
The Arrival of the Europeans

Centuries before its recorded history, large numbers of Native Americans lived on the future site of Santa Barbara. These people, known as Chumash, lived in settlements clustered around the pure-water springs in the area. It is estimated that between 8,000 and 10,000 lived and thrived here. They built hive-shaped structures made of tree branches covered by reeds, and ate acorns, seeds, herbs, rabbits, squirrels, fish, and enormous amounts of shellfish. They also enjoyed a treat when a whale washed up on the beach.

They traveled long distances in fast canoes that transported them safely among the Channel Islands and up and down the coast. Most of these canoes held 12 to 15 people and were made of planks carved with care and artistry. These planks were lashed together with fibers and tendons and caulked with the tar found in great quantities along the shore. Although coastal tribes did not have a common language, they traveled so frequently that an intricate and effective system of sign language evolved.

The Spanish Discover the South Coast

Santa Barbara's recorded history began in October 1542, a mere 50 years after Christopher Columbus arrived on the shores of the New World. **Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo** and his crew reached Santa Barbara's south-facing shore in two small, badly-built vessels, the *San Salvador* and the *Victoria*. Cabrillo, a Portuguese sailor employed by the Spanish, saw the future site of Santa Barbara and claimed it for Spain.

Cabrillo was exploring the coast of California in the fruitless search for the Northwest Passage, a large river that would allow ships to sail from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Although this passage was never found, the search for it resulted in the exploration of large portions

of the West Coast. On this exploratory journey, Cabrillo also stopped to explore Carpinteria and anchored several miles west of Goleta Point.

As soon as he left to explore the coast north of Santa Barbara, his ships were driven offshore by the treacherous winds in the Santa Barbara Channel. Cabrillo and his crew found refuge in Cuyler's Harbor at San Miguel Island. While he was exploring the island, he fell and injured himself.

From Cuyler's Harbor, Cabrillo and his crew tried several times to sail north. Each time, his ships were blown offshore before rounding Point Conception. Finally, both ships returned to Cuyler's Harbor to wait for the winds to subside.

Unfortunately, Cabrillo's injuries never healed and he died from their complications on San Miguel Island. Many believe he is buried there, but his grave has never been found. Command of the two ships fell to Bartholome Ferrelo.

Finally, the winds calmed and the two ships left Cuyler's Harbor on January 19, 1543. They explored the coast as far north as the Russian River in Oregon before concluding their voyage in Mexico in April 1543. Although this journey set the stage for Santa Barbara's era of Spanish exploration and rule, it was many decades before the Spanish returned to take possession of Santa Barbara.

Sixty years later, **Sebastian Vizcaino** was commissioned to lead another exploratory expedition up the coast of California. As a merchant, rather than a navigator, his appointment was controversial, and many powerful people in Spain felt that he was a poor choice. His fleet of three ships and a crew of 200 left Acapulco in the summer of 1602. Plagued with illness, they voyaged north as quickly as possible.

On December 4, 1602, Vizcaino and his crew anchored off the curving coastline that was to become Santa Barbara. As this was the feast day of Saint Barbara, a legendary Roman martyr and patron saint of sailors, naming the lovely land near the anchorage was an easy choice.

Forgotten for a Century

Despite Vizcaino's reports of this scenic land populated with friendly tribes, Spain neglected California until late in the 18th century. By this time, trade had become an important source of a nation's income and it was evident that the country that controlled California's harbors would reap incredible profits. When England, France, and Russia began to covet California's coastline, Spain knew that it was time to assert its ownership.

The first step toward possession of California was to build presidios (forts) at Monterey and San Diego. Once these two presidios had been established, the Spanish began fortifying the coast between San Francisco and San Diego by constructing two more presidios. In addition to strengthening Spain's hold on the province, these presidios provided refuge for the increasing numbers of travelers between San Francisco and San Diego.

In April 1782, soldiers arrived in Santa Barbara with orders to establish the last of these presidios. Their arrival marked the beginning of Santa Barbara's Spanish era.

Spanish Settlement

When **Lieutenant Jose Francisco de Ortega** and his soldiers arrived in Santa Barbara in 1782 to establish the last of the California presidios, they were accompanied by **Padre Junipero Serra**, the kind, dedicated monk credited with the establishment of many California missions. They sought a location that met two specific criteria: a large, friendly native population to work for them, and a consistent source of good water. Although Goleta was the site of the largest native population, it was rejected due to its uncertain water supply. Dos Pueblos had a good supply of water, but had too few Chumash settlements. Santa Barbara had both.

Under orders not to establish a presidio if the tribes were warlike, Ortega was relieved to be welcomed by **Chief Yanonali**, the Chumash chief who led 13 settlements, stretching from Goleta to

Carpinteria. Yanonali was born in one of the largest, oldest settlements located on a mound 600 feet inland from the beach between today's Bath and Chapala Streets, later known as Burton's Mound. This area is believed to have been continuously inhabited for over 10,000 years.

According to legend, Yanonali led Ortega to a lush thicket from which bubbled two fine springs of clear water. Although Santa Barbara was plagued by swampy land, these springs at the corner of today's Garden and Ortega Streets (later known as De la Guerra Wells) tipped the scales in favor of building the Presidio at Santa Barbara.

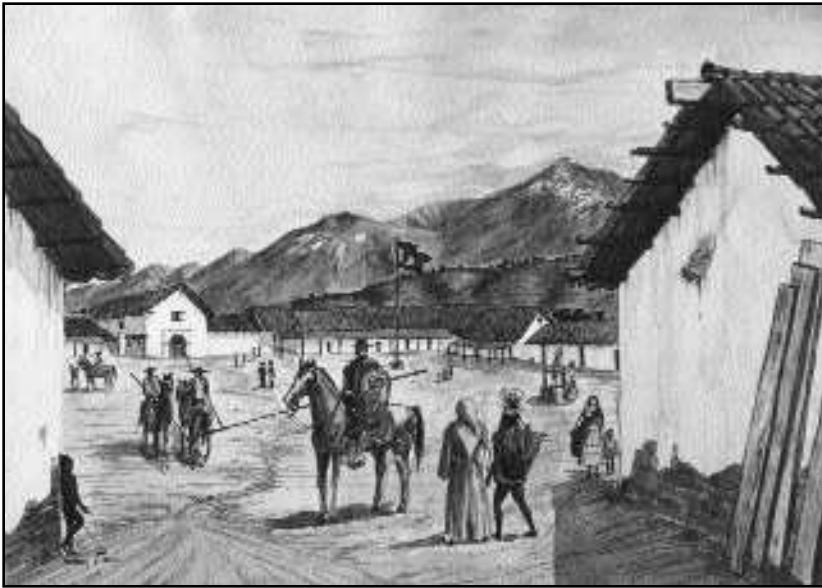
When Yanonali learned that Ortega wanted to build a presidio, he feared that the springs would be overused and leave his people without the water they needed. To reassure him, Ortega brought him gifts. He also brought a promise: he pledged to protect them from attack by the warlike inland valley Tulare tribes.

Eventually, Yanonali's people persuaded him to cooperate with Ortega. Soon they were making adobe bricks for the Presidio and carrying stone for the aqueducts.

The Presidio

Although Ortega selected Santa Barbara because of the spring Yanonali showed him, he did not build the Presidio at the spring. Instead, he avoided the swampy land and mosquitoes by selecting a rise straddling today's intersection of Canon Perdido and Santa Barbara Streets. On April 21, 1782, the birthday of Saint Barbara, Padre Serra formally dedicated the Presidio; praised its perfect location with sweet water, beautiful ocean views, and fertile land; and spoke of the mission that would soon be built. Thirty-six soldiers and several Chumash attended this consecration.

Serra's hopes of building a mission were soon dashed. To his disappointment, the Governor decreed that the mission could not be built until the Presidio had been completed. Old, ill, and discouraged, Serra went back to Monterey to die.



Artist's conception of the Presidio

At first, the Presidio consisted of a crude brush wall surrounding the soldiers' tents. Soon, a chapel, a house for the comandante, barracks for unmarried soldiers, and storage sheds were completed. A roof, made of reeds from the local lagoon, stuck together using the tar from the Carpinteria tar pits, was added.

Progress was slow for a variety of reasons and the Presidio was not completed for many years. Santa Barbara soil was not heavy enough to make strong adobe bricks, so lime had to be dug from the area that is now Hope Ranch, transported to the Presidio, and made into mortar to strengthen the bricks. Additionally, the Chumash were the only source of labor to build the Presidio and to cultivate the surrounding land. Not used to the grueling and regimented work, many Chumash balked and ran away or sickened.

Despite these challenges, slow but steady progress was made. By 1793, the Governor of California announced that Santa Barbara's Presidio was the best in California. When it was finally completed in 1797, the Presidio wall enclosed approximately a city block. Cannon

were placed at each corner of the main gate and the reed roof had been replaced with red clay tiles.

Although it was charged with both military and civil jurisdiction over a large area from Lompoc to Los Angeles, Santa Barbara's Presidio was never a well-provisioned outpost. By 1811, Spanish ships, always rare, stopped coming entirely. Hungry and ragged soldiers waited hopelessly for supplies and wages. By 1813, the Comandante officially informed the Governor that his soldiers had been shirtless, underfed, and unpaid for the past three years. Amazingly, despite this neglect, the soldiers remained loyal to Spain.

The Mission

By 1785, two years after Serra's death and many years before the Presidio was completed, the Governor relented and plans were made to build Santa Barbara's Mission. When **Padre Fermin la Lasuen** and two friars arrived in 1786 to begin building, they rejected the Montecito site that had been selected and chose the higher ground near Mission Creek.

The dedication was planned for December 4, 1786, the feast day of Saint Barbara. When the day arrived, the Governor had not yet arrived, but Padre Lasuen proceeded with the dedication by raising a wooden cross, saying a Mass, and lighting the altar candles so that the Mission could claim Saint Barbara's day as its official establishment date. These altar candles have remained lit since this dedication, making it California's only continuously functioning mission. When the Governor arrived 10 days later, another celebration was held.

Initially, Santa Barbara's Mission was a crude hut. The chapel, constructed of poles and thatch, was completed almost immediately. Soon, the bells sent from Mexico by the King of Spain were strung between poles to call worshipers to services.

During the first six months, 70 Chumash were baptized. Those who came to live at the Mission were called "neophytes" and were taught religion, woodworking, farming, cooking, building,

and weaving. Within a year, 307 neophytes lived at the Mission and had built an adobe chapel, a friars' home, a granary, a kitchen, a carpentry shop, and a tannery. Animals and seed contributed by other missions thrived so that during this first year, fields were cultivated and herds flourished to number 80 cows, 27 sheep, 87 goats, 32 horses, and 9 mules.

Unlike the Presidio, characterized by hungry, ragged, and unpaid soldiers, Santa Barbara's Mission was immediately successful, achieving almost complete self-sufficiency. The Mission continued to flourish for the remainder of the 18th century, and by the close of the century, a reservoir, 3 granaries, a leather shop, a blacksmith shop, and storehouses had been built. Approximately 800 Chumash families lived and worked there. For years, Yanonali had refused to be converted to Christianity. Finally in 1787 he relented, and was baptized "Pedro." He died at the Mission at age 68 in 1805.

The completion of the Mission was delayed by a series of earthquakes. Beginning in December 1812 and continuing until March 1813, these earthquakes caused much structural damage and required extensive



Mission, circa 1887

rebuilding. The Mission was finally completed in 1820, 34 years after it had been established. Its dedication on September 10, 1820 was celebrated with fireworks, musicians, and dancers.

Mission Land

The Mission had the luxury of one resource that was virtually unlimited—land. With the exception of small plots given as a reward to high-ranking soldiers, the Mission controlled all the land in the region. These vast holdings were divided into a number of “ranchos.”

In theory, the Church was holding this land in trust for the neophytes. The plan was that as soon as the neophytes had learned to cultivate it, ownership of all the land would revert to them. Until this time, these enormous tracts of land, rich with crops and herds, were used to support the Mission. Although the King of Spain continued to hope that the Chumash would be rapidly converted and freed to cultivate their land, many knew that the flourishing Mission structure was too powerful a force to disappear soon.

During the Mission’s first 40 years, its wealth, influence, size, and power far outweighed that of the Presidio. As their goals were often at odds, Santa Barbara’s early years were marked by steadily growing feelings of resentment between its military and religious institutions.

Illness Plagues the Mission’s Neophytes

Despite its wealth, by the beginning of the 19th century, a cycle of disease began that would eventually cripple the Mission. In 1801, a serious outbreak of pneumonia in Santa Barbara killed both soldiers and neophytes. Although many soldiers died during this epidemic, the toll was far higher for the neophytes.

Neophytes who survived this pneumonia outbreak soon found themselves ill from a wide variety of other diseases carried by the Spanish. By 1812, it was clear that far too many neophytes were dying of such common illnesses as colds and measles. Also,

birthrates had dropped significantly and many babies did not survive childhood. The padres were forced to face the fact that the Chumash were not thriving in their new role as Christians.

By the time the Mission was completed in 1820, its decline had already begun. Since the Mission was dependent on large numbers of healthy neophytes for its prosperity, their illnesses and declining birth rates foretold its demise. The Mission's power deteriorated quickly while tensions between the religious Mission community and the secular Presidio community grew. When Mexico gained possession of California, the takeover of the Mission and its enormous tracts of land was just around the corner.

Santa Barbara's Founding Families

Some of the original 36 soldiers and 9 scouts of the Presidio brought their wives and families from Mexico with them. Few of them returned to Mexico when their army days were over. Most stayed in Santa Barbara, creating Santa Barbara's founding families.

These families were permitted to build homes outside the Presidio walls. They created a hodgepodge of adobes clustered around the Presidio. Eventually these families, plus the families of a few sailors and traders, had established a tiny community. By 1793, when Vancouver passed through on one of his exploratory journeys, he reported a firmly established community with adequate food.

During these early years, Santa Barbara was an unpleasant place to live. The adobes surrounding the Presidio were dirty, ugly, and odorous. None had glass in their windows, and when the wind blew, dust permeated everything. Garbage and waste lay rotting for rats and seagulls, which performed the only refuse removal services for the young town. Not surprisingly, on hot days, Santa Barbara stunk.

Santa Barbara's Presidio Comandantes, especially **Captain Jose Francisco de Ortega** and **Don Jose De la Guerra y Noriega**, played significant roles in transforming this rough and dirty village into a cleaner, more pleasant town.

Ortega was a skilled engineer who was also fun-loving, overweight, and unwise with money. He established the Presidio in 1782 and served as its Comandante until he was ordered back to Mexico in 1784. Under his command, irrigation ditches were dug so land could be cultivated. Before long, these irrigation ditches nurtured the vegetable gardens, vineyards, and orchards dotting the young Santa Barbara's landscape.

Eventually, Ortega's two weaknesses, obesity and poor money management, left him penniless and jobless. He was forced to seek early retirement at 61, after 36 years of service, because he was so overweight that he could no longer mount his horse. Unfortunately, he was also deeply in debt to the Spanish government.

He asked for some land so that he could raise cattle and eventually pay off his debt. Although the Mission held the land in trust for the Chumash, the Governor agreed to allow him to select some land to work so that he could repay the government. He was warned that this land would revert to the government as soon as he died. He selected land near Refugio.

Ignoring the missionaries' adamant opposition to this private use of land, Ortega moved his wife and 8 children there and built an adobe home, barns, and a corral. Almost immediately, he planted vineyards, fruits, and vegetables and began acquiring cattle. As his sons matured, they each built adobes in adjoining canyons up the coast. Eventually, the Ortegas had settled land stretching 25 miles along the coast near Refugio.

Soon after Ortega moved to Refugio, his money problems were over. He had stumbled into an extremely lucrative trade opportunity. As luck would have it, Refugio was a favorite anchorage for Yankee ships smuggling goods into California. Although this trade was illegal, Ortega was eager to trade and sold his fruits, vegetables, and cowhides to the smugglers.

In exchange for these local goods, Ortega acquired silks and spices from China, shoes and cloth from Peru, and tables and chairs from

New England. He then sold these illegal treasures to soldiers, who had been forgotten and unpaid by Spain for many years and felt no compulsion to enforce Spanish laws. Before long, all soldiers who could afford them had jewelry, clothes, mahogany furniture, and expensive Chinese rugs from Ortega's treasure trove.

When Ortega died in 1798 at 65, his sons stayed. Thirty-six years later, when the missions were secularized, the Ortegas were granted 26,529 acres of coastal land.

Don Jose De la Guerra y Noriega

While the important and wealthy Ortegas were characterized by energy, fun, and a most liberal interpretation of the law, another of Santa Barbara's important founding families, the De la Guerras, was known for their grace and charm. Don Jose De la Guerra y Noriega came to California in 1806 and became a lieutenant at the Presidio. He fell in love with and married Dona Maria Antonia Juliana Carrillo. Dona Maria soon became known as a gracious and affectionate wife, mother, and hostess. According to legend, one



De la Guerra Adobe, circa 1867

American visitor said there were two things in California that were supremely good: Dona Maria and grapes.

When De la Guerra became the Comandante of the Presidio, he and his family built a home next to it. This home became the center of the town's political and social life. During Santa Barbara's Spanish era, it was the site of numerous resplendent celebrations and gatherings. Respectable and courtly, the De la Guerras epitomized pastoral charm and set the standard of behavior for early Santa Barbara society.

De la Guerra is credited with transforming an arid area into the first of the many verdant gardens that distinguish Santa Barbara today. He planted eight acres of gardens and orchards near the spring that Yanonali had shown to Ortega. This spring soon became known as De la Guerra Wells, and today's Garden Street was so named because it bisected these wonderful gardens.

These families established the foundation of the town that Santa Barbara was to become. Together, the soldiers with their adobes clustered around the Presidio and the wealthy founding families such as the Ortegas and De la Guerras, gave Santa Barbara a distinctive Spanish character that remains evident today.

Pirates, Trappers, and Smugglers

According to legend, De la Guerra's courtly manners are credited with helping to foil a pirate's plans to loot California's coastal towns. While he was imprisoned in Santa Barbara in 1816, Captain Henry Gyzellar was so impressed with De la Guerra's courtesy that he returned two years later to warn De la Guerra of an imminent attack by a pirate, **Captain Hipolito de Bouchard**.

Bouchard was an admiral serving Argentina, then a colony fighting for its independence from Spain. Gyzellar had observed him outfitting two frigates in Hawaii and bragging about his plans to attack California ports. Under the guise of striking a blow against Argentina's enemy, Spain, Bouchard hoped these attacks would net him holds filled with precious booty.

As soon as De la Guerra heard of the impending attack, he sent a messenger to Monterey to warn the provincial capital. When Bouchard and 280 heavily armed men arrived in Monterey, on November 22, 1818, demanding the surrender of the provincial capital, most citizens had fled. Bouchard burned and looted homes. After sacking the capital, he headed south with the intention of looting the rich Rancho Refugio and Santa Barbara. Citizens prepared for attack by sending wives and children to the Santa Ines Mission and hiding valuables in the surrounding mountains. As Bouchard approached, they watched and waited.

Bouchard and his ships were sighted off Gaviota on December 2, 1818. **Sergeant Carrillo** and 30 soldiers rushed to Refugio as Bouchard's frigates, with large cannon pointing toward land, anchored near the rancho. Several small boats with armed pirates rowed ashore while Carrillo and his men hid in the brush and waited.

When Bouchard and his men came ashore, they found the rancho deserted. When three of the pirates strayed from the house into the vineyard, Carrillo's men lassoed them and dragged them into the brush. When other pirates tried to rescue them, Carrillo's men began firing from their hiding places.

Bouchard and his small band returned to their ships, but came back the next day with more men. By this time, neophytes from the Mission had arrived to help repel Bouchard's attack. They hid with Carrillo's men and watched. Bouchard and his men burned and looted the rancho, slaughtered all the cattle they could catch, and returned to their ship vowing to destroy Santa Barbara next.

As Bouchard's frigates headed east, Carrillo and his men followed on foot along the coast, watching and waiting for the next attack. Two days later, Bouchard and his men anchored just off Santa Barbara and prepared to attack.

The odds were in favor of Bouchard: 280 pirates to 50 soldiers; 40 large cannon to the Presidio's two small cannon. Carrillo knew his only hope was to fool Bouchard into thinking he had many more soldiers and weapons than he actually had.

He had a plan to do just that: Carrillo gathered his 50 soldiers on the beach and organized them into a march. Each soldier rode from behind the willows into full view of Bouchard, disappeared behind a nearby knoll and circled back to do it again. While hidden behind the knoll, they changed shirts and hats in addition to changing their order of formation so that neither they nor their horses would be recognized.

Carrillo was counting on Bouchard to be watching and hoped he would count the same men over and over and over again. It worked! Bouchard sent an officer ashore under a white truce flag saying: "We can easily batter your adobe houses into dust with our cannon balls. But all we are after is our three men. Give back your prisoners and we will sail away." De la Guerra, the Presidio Comandante, agreed. The prisoners were released, and Bouchard sailed south. He was sighted near San Juan Capistrano briefly and was never seen again.

One footnote to Santa Barbara's pirate tale: one of the three captured pirates was an American, **Joseph Chapman**. He returned to become one of Santa Barbara's most famous foreign residents. He epitomized the typical Yankee: smart, competent, and popular. Eventually, he wooed and married Guadalupe Ortega, whose ranch Bouchard had looted and burned. Descendants of Joseph and Guadalupe still reside in Santa Barbara, and Joseph is buried at the Mission.

Trappers and Smugglers

During Santa Barbara's Spanish years, the young village flourished in an era characterized by a gracious, pastoral society, the strong presence of the Church, and enough isolation from Spain to develop a character uniquely its own.

One advantage of Santa Barbara's isolation from Spain was the ability of residents to ignore laws they did not like. The lucrative and thriving trapping and smuggling operations offer prime examples of Spain's inability to enforce its laws.

Trapping was illegal for all but Spanish nationals. Despite this prohibition, large numbers of non-Spanish trappers from Russia,

England and America's Rocky Mountains came to Santa Barbara regularly. Their quarry, the sea otter, was numerous and easy to catch and their pelts brought a whopping \$30 in Honolulu and \$90 in China. In the face of these enormous profits, trappers found it easy to ignore Spain's anti-trapping law. Soon, Santa Barbara was one of the most profitable trapping locations in the world.

Russians were among the first to enter California waters seeking fur seal and sea otter pelts. As early as 1741, a Russian ship took 900 sea otter skins back to make the cloaks so prized by Russia's aristocracy and royalty.

Before long, word of the rich waters reached American trappers in the Rocky Mountains. These Rocky Mountain trappers were boisterous, hard living, hard fighting and independent. Most left Santa Barbara as soon as their trapping was done, but some stayed. These Americans introduced a new, energetic, and unpolished element to the young settlement that was markedly different from that of the Spanish soldiers.

Soon this wholesale massacre of sea otter resulted in their disappearance from seas around Santa Barbara. Trappers, forced to find another source of income, looked to the other illegal and lucrative activity—smuggling. Conditions were perfect for smuggling to flourish for several reasons:

The law imposing an enormous tax on all non-Spanish ships was not enforced.

The cattle hides sought by smugglers abounded. Previously valueless, these hides, with the advent of smugglers, routinely brought an impressive \$2 each.

Smuggled products were needed in Santa Barbara. These Eastern seaboard goods were essential as there was virtually no local production. With no local coal, no year-round streams large enough to provide power, and none of the metals so valued by industry in the East, manufacturing was difficult, if not impossible.

New England ships would bring coveted products from the East, hide them in coves on Santa Cruz Island, and gradually smuggle

them to Santa Barbara. Hides and tallow would then be surreptitiously loaded, and these untaxed ships would be on their way home with chests full of money and holds full of hides and tallow.

Trading hides and tallow was the perfect solution to Santa Barbara's inability to manufacture its own products and before long, smuggling became its economic foundation. Officials closed their eyes to this smuggling, while respected soldiers, clergy, and leading citizens bought, sold, and profited.

For many, these were good years: Santa Barbara basked in welcome isolation from Spanish rule with hides to sell, valued Eastern goods to buy, and a constant flow of interesting ships from all over the world. They liked this pastoral life and were unsupportive of Mexico's agitation for freedom. It was only when Mexico declared its independence from Spain in 1821 that citizens were forced to face the fact that it was about to become a Mexican territory.