

## MISIÓN LA PURÍSIMA CONCEPCIÓN

(Summary by John Samuel Fox)

The date of the consecration of Misión la Purísima Concepción de María Santísima was December 8, 1787, although it had been planned for at least ten years previous to that time. Its location had both strategic and religious importance to the Spanish empire. The powerful tribes of the Santa Barbara channel constituted a real menace to communications between the province's northern and southern settlements. In addition, the Indians along the coast had the highest culture of the tribes in Alta California with which the Spaniards came into contact, and this made them more susceptible to the introduction of Spanish civilization and the Holy Faith.

Three missions were planned for the Santa Barbara region as early as 1777, of which La Purísima was to be the northernmost. Quarrels between the civil and ecclesiastical authorities, delays in obtaining legal confirmation of the plans from Mexico, and preliminary surveys delayed the founding more than a decade. By the spring of 1788, the mission was firmly established and building construction begun.

Things went well for many years. The Indians received the fathers with unusual kindness and willingness. This establishment enjoyed the largest proportional gain in population and the smallest death-rate of all the California missions. Crops, especially wheat, were good; and the cattle, sheep, and horses multiplied greatly. Construction went on apace; church, living quarters for padres and soldiers, houses for converted families, workshops, and storage warehouses were constantly being constructed and repaired. The chief industrial activity of the neophytes was weaving, but they also made cotton cloth and shoes. In 1804, La Purísima could boast of 1,520 neophytes living in and around the community.

The establishment enjoyed its peaceful prosperity until an earthquake in 1818 entirely destroyed the church and vestry, workshops, and garden wall. One hundred neophyte houses were made unserviceable for further habitation. The disaster induced the padres to move the mission to a new and better site some five miles away. Although construction of the new buildings was rapid, La Purísima never regained its former prosperity. Its resources were drained to support the military; dry years killed off livestock and crops; and fire took its toll. In 1824, an Indian revolt was added to its list of unhappy events.

The final blow occurred when the missions were secularized in 1834. After that, the story of La Purísima is a tale of its rapid decay and of enrichment for the commissioners who administered its wealth. The value of the property declined about two-thirds between 1835 and 1839, while in the latter year only 122 Indians were left of the mission community, besides forty-seven freed neophytes on one of the ranchos. By the next decade, the mission was practically in ruins, and in 1845 it was sold at auction for \$1,100. Thus, one of the five missions for the defense of the Santa Barbara coast came to an end.

Excavation of the ruins and restoration of the mission buildings is being done under the direction of the State and when the work is finished La Purísima will take its rightful place as a State monument, one more in the list of historic shrines of California.

OP #55

Not Rec.

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Name?

*Typed in final form*

*SP #55*

*(Cape)*

Misión La Purísima Concepción

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*By John Samuel 7/4*  
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*OK*

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