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**Visiting Mission San Luis Rey and Remembering the California Native American System
San Luis Rey Mission, Oceanside, CA.**



Figure 1: San Luis Rey Mission. Photo by author.

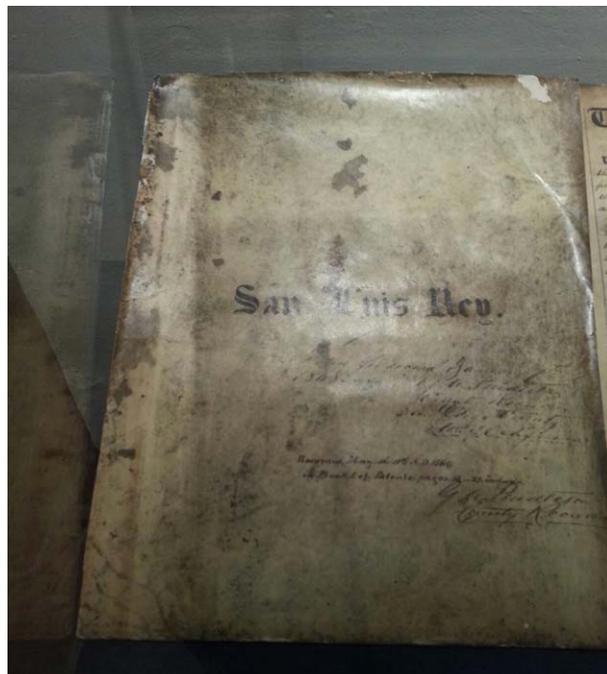


Figure 2: Display case with religious text. Photo by author.

California Native American Indians were heavily affected and influenced by Spanish domination in constructing Catholic

Missions throughout the California coastline. During the early colonization period Spain established religious outposts to claim an imperious foothold in the frontier and California territory. The idea behind Spanish expansion was to create Mission centers, where the local native population could assimilate, and become good Spanish citizen laborers by learning religious and moral virtue. By historically examining the memory and portrayal of the Mission San Luis Rey while considering the California Native American Indian labor system that was implemented, concise analysis can be obtained about its inhumanity.

Mission San Luis Rey provides a beautiful secluded historical retreat from the modern momentum of surrounding city areas. The Mission exudes valuable and unique insight to a period of history that may have been otherwise lost. The Mission San Luis Rey is also involved in obscuring important facts about this period and distributing distorted information of California Native American Indian treatment under the Mission system. Withholding essential information regarding the treatment of California Native American Indians under the Mission system is equally misleading. The significance of maltreatment in the California Mission system may often be overlooked by Americans because there is not nearly enough unbiased emphasis made to inform the masses about its past. In the California State curriculum the California Native American Indian and the Spanish Mission system are only implemented and taught at the fourth grade level.¹ The notion that the California Native American Indians were coerced into religious conversions and inducted into a physically demanding labor institution that was validated through the idea that it was “god's will of conquest” is not present in the curriculum. Through observation, research, and analysis this exhibit review will provide a descriptive visiting experience of the Mission San Luis Rey in relation to the inhumane atrocities of the California Native American Indian labor system.

Today, when one visits the Mission San Luis Rey they will be presented with institutional and structural facts. Mission San Luis Rey was the eighteenth of twenty-one missions built in California and was established on June 13, 1798 by Padre Fermin Lasuen. The mission was named San Luis Rey in honor of the French Saint King Louis IX. The tragic history of the California

¹ National Archives, <http://www.archives.gov/pacific/education/curriculum/4th-grade/>

Native American Indian tribes and the evidence of their often forced assimilation under the Mission system is underrepresented in this Mission and many of California's historical sites and elementary education programs. The Mission San Luis Rey was no different. There was a variety of tribes that fell under the mission's jurisdiction. Under the mission plan they became known as the Luiseno band of Mission Indians.

Historically, Mission San Luis Rey was a vast property claiming ownership of miles of land in the surrounding area. These lands would be incorporated as part of the mission territory for which all inhabitants of that area were required to abide by Church tides, law and authoritative demand, including coerced labor. When surveying land for prospective locations, missionaries took into consideration the best optimum land for gathering labor for agriculture and infrastructure development while incorporating the relative location to sea accessibility. Under the direction of Father Junipero Serra the inclusive Spanish Mission plan was systematically implemented and became successful.

Arriving at the Mission San Luis Rey is a transformative experience. Visitors first begin to notice the welcoming white church tower set in green pastures, which is a strong contrast to the improprieties that mar its history. Mission San Luis Rey had just re-opened its "Exhibits Relating to the Colorful History of Mission San Luis Rey de Francia". The collections include artifacts from [California] Native American [Indian], Spanish Mission, Mexican Secularization and American Military periods.² Public parking is available near the museum exhibit entrance located by an outdoor garden and courtyard featuring one of California's oldest pepper tree.

The public has the option of following a self-guided tour of the interior of the museum, which consists of multiple living quarters, historic locales, excavated sites, statues, and exhibits for five dollars or exploring the perimeter of the Mission for free.

The tour begins in a room containing several hand woven baskets and labeling cards describing the alternative uses of these baskets by the Luiseno Indians for such tasks as cooking acorn mush or retrieving water with a tightly woven basket. One important aspect of the first room in the exhibit was establishing what the Luiseno diet consisted of prior to the European influence

² Old Mission San Luis Rey De Francia, accessed February 12, 2013, <http://www.sanluisrey.org/Museum/Tour-Info>.

of systematic sedentary agriculture. The vast territory incorporated into the Mission property included various cohabiting California Native American Indian tribes spanning from deep into the inland valleys to the Pacific coast. A culmination of various foods for a diverse diet can be attributed to a vast trading network infrastructure amongst tribes that was prevalent even before European contact was made. Another interesting informational placard in the same room was “The Lord's Prayer” translated into Luiseno. This is an important example outlining the extent of religious conversions to Native California Indians for the Spanish Missionaries.



Figure 2-3: Baskets and pottery by Luiseno Indians.
Photo by author.

The self-guided tour continues with several display models portraying the likeness in living quarters of the Padres and Soldiers during the Mission system. The beds of the Padres and Soldiers appeared unappealing and uncomfortable, but there was no section of the museum dedicated toward displaying the living conditions or hardships that the Luiseno Indians had to endure during their required tributary labor conscriptions.

The final portion of touring Mission San Luis Rey includes visiting the Solider Barracks and Indian "Lavenderia". There are

many informational placards describing this area. One sign describes The Soldier Barracks as consisting of “adobe ruins that had once housed the Spanish soldiers that were assigned to protect the Mission”.³ Another marker indicates that the barracks had once, “included apartments and a look-out tower, and housed the American troops stationed in San Luis Rey at the time of the Mexican-American War, 1846-1848.”⁴ Whereas the "Lavanderia" is described by another placard as being an “Elaborate Laundry” where Mission members bathed and washed their clothes”.⁵ This part of the historic landmark sits across from the Mission chapel. Its front entrance facing the museum contains a gated arch followed by a grand staircase leading down to the wash area.



Figure 4: “Lavanderia” pathway. Photo by author.

Despite its numerous omissions, visiting Mission San Luis Rey can be considered an enjoyable learning experience. The landscape and historical artifacts that are on the property are truly a beautiful sight for see. It is essential that historical landmarks such as the Mission San Luis Rey are maintained because without the cumulative efforts put fourth focusing on preserving the Mission,

³ Old Mission San Luis Rey De Francia, accessed February 12, 2013, <http://www.sanluisrey.org/Museum/History>.

⁴Old Mission San Luis Rey De Francia, accessed February 12, 2013, <http://www.sanluisrey.org/Museum/Tour-Info>.

⁵ Ibid.

all of its historic insight may have been lost. This site provides an interesting and informative introduction to the subject matter. It is highly recommended for everyone to visit this historical landmark, or any of the original twenty-eight California Spanish Missions. Going to Mission San Luis Rey is an informative learning experience that one will never forget. It is also necessary to be critical of the limited portrayal of that historic period depicted at Mission San Luis Rey and other important California Historical Landmarks, but it is only fair to give the Mission credit for its efforts towards maintaining the site and providing an immersive educational experience to the public. Understandably, the Mission atmosphere is geared toward a neutral and pleasant experience for all. Withholding such graphic information in an effort to be universally inoffensive, limits the Mission's audience's ability to fully comprehend this complex subject matter. The Mission museum exhibit and historical landmark are essential efforts initiated to maintain coherent insight to that time era, but undermine the extensive repercussions that its continued labor system had on California Native American Indians throughout various political transitions.

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