

History of the Mission

Mission San Luis Rey (King of the Missions) was founded in 1798 by Padre Lasuen and then named after St. Louis, King of France, 13th century. The mission system was one of the marvels of history. While colonists in other parts of the world tried to exterminate and expropriate the natives, the Franciscan Padres and Spaniards sought to save them. Within a short time under such help, the Indians progressed from a state of barbarism to a relatively high level of civilization. Where desolation and savagery formerly prevailed, large sections of the countryside were brought under cultivation; grapes, oranges, and olives had been planted. The Mission became the home of between two and three thousand Indians. In their name, and as a result of their labor, the Mission supervised some 27,000 head of cattle and 26,000 sheep. As late as 1832, Padre Peyri still headed this vast enterprise. The high regard in which he was held is still a cherished tradition among Indian descendants.

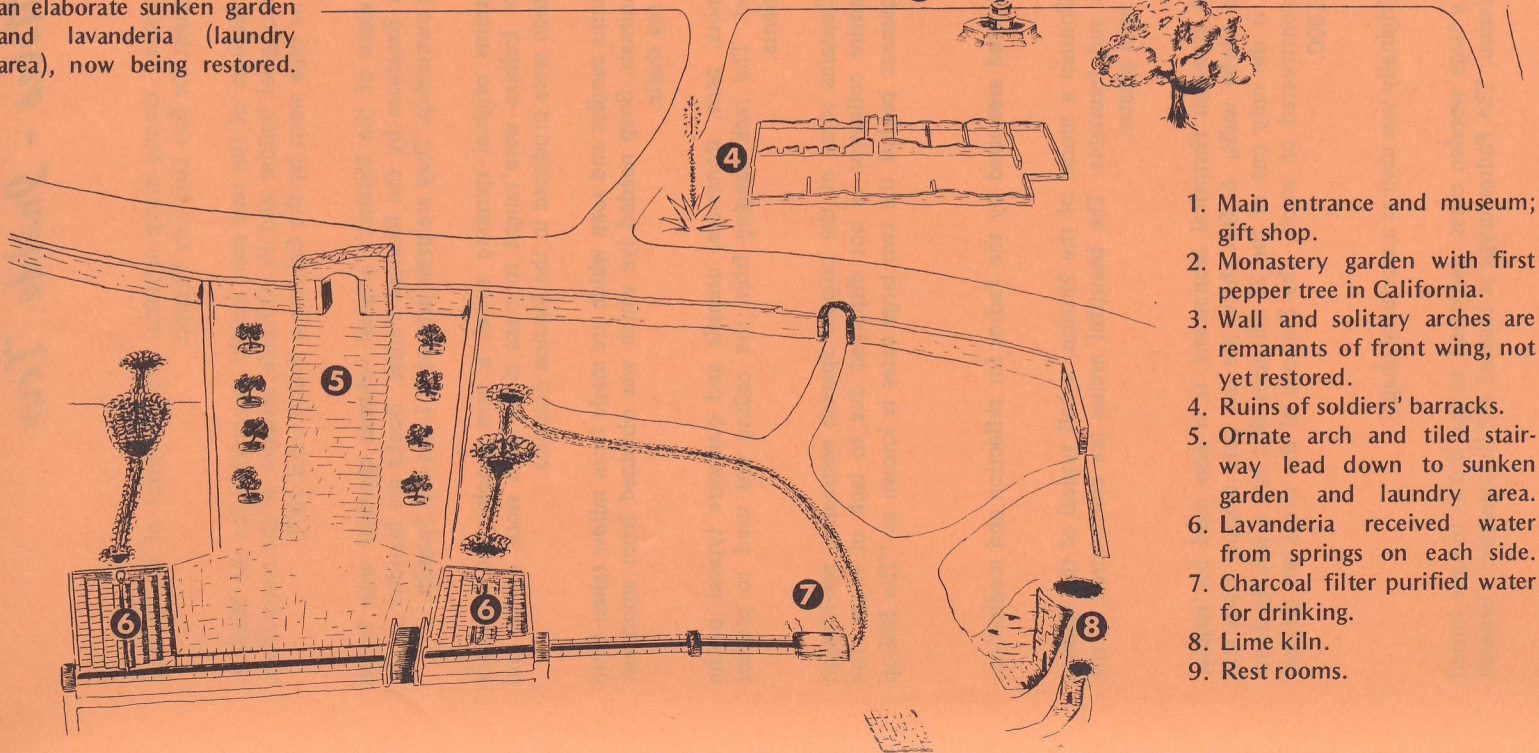
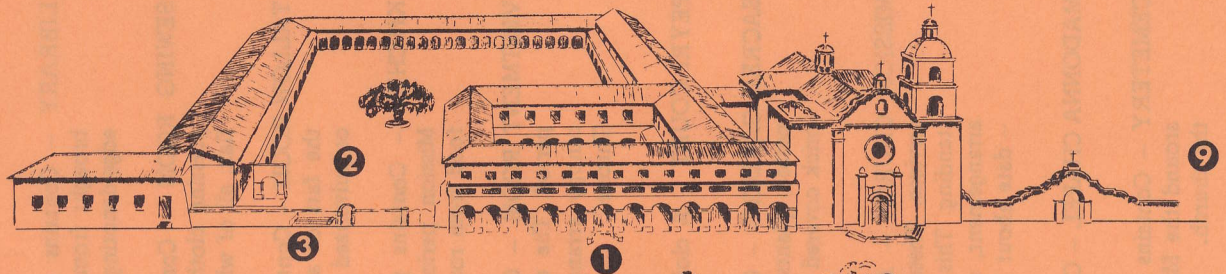
In 1834 a law of "secularization" was passed; the politicians took over. Mission properties were put into the hands of the Indians, and almost immediately bought from them for a pittance by greedy colonials. Scarcely an acre of ground was left to the Indians. In the home of their race they were outcasts. They withdrew to the hills and secluded valleys, there to await almost total extinction.

In the unsettled period that followed its seizure, the Mission was reduced to a noble ruin. In 1865 Abraham Lincoln restored the Mission to the church. He signed the deed (the original is here at San Luis Rey) less than a month before his assassination. In 1892 and again in recent years, restoration on a large scale has been undertaken, and the splendor of the past has partly returned. The Mission now serves as a parish church and a center for religious retreats and conferences.



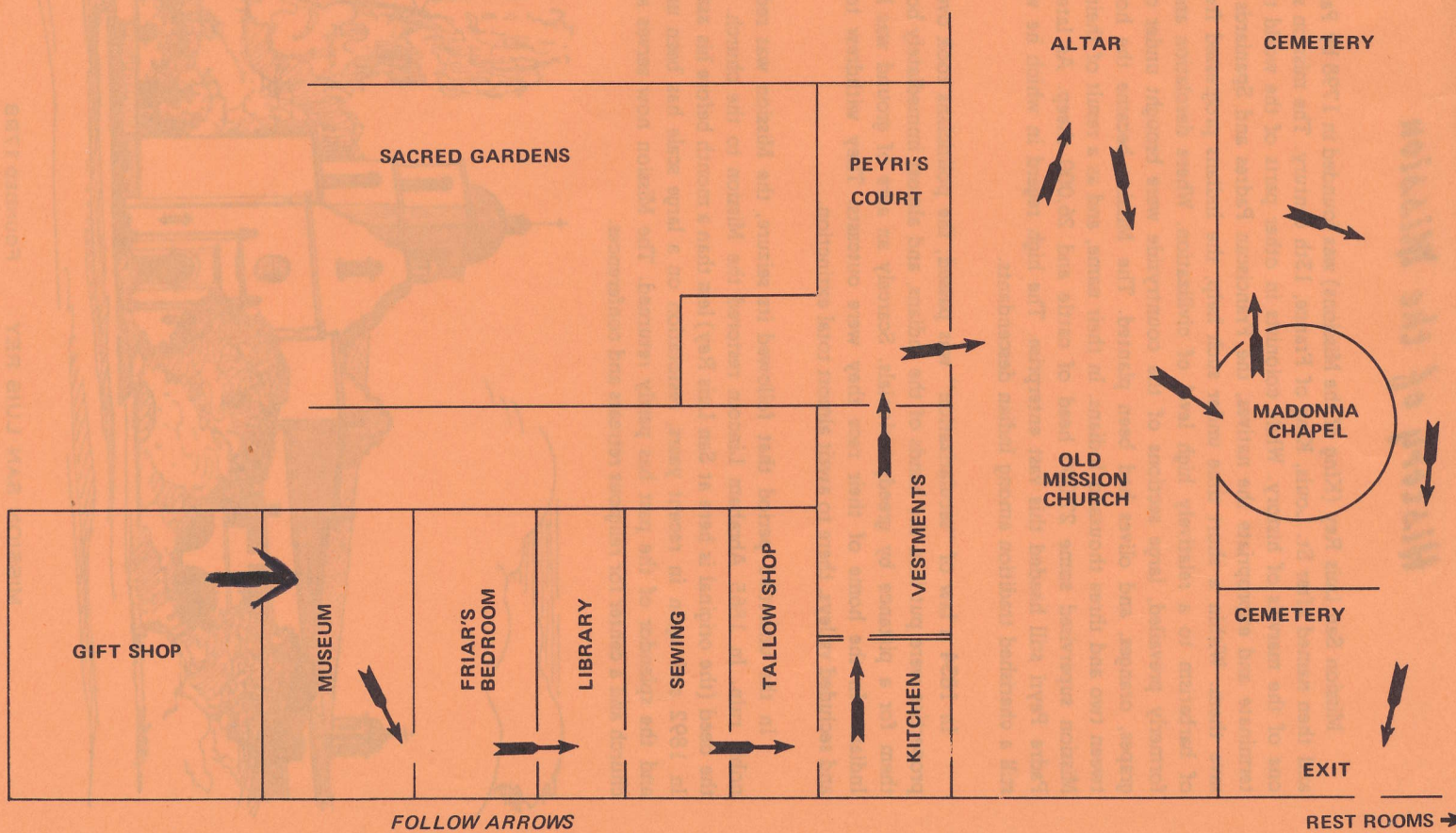
Outside Tour

One of the most extensive of the mission chain, the buildings of San Luis Rey covered nearly six acres and were arranged around a patio 500 feet square. In front of the mission was an elaborate sunken garden and lavanderia (laundry area), now being restored.



1. Main entrance and museum; gift shop.
2. Monastery garden with first pepper tree in California.
3. Wall and solitary arches are remnants of front wing, not yet restored.
4. Ruins of soldiers' barracks.
5. Ornate arch and tiled stairway lead down to sunken garden and laundry area.
6. Lavanderia received water from springs on each side.
7. Charcoal filter purified water for drinking.
8. Lime kiln.
9. Rest rooms.

Inside Tour



Notes - Inside Tour

- MUSEUM ROOM – Contains, among many artifacts, the photostat of the original Lincoln Document for San Luis Rey Mission.
- BEDROOM – Contains pictures of the two men mainly responsible for the Mission: Fr. Peyri, the original builder and Fr. O'Keefe, initiator of the restoration; a grey robe, the type worn by the California Padres until 1875.
- LIBRARY – Contains some of the Mission's original volumes together with books brought from Zacatacas by the Mexican Padres. Books are branded on the edge denoting ownership. They are press printed in Latin and Spanish.
- SEWING ROOM – Contains original spinning wheel, a yarn spooler and irons for pressing cloth. Indians were taught to make cloth from wool, cotton and flax, all of which were produced in the Mission complex.
- TALLOW ROOM – Contains candles and soap which are made from tallow taken from the fats of animals. Soap needed lye which was obtained from wood ash or pulverized sea shells.
- KITCHEN – Contains pots, pans, stoneware, utensils and glassware typical of the Mission period. The rack hanging from the ceiling was used to protect food from rodents.
- VESTMENT ROOM – Contains some of the original Spanish vestments, pre-Mission period. The entire collection is not displayed due to lack of room. The canopy arrangement behind the two large cases is known as "The Bishop Throne".
- PEYRI COURT – A cloistered area used by the Padres for reflection and meditation.
- SACRED GARDENS – Contain a model of the Mission, a bell typical of the Mission period, plants and fountains. The beautiful arches are constructed of tile brick covered with plaster.
- MISSION CHURCH – A National Historical Monument, it is also used for regular services. These adobe walls, 6 feet thick, are the only original walls still standing. This is the only one of the 21 Missions that has a double dome arrangement, constructed of wood. The Stations of the Cross are original – date about 1800.
- MADONNA CHAPEL – Originally was used as a mortuary chapel.
- CEMETERY – Contains a large wooden cross, dedicated to the 3,000 Indians buried around the Mission. The Padres crypt is located off the cemetery, beneath the church.