 17, 85, 100, 146-149, 169; Bancroft, History of California, I, 136.

of the orchard and some vines that were planted by the Franciscans.

The wooden structure which replaced the old adobe was destroyed by fire on October 25, 1926. In 1928 a concrete church was completed, conforming as closely as possible to the old adobe dedicated in 1822. Part of the rear cloister wall is the original. Only a bit of the original cross remains in front of the church; this section is incased at the base of the present cross.

Fortunately many of the relics have been saved despite the rather frequent changes in the church of Santa Clara. The crucifix so venerated by Father Catala remains. An ancient volume of chorals dating from the sixteenth century, bound in wood with bronze corners is in the library as is a collection of Gregorian chant notes written on heavy parchment. Three large volumes of baptisms, bound in hide, with thong clasps tell us the names of the Indians and Californians who were baptized here. The first book is from 1777 to 1804, opened by Father Peña on January 12, 1777, and certified by Father Junípero Serra. The second is from 1804, to 1843, by Father Catala and the third by Father Nobile, founder of the present university. There are also two books of the dead and a book of marriages.

The ceiling decoration in the church is the same as that painted by Father Viader and his Indian pupils in

1802. The bells of Santa Clara were presented in 1798 to the mission by King Charles IV of Spain. The bell which hangs highest was recast in San Francisco in 1864. The fathers say that these bells were given with the understanding that they should be rung every evening that listeners might be reminded to say a de profundis for the souls of the dead. At intervals the air is tremulous with the vibration of the bells, reminding us of the romantic past that has been Santa Clara's. In the quiet of the beautiful garden we find a bit of the old world and pause to think of our good fortune in living in an age where the past is preserved with veneration. This historical landmark is church property and crosses mark the sites of the old Mission Santa Clara de Asís.

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