

## Historical Notes

Near the close of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, California was a desolate land. The Spaniards, who had conquered Mexico in their quest for New World riches, judged Alta California to be without value and ignored it for two hundred and fifty years. California might have remained forgotten indefinitely if the Russians coming south from Alaska, and the English moving west from Hudson Bay, hadn't begun coming south into California, driven by their unquenchable appetite for furs. Fearful the security of Nueva España (Mexico) was threatened, Spain decided to create a buffer in California.

In 1769, leather-jacketed Spanish soldiers and gray-robed Franciscan priests, led by Father Junipero Serra, established Mission San Diego de Alcalá, the first in a string of 21 missions that would stretch northward to Sonoma, California, over the next fifty-four years. After founding the first mission they marched up the coast toward Monterey, stopping at Indian villages along their route. At a village called *Mishopshnow* by the Chumash and *La Carpinteria* (the carpenter's shop) by the Spaniards, the soldiers and priests marveled at the *tomols*, sea-going planked canoes, being built.

Cayatu, a young Chumash woman, was born and raised in the village of *Mishopshnow*, east of Santa Barbara. Her father was the leader of the Brotherhood of the Canoe which built the tomols. He held a high rank in the village. Cayatu's mother was also high born, a daughter of the local chief.

The Royal Presidio of Santa Barbara was built in 1782. Three other forts were built at San Diego, Monterey and Yerba Buena (San Francisco). No more than 60 *Soldados de Cuera* (leather-jacketed soldiers) were assigned to the Santa Barbara Presidio and they were spread thinly among the five missions they were charged with protecting—San Gabriel, San Buenaventura, Santa Barbara, Santa Ynez and La Purísima Concepción.

The soldiers who manned the Presidio came from northern Mexico with a party of settlers who were the original founders of the Pueblo of Los Angeles. Most of the men brought their wives and children with them because it was understood from the time they were recruited that they would settle in the new, virtually empty land and probably never see their homeland again. They marched across the parched Sonoran Desert and fording the Colorado River at Yuma, Arizona. Then they continued marching across the California desert to the coast. Josefa and her soldier husband, Guillermo, came to Santa Barbara with the other soldiers, with Josefa carrying their son Joaquin on the long march. The infant didn't survive the hardships of the journey.

After a four-year delay, Mission Santa Barbara was founded on Dec. 4, 1786, the Feast Day of Saint Barbara. Junipero Serra had died by then so the founding ceremony was presided over by *Padre Presidente* Fermin Lasuen. The mission priests immediately began seeking souls to save at the nearby Chumash villages.

The Chumash did not flock to the Santa Barbara Mission for religious reasons; they came to survive. European diseases like small pox, pneumonia, diphtheria and syphilis were spreading through their villages and some of the Indians believed they would escape death at the mission. Their food supply dwindled as the mission cattle and sheep grazed on traditional seed- and acorn-gathering grounds.

Once baptized, neophyte Christians were not allowed to leave the mission. Any of those who did leave without permission were hunted down by soldiers, returned to the mission and punished. Unmarried women were locked in women's quarters each night at the mission to prevent what the priests called promiscuity. The priests punished neophytes for other offenses too, such as lack of attention in worship services. They used whipping, confinement in stocks and other punishments they thought necessary to Christianize the Native Americans. It was the goal of the Spanish Kings, who were considered the protectors of the Pope during this period, to make all native people in the lands Spain colonized good citizens of the Empire, and being a good citizen meant becoming a good Catholic.

Until 1821, only Spanish ships were allowed to trade with Spain's New World possessions. People in Santa Barbara and throughout Alta California depended on the yearly ship that sailed from San Blas, Mexico, to bring them the supplies they could not produce for themselves. In some years the San Blas ship failed to arrive and soldiers, people of the pueblo and mission padres went without both necessities and luxuries.

With free Indian labor Santa Barbara Mission grew rich. Large cattle herds roamed the hills around Santa Barbara by the thousands and provided all the leather the mission and Presidio needed for shoes, saddles and other leather goods. Cow hides and tallow from rendered fat were the mainstays of the early economy. Traders from other nations soon found it profitable to smuggle goods into California to trade for the hides and tallow which were much in demand in eastern mills and factories.

The Mexican rebellion from Spain, which started in 1810 and ended in 1821, meant almost no annual supply ships came to California. Presidio soldiers, unpaid, with tattered uniforms, had to depend on the mission to keep them fed. The soldiers and settlers (*gente de razón*) directed their anger and frustration toward the neophyte Chumash under the protection of the Franciscan priests.

A devastating earthquake rocked Santa Barbara a few days before Christmas 1812, severely damaging both mission and Presidio. During the rebuilding period, soldiers and priests depended on the Chumash for backbreaking labor.

In 1824, the mission Chumash rebelled against what they thought was unfair treatment by the Spanish priests and soldiers. They captured Mission Santa Ynez and encouraged their brothers at Mission Santa Barbara to revolt. Rather than face a pitched battle, most of the Santa Barbara Mission Chumash fled over the mountains to the Tulare Lake region of California's Central Valley. After they fled, Presidio soldiers pillaged their village, killing remaining neophytes too old to

flee with the others. Six months after the revolt, a party of priests and soldiers marched into the Central Valley and forced the Chumash to return. Most reluctantly came back, but Massilili and some others hid and never returned.

Readers of Dream Helper should note that while it is purely a work of fiction it is based on this historical record. The actual time period has been compressed to make a more unified and satisfying story.