

TUMACACORI
national monument · arizona

Tumacacori National Monument is a typical frontier mission church illustrating Spanish colonial endeavor and commemorating the introduction of European civilization into what is present-day southern Arizona.

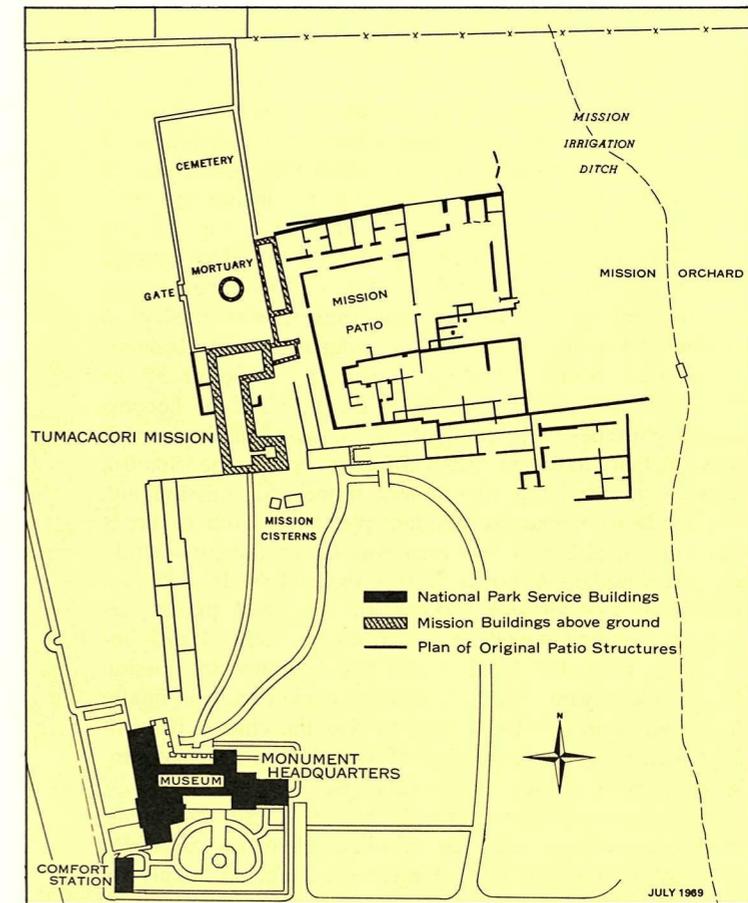
TUMACACORI

To hold the far-flung frontiers of the Spanish Empire of 250 years ago in South Central America and Mexico and to bring Christian civilization to hundreds of native tribes, Spain sent soldiers and missionary priests into the wilderness. Missions were founded among the settled tribes, and presidios (military posts) were set up on the borders of the hostile tribes. The frontier missions were both churches and centers of European culture and civilization. By such means, the outlying provinces of Spanish America were extended and secured.

The mission of San Jose de Tumacacori was a northern outpost of a mission chain constructed by Franciscan priests in the late 1700's, on sites established by the Jesuits in what was then the Province of Sonora. As a reminder that Spain was active on the frontier in the Southwest long before the United States became a nation, Tumacacori remains today an inspiring symbol of the faith, courage, and vigor of the early missionary priests and of the great loyalty and devotion of the Indian converts.

Father Kino and His Work

One of the greatest missionaries was Father Eusebio Francisco Kino, a Jesuit, who introduced European culture to this region. He founded his first Sonora mission in 1687, and explored and mapped the Upper Pima Indian country, now southern Arizona and northern Sonora, Mexico. Wherever he went, he spread the Christian doctrine, gained friends among the Indians, and established missions. He initiated ranching on this frontier by introducing cattle and other livestock. To such beginnings some of our thriving modern towns owe their existence.



Tumacacori History

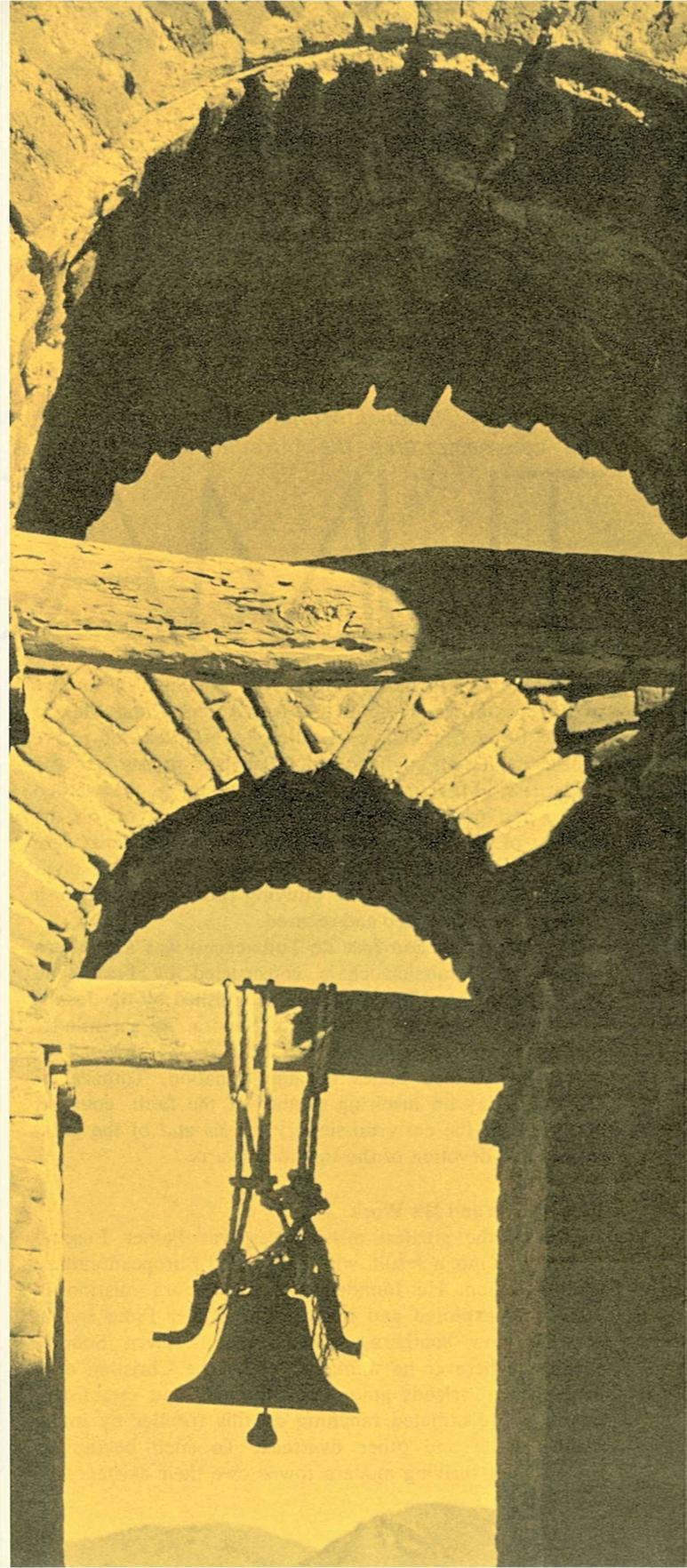
Father Kino came first into what is now southern Arizona in 1691, when he visited, at the request of the inhabitants, the small Pima village of Tumacacori, which he called San Cayetano. The village was a few miles from the site of the present mission. He said Mass under a brush shelter built by the Indians for that purpose. By 1698, according to Father Kino, Tumacacori had an "earth-roofed house of adobe," fields of wheat, and herds of cattle, sheep, and goats. At every opportunity he and his successors visited Tumacacori to hold services and to encourage ranching and farming. When a missionary was assigned to Guevavi, to the southeast, Tumacacori became a *visita* of that mission, that is, a place where the missionaries occasionally held services. After the Pima Rebellion of 1751, the village was moved to the site where the mission now stands and renamed San Jose de Tumacacori. A small mission was erected here and a presidio was established at Tubac, 3 miles north of Tumacacori.

The Jesuits were expelled from all Spanish dominions in 1767, and the following year the Franciscan Order took over the Sonora mission chain. About 1772, because of Apache raids, Guevavi was abandoned and San Jose de Tumacacori became the headquarters for the missions of the district. Apparently, construction of the present church was not begun until nearly 1800, but was in use by 1822.

To the south, important events were occurring. Mexico won her independence from Spain in 1821. This change in government brought about abandonment of most of the frontier missions. The new government was unable to provide adequate military defense against hostile Indians. Mexico passed laws tending to weaken the power of the church, and mission churches were required to become parish churches. The close of the mission-building period was further hastened when Mexico ended the Spanish custom of providing government money for mission aid.

Exactly when the last resident priest left Tumacacori is not known, although this area was under the jurisdiction of a nonresident priest as late as the 1840's. It is known that after the Spanish settlers, soldiers, and priests departed, frequent Apache raids made life here almost impossible. In 1844, Mexico sold the Tumacacori mission lands to a private citizen. When the devout Indians finally left Tumacacori in 1848, they carried the church furnishings with them to the mission of San Xavier, near Tucson, where some of the statues are still in use.

The church, deserted, slowly began to fall into ruins. Treasure hunters and the eroding elements gradually wrought havoc with the beautiful structure, until only its massiveness preserved it from complete destruction.



The Mission Buildings

Various old descriptions and drawings of Tumacacori show the buildings to have been arranged with the long axis of the church running north and south. To the east was a closed courtyard, surrounded by arcades and rooms; here were the quarters of the priests, storerooms, workshops, granaries, and classrooms.

North of the church is the cemetery where many Christian Indians are buried. An unfinished circular mortuary chapel dominates this area. After abandonment, the cemetery was often used as a corral, so that milling cattle, as well as weather and treasure hunters, have destroyed the grave mounds of the mission period. Today, the visible grave mounds are those of later Mexican-American burials.

The church still stands, although the courtyard structures long ago fell almost entirely into ruin. In 1921, some repair work was done to the old buildings and walls to protect them against weather, a new roof was placed over the long nave, and lesser repairs were made to other parts. Repair work since that date has been limited to preserving existing original construction.

Today, you may examine in great detail the features of this stately old building, seeing the many interesting structural elements of the baroque architecture and the faded but original colors which the Indian workmen applied. The unfinished bell tower of burned brick speaks eloquently of how the last Franciscans tried to complete the church.

About Your Visit

The monument, 48 miles south of Tucson and 18 miles north of Nogales on U.S. 89, is accessible by paved road throughout the year. Buses plying between these cities pass several times daily. The nearest rail connections and commercial airport are in Tucson.

The monument is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Self-guiding walks lead through the museum and church, the principal features. A member of the National Park Service staff is on hand to answer questions.

A modest entrance fee is charged.

The monument office and museum are in a building next to the parking area. Constructed in the Sonora mission style, it houses exhibits that depict facets of early Indian and Spanish history. Maps, dioramas, drawings, and photographs bring Tumacacori to life. A patio garden and fountain are part of the museum grounds.

Sales publications describing the region's history and natural history are available in the museum lobby.

Picnic grounds are nearby, but there are no campgrounds.

No real extremes of heat or cold normally occur here,

but if you visit in winter, you should bring warm clothing. During years of normal rainfall, vegetation blooms in early spring and late summer; most species of cactus and yucca bloom from March through May.

Administration

Tumacacori National Monument, containing 10 acres, was established in 1908. The monument, which is no longer connected with any religious order, is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Box 67, Tumacacori, AZ 85640, is in immediate charge.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities for water, fish, wildlife, mineral, land, park, and recreational resources. Indian and Territorial affairs are other major concerns of America's "Department of Natural Resources." The Department works to assure the wisest choice in managing all our resources so each will make its full contribution to a better United States—now and in the future.

