

Santa Cruz Mission State Historic Park



Our Mission

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P.O. Box 942896

Sacramento, CA 94296-0001

For information call: (800) 777-0369

(916) 653-6995, outside the U.S.

711, TTY relay service

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Santa Cruz Mission State Historic Park

144 School Street

Santa Cruz, California 95060

(831) 425-5849

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*Today the complex
of buildings standing
on the site of the
Santa Cruz Mission
is a testament to the
strength of the early
missionaries and the
hard work of the original
Indian inhabitants.*



Nestled against the coastal hills on the northern shore of picturesque Monterey Bay lies Santa Cruz Mission State Historic Park. Built twelfth in the chain of California missions, Santa Cruz Mission has only one remaining original building—an adobe that housed converted native families.

Despite the tenacity of early Franciscan missionaries to make the mission system successful, Santa Cruz Mission residents experienced many difficulties. Their stories are interpreted here.

Summers in downtown Santa Cruz can be warm with occasional fog, while the winters are cool with some rain. The weather can change quickly.

PARK HISTORY

Native People

This land of abundance was home to the Ohlone Indians. Originally living in small independent tribes, neighbors often shared a similar language. The Ohlone lived in domed structures thatched with tule reeds. Groups moved seasonally to prime locations within their territories to fish, hunt, or collect plants. They ate processed acorns, seeds, berries, and roots, supplemented with meat from large and small game animals, waterfowl, and sea life.

The Ohlone also pruned, harvested, and burned the grasslands to encourage fresh plant growth and to attract such small animals as deer and rabbits.

Skilled artisans, the Ohlone twined and coiled baskets—many decorated with

abalone pendants, quail plumes, and woodpecker feathers. They traded mussels, abalone shells, and salt in exchange for obsidian and other items with the Yokuts, who lived across the coastal mountains in the San Joaquin Valley. Today's descendants of the Ohlone preserve and celebrate their heritage.

Spanish Settlers

Spanish missionaries learned of the coastal land surrounding Monterey Bay from early explorers. Gaspar de Portolá, in his quest to find the famed Monterey Bay, passed along the northern shore of Monterey Bay in October 1769.

Misión la Exaltacion de la Santa Cruz became the twelfth of 21 missions established in Alta California. Founded on August 28, 1791, by Father Fermín Lasuén,

the mission was first built near the mouth of the San Lorenzo River. The mission flooded the first winter, and Father Lasuén had to relocate to higher ground. The new location had a commanding view of the surrounding area, good climate, fertile soil and—from nearby Mission San José—native people familiar with Christianity. Construction began on the mission complex in 1793. The church and mission quadrangle, complete with grist mill, two-story granary, and workshops, were completed in 1795.

The second Santa Cruz mission faced numerous challenges, earning it the nickname of “The Hard Luck Mission.” Diseases swept through the mission's neophyte population; many ran away or rebelled at hard labor and an unfamiliar diet. The mission's decline was further accelerated when Alta California Governor

Courtesy of Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History



Painting of Santa Cruz Mission by Edward Deakin

Diego Borica established the pueblo Branciforte across the river. Although Spanish law forbade the establishment of a pueblo within a league (three miles) of a mission, Borica expected Santa Cruz Mission to support the pueblo.

However, the goals and customs of the two settlements were not compatible. As the local native population declined, the padres looked to the nearby Yokuts in the San Joaquin Valley as an alternate source of converts; later the Franciscans resorted to recruiting native converts by force.

Another blow to the weakened Santa Cruz Mission occurred in 1818 when French pirate Hippolyte Bouchard—known for plundering



Primitive spinning wheel on exhibit

California's missions and communities under the Argentine flag—was reported off the Monterey coast. Governor Borica ordered Father Ramon Olbés to flee 30 miles north with the remaining Indians to Mission Santa Clara. Branciforte residents were ordered to save the Santa Cruz Mission's valuables, but

some were damaged or stolen (although later returned). Bouchard never attacked, and the Santa Cruz Mission struggled to maintain good relationships with its neophytes, pueblo neighbors, and the government.

Santa Cruz Mission was among the first California missions to be secularized in 1834. Little of value was offered to the Indian residents. Time and the elements quickly brought about the mission complex's collapse. In 1840, an earthquake destroyed the mission bell tower; a second quake on January 9, 1857, toppled the front wall of the church and crumbled most remaining buildings.

Although Mission Santa Cruz had been disbanded and the padres scattered, its influence on the surrounding community remained. In 1845 Branciforte and the settlements on former mission lands assumed the permanent name of Santa Cruz. A wooden church was built near the collapsed mission buildings and dedicated on July 4, 1858, to serve the Santa Cruz community. In 1891 the Holy Cross Church, a brick structure, replaced the original mission church.

The Mission Grounds Today

Today a complex of buildings stands on the site of the original Santa Cruz Mission, including a half-scale replica of the original church that contains some surviving mission relics.

The only remaining original mission building is the adobe that the Indian



Students examine a foxskin arrow quiver.

families built and lived in while they worked at the mission. Its seven rooms (out of an original 17) house a museum that shows the changes that occurred in the native people's lives when they came to the mission.

ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

- The historic buildings have narrow doors and raised thresholds, but they are generally accessible.
- Parking, the visitor center, bookstore, picnic area, and restrooms are accessible.

PLEASE REMEMBER

- Living history demonstrations are often scheduled on weekends.
- Restrooms are located near the picnic area.
- School programs are available.
- For reservations and park hours, call (831) 425-5849.
- Free school-report information is available; please inquire.

Santa Cruz Mission State Historic Park

Holy Cross Church
Site of Original Church

NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Henry Cowell Redwoods SP
5 miles north of Santa Cruz on Highway 9, (831) 335-4598
- Natural Bridges State Beach
in Santa Cruz on West Cliff Drive (831) 423-4609
- New Brighton State Beach
4 miles south of Santa Cruz on Highway 1, (831) 464-6329
- Wilder Ranch State Park
1401 Old Coast Road
Santa Cruz 95060 (831) 423-9703

Santa Cruz
Mission
Plaza
(Fountain)

Santa Cruz Mission
Chapel and Reliquary
(Modern half-scale Replica)

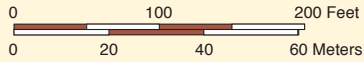
Holy Cross
School

Mission
Adobe

Park Entrance
Visitor Center
& Bookstore

Patio/Picnic
Area

Park Office
(Business Only)



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Legend

- Road
- State Park
- Park Building
- Non-Park Building
- One Way Street
- Accessible Feature
- Parking
- Picnic Area
- Restrooms



This park is supported in part by a nonprofit organization. For more information contact:
Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks
144 School Street, Santa Cruz, CA 95060
(831) 429-1840