

“The Early Mission Establishments in California”

**In *Scientific American*, Vol. LXIII, No. 8,
August 23, 1890, pp. 118**

This article, which begins on the next page,
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August 2012

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“We present herewith, from photographs taken by Mr. W. J. Rea, of Santa Barbara, views of some of the old mission houses established in California by the Catholic missionaries in the last century.

“The California mission began at about the period of the American revolution, and attained a wonderful degree of prosperity, but is now as much a matter of the past as are the Iroquois or Huron missions of the North. Generally speaking, a rectangular building of eighty or ninety yards frontage, and about as deep, composed the mission. In one end was the church and parsonage. The interior formed a large and beautiful court, adorned with trees and fountains, and surrounded by galleries, on which opened the rooms of the missionaries, stewards, and travelers, the shops, the schools, store rooms, etc., and the granary. A part, separated off and called the monastery, was reserved for the Indian girls, and here they were taught by native women to spin and weave, and received such other instruction as was suited to their sex. The boys learned trades and those who excelled were promoted to the rank of chiefs, a dignity being thus given to labor that impelled all to embrace it. Each mission was directed by two friars, one of whom superintended the mission building and the religious instruction, while the other superintended the field labors, in which he always took part, teaching by advice and example. The discipline was severe, and the whole establishment was conducted like some vast factory. This, in modern times, has excited great outcry; but the missions have been abolished, and the Indians left to the ‘enlightened’ men of our day, under whose care they have disappeared like smoke before the wind.

“Around the mission building rose the houses of the Indians and of a few white settlers, and at various distances were ranches or hamlets, each with its succursal chapel. In a little building by the mission was a picket of five horsemen acting as soldiers and couriers. The Indians of a mission were not all of the same tribe, but perfect harmony prevailed, and when the season of work was over, many paid visits to their countrymen, and seldom returned alone. In this way the missions constantly received new accessions, for the good friars had the art of making labor attractive. When the crops were harvested, each mission sold or shipped its breadstuffs, wine, oil, hemp and cordage, hides and tallow, and from the returns distributed to the Indians clothes, handkerchiefs, tobacco, and other articles. The surplus was spent in the purchase of necessities for the mission.

“The mission of Santa Barbara, shown from two points of view in Figs. 1 and 2 (*on the next page*), was founded by father Palon, in 1786, at the foot of a chain of arid mountains. The church is of stone, with two towers and an extensive wing, tiled roofs and arched corridor.

“The mission of Santa Inez (Fig. 3) (*on the next page*) was founded in 1797, on a beautiful prairie embosomed in the hills, a perfect garden of fertility. The building is similar to that of Santa Barbara, but differs in the appearance of the church. In front there was a large brick inclosure (sic) where the females bathed and washed. To the right were the gardens, filled with choice fruit trees; and, on the left, a few clusters of Indian huts and tiled houses.

“The mission of San Luis Obispo (Fig. 4) was founded by Father Serra, and the church and barracks were begun in 1772. It is built near the extremity of a small pass through the hill, where the sun casts its burning heat in a degree almost insufferable. The mission, though formerly wealthy, is now of little importance. The buildings are in a decayed state, and everything about them bears the appearance of neglect. It is surrounded by high and rocky hills.”



Fig. 1.-SANTA BARBARA MISSION-FRONT VIEW.

Fig. 1. Santa Barbara Mission – Front View.



Fig. 2.-SANTA BARBARA MISSION-PERSPECTIVE VIEW.

Fig. 2. Santa Barbara Mission – Perspective View.



Fig. 3.-MISSION OF SANTA INEZ.

Fig. 3. Mission of Santa Inez.



Fig. 4.-MISSION OF SAN LUIS OBISPO.

Fig. 4. Mission of San Luis Obispo.