Cowboy Culture

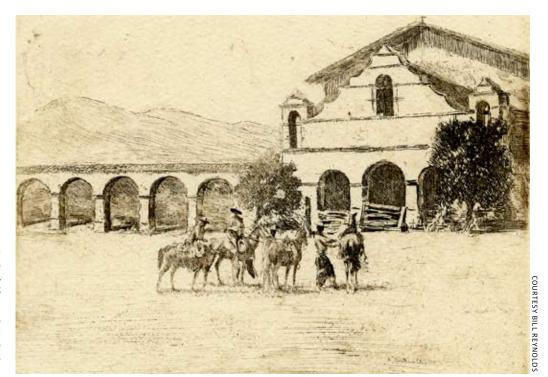
BY BILL REYNOLDS

OUT WEST

California Mission Brands

An eloquent chapter in the history of the West, the formation of California's mission system was instrumental in developing the state's livestock industry.



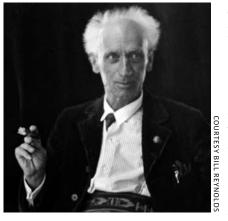


Right:Mission San Juan de Padua is portrayed in this circa 1915 etching by artist Edward Borein. Below right: Charles F. Lummis established The Landmarks Club to preserve California's missions.

IN 1894, CHARLES F. LUMMIS, a pas-

sionate preservationist of Southwest culture, sat in front of Miss Tessa L. Kelso, librarian of the Los Angeles Public Library, listening to her pleas. She had called Lummis seeking his help with the desperate condition of what she described as "unoccupied Franciscan missions of Southern California." She told him that only a few of the 21 historic missions were in good repair. The rest, geographically spaced to be one day's ride apart, "were falling into ruin with frightful rapidity."

Lummis was sympathetic to Kelso's request, and responded by creating an organization called the Landmarks Club to invite public participation in restoration and preservation of the missions. However, Lummis encountered resistance.



"The Catholic Church owns those old missions," he was told by many naysayers. "Let them pay for reparations."

Lummis responded with explosive energy.

"Those mighty piles belong not to the Catholic Church but to you and me, and to our children and the world. They are monuments and beacons of heroism and faith, and zeal and art. Let us save them, not for the Church but for humanity."

Lummis' first project was Mission San Juan Capistrano, once considered the jewel of the mission system, and because of his efforts work on many of the missions continues today. Lummis' enthusiasm also started a resurgence of interest in mission history that helped retrieve much information regarding the local day-to-day operation of the communities that surrounded each mission.

From the establishment of the "Mother Mission" in San Diego, Mission San Diego de Alcala in 1769, to the final and most northern in Sonoma, Mission San Francisco de Solano in 1823, these outposts had to create their own sources of food, which included raising cattle.

California cattle descended from stock brought to the New World by early Spanish explorers, and it may have been Cortez who brought the first branding irons to this continent. In the late 1700s and early 1800s, mission cattle were branded as a matter of course. Over the years, research on the actual brands used by the missions has unearthed images of the brands used by each, and while many of them have specific histories some continue to have only obscure backgrounds.

Every mission in the chain from San Diego to Sonoma had its own cattle herd, some of which were quite large. Mission San Luis Rey had more than 27,000 head. Smaller missions tended approximately 2,500 head. By 1828, the 21 missions controlled or owned almost 200,000 head.

The missions are located along 650 miles of what is today Highway 101 through California. To see each mission's brand, let's travel up the coast of Old California, along the beautiful El Camino Real, also known as the California Mission Trail.

Mission San Diego de Alcala, 1769. Founded by Father Junipero Serra, Mission San Diego de Alcala is known as the "Mother Mission."

Mission San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo, 1770. The second mission to be constructed, this is still considered one of the system's most beautiful structures.

Mission San Juan de Padua, 1771. During its heyday, Mission San Juan de Padua supported more than 6,000 cattle.

Mission San Gabriel

Arcangel, 1771. At one time this mission boasted a herd of 15,000 cattle. Located near an active fault line, the mission used the temblores (earthquake) brand.

Cowboy Culture

San Luis Obispo de Tolosa, 1772. The fifth mission built, San Luis Obispo de Tolosa had only a small herd of cattle.

San Francisco de Asis, 1776. The sixth mission, San Francisco de Asis, was established the same year as the signing of the U.S. Declaration of Independence.

Alission San Juan Capistrano, 1776. Father Junipero Serra's home base, Mission San Juan Capistrano didn't escape the big California earthquake of 1812 and suffered severe damage. In its prime, it had more than 10,000 cattle.

Mission Santa Clara de Asis, 1777. Originally built near San Francisco Bay, this mission was relocated after a flood. At one time, it was second only to the Mission San Gabriel Arcangel in cattle holdings.

Mission San Buenaventura, 1782. This mission had an amazing seven-mile aqueduct system that supplied water to its fields. Mission Santa Barbara, 1786. The "Queen of the Missions," Mission Santa Barbara was founded two years after the death of Father Serra. It was built during the dawn of the "Golden Age" of mission culture. Today it's the only mission that remains under Franciscan control.

Mission La Purisima Concepcion, 1787. A day's ride north of Santa Barbara is the Mission La Purisima Concepcion. Having fallen into ruin, in 1935 the California Conservation Corps began rebuilding it to its original form.

Mission Santa Cruz, 1791. Through the years, this mission suffered a series of unfortunate incidents ranging from looting by pirates to earthquakes and tidal waves.

Mission Nuestra Senora Soledad, 1791. This small mission suffered when disease, floods and the epidemic of 1802 brought havoc to its population. Mission San Jose, 1797. This mission and its more than 10,000 cattle were located at the western-most approach to California's fertile Central Valley. Its location proved to be strategic in both military and agricultural operations.

Mission San Juan Batista, 1797. Unknowingly built on top of the infamous San Andreas Fault, this mission was damaged by many earthquakes. Properly engineered restoration has since returned it to its former glory.

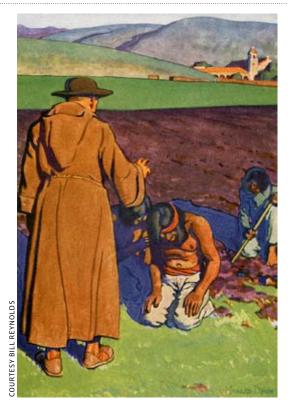
Mission San Miguel, 1797. In its prime, the mission tended several thousand cattle. After the missions were secularized in the 1830s, one of the Mission San Miguel buildings was sold and became one of El Camino Real's most popular saloons. The mission, located just north of Paso Robles, is being rebuilt today.

Mission San Fernando Rey de Espana, 1797. At its height, Mission San Fernando Rey ran more than 20,000 cattle. A ready market in Los Angeles soon had the mission producing hides, tallow, soap and cloth. San Luis Rey de Francia, 1789. The last mission to be founded in the south, the "King of the Missions" came to be the largest and richest of all. In 1832, its herd numbered more than 27,000 cattle.

Mission Santa Ines, 1804. Just north of Santa Barbara, in the heart of the Santa Ynez valley, sits Mission Santa Ines. The birthplace of bridle-horse culture, at its peak the mission had more than 7,000 head of cattle.

Mission San Rafael Arcangel, 1817. Known as the first sanitarium in California, San Rafael Arcangel became a fullfledged mission in 1823. Originally, it was an asistencia or outpost chapel of the San Francisco mission. This mission never had herds exceeding 4,000 head.

Mission San Francisco de Solano, 1823. This structure was the last mission to be built and was the farthest north in Sonoma. It always had its own troubles with earthquakes, yet due to its northerly location the mission benefited from the Russian fur traders who, at the time, had advanced down the California coast.



Bill Reynolds is a writer based in California's Santa Ynez Valley. He is the author of The Art of the Western Saddle and co-author of The Faraway Horses and Believe: A Horseman's Journey, both collaborations with Buck Brannaman. This installment of Out West concludes the column.

Mission Life, a 1926 illustration by Maynard Dixon, portrays the Spanish spread of Christianity to the natives living in California.