

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **San Juan Bautista**

We heartily recommend a visit to San Juan Bautista these delightful summer days. A tour of this California Historical Monument will renew your faith in the continued preservation by the Division of Beaches and Parks of the state's simple things in life, the beauty of the landscape, the peace and quiet which should be one's heritage, the appreciation of the past as expressed in San Juan Bautista Mission (church property), and the charm of the old town. May it be preserved without the intrusion of highways, too many motels and subdivisions!

Mission San Juan Bautista was founded June 24, 1797 and is the largest of the 21 missions built by the Franciscan Fathers in California.

It is today one of the best preserved of all the historic monuments to the Christianization of the California Indians. The two wings of San Juan Bautista that remain are, for all practical purposes, just as they were when completed in 1812.

In the folder which we picked up in our tour of San Juan we note this: "The mission was built of adobe, with walls four feet thick. The timber work is all redwood. The beams and floor planks are hand-hewn. Whenever two timbers joined, they were tied with rawhide thongs. It took the Indians 15 years to build the mission, and upon its completion the King of Spain sent a beautifully-toned bell as a gift. The bell is still in use today."

We also learned these facts from the folder: Those who enter the church walk on the original tiles, the confessional box is the original one. Along the walls of the church hang the Stations of the Cross and paintings of the 12 apostles, originals.

When the church was completed, it had three naves. The arches were sealed in 1830 for security reasons. In the earthquake of 1906, the outer walls of the church caved in and the roof fell. The present ceiling hides the original beams that still support the roof.

The screen behind the main altar was built by the first American settler in California, a Yankee sailor, Thomas Doak, who jumped ship in Monterey in 1816. His painting, done with animal and vegetable oils, still

remains as it was the day he painted it, except for minor touching up.

The six statues in the Church were sent to the Mission in 1809. Hanging alongside the altar are two large, convex mirrors, through which the Padres used to watch the Indians during the Mass. There were no pews in the church in the early days.

In the sanctuary, near the front of the communion rail, is the grave of Father Tapis, one-time Presidente of all the Missions in the state, and superior of San Juan Bautista Mission when he died in 1825.

We agree with this statement in praise of San Juan Bautista: "One may stand in the quiet old plaza in the little city of San Juan and fold back the years to the early California days. Magic is not needed to do this. Time has softened and mellowed the charm of the venerable structures in the city, and the visitor can readily see a picture of life that went on here nearly a century and a half ago."

The San Juan Bautista State Historical Monument was incorporated into the California State Park system in 1933 and is under the supervision of the division office in Monterey.