

MISSION SAN JOSE DE GUADALUPE  
(La Mision Del Gloriosissimo Patriarca San Jose)  
43300 Mission Boulevard  
Fremont  
Alameda County  
California

HALS CA-75  
*HALS CA-75*

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

## HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

### MISSION SAN JOSE DE GUADALUPE (La Mision Del Gloriosisimo Patriarca San Jose)

HALS NO. CA-75

**Location:** 43300 Mission Boulevard, Fremont, Alameda County, California.  
Lat: 37.533714 Long: -121.919489 (Fountain in the courtyard garden, Google Earth, Simple Cylindrical Projection, WGS84)

**Significance:** The chain of 21 missions built in California between 1769 and 1823 represents some of California's earliest European habitation. Mission construction began while California was still controlled by Spain — long before Mexico gained control in 1821 or the United States took possession in 1846. As each mission was dedicated it formed the core of a new community, many of which grew into major California cities — San Diego, San Luis Obispo, San Francisco, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz and San Rafael all began as missions. Some mission sites were abandoned and some continue as active parishes.

Mission San Jose de Guadalupe was the fourteenth mission founded by the Franciscan Fathers in Alta, California, and the site was consecrated on June 11, 1797. The Mission was the first community and cultural center in the Contra Costa, and was on the northern frontier of Spanish expansion in North America. More Native Americans were baptized here than at any other mission, and it was considered the most prosperous of the missions next to Mission San Luis Rey de Francia.<sup>1</sup>

**Description:** Much of the landscape associated with Mission San Jose appears to have been installed at the time of the reconstruction of the 1809 church between 1982 and 1985 so one could classify the landscape as modern mission revival. Most of the materials used – adobe block, stone, terra-cotta tile, and drought tolerant plant species are compatible with the historic period.

The site runs generally north to south parallel to Mission Boulevard (originally Vallejo Street). The site slopes up from west to east. The street frontage measures 430' and is 230' deep.<sup>2</sup> The cemetery extends the depth of the property at the north. The church is laid out west to east. The monastery wing, now used as a museum and gift shop, is parallel to Mission Boulevard and setback 60-65'. Between the church and monastery wing there is a reconstructed foundation of missing rooms and a raised courtyard garden with a fountain. The monastery wing is the only extant original building.

The landscape along the street frontage from north to south starts with an adobe

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<sup>1</sup> Statement of Significance adapted from the original HABS documentation

<sup>2</sup> Approximate dimensions from Google Earth

wall that wraps around two sides of the cemetery. The 8' high wall has a stone foundation, is made of adobe blocks with a plaster and whitewash finish, and has a cap of terra-cotta roof tiles.

South of the cemetery there is a plaza on the west side of the church. It extends from back of sidewalk to the church steps. The plaza is buff-colored, salt-finished concrete, 90' wide, and 45' deep. A massive set of semi-circular steps, 80 feet across, provide access to the rustic wood church doors. The steps are made with 1 ½" thick 12" x 12" terra-cotta tiles. Two sets of light-weight, wrought-iron handrails divide the steps into thirds. These steps can be seen in an 1868 painting made to record the condition of the church immediately after it was destroyed by an earthquake. The location of the cemetery and the missing rooms can be seen in the same painting. Historically, there was a ten foot square fountain in the plaza that was fed by a nearby hot spring.

South of the plaza the landscape is generally level and consists of planting beds with lawn or low growing shrubs, perennials and trees. A curving concrete path varying in width from 7 – 11' wide weaves through the planting beds. The finish on this path matches the concrete plaza at the church. Along the path there are simply-constructed wood benches with adobe block supports, trash containers, exterior lights that illuminate the monastery wing, and a pair of raised planting beds made of mortared rock. At the midpoint of this space there is an elaborate drainage structure consisting of a rock ramp 23' long and 8 feet wide with a central runnel lined with terra-cotta roof tiles. The runnel starts at the porch on the west side of the monastery wing and ends in a narrow planting bed at the sidewalk.

Plant species in this area include 4 live oaks (*Quercus agrifolia*), alder (*Alnus rhombifolia*), bay (*Laurus nobilis*), bearberry (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*), vine hill manzanita (*Arctostaphylos densiflora*), fortnight lily (*Dietes iridoides*) Mexican bush sage (*Salvia leucantha*), red valerian (*Centranthus ruber*), lantana (*Lantana montevidensis*), sweet alyssum (*Lobularia maritime*), tea tree (*Leptospermus scoparium*) and turf.

An important feature at this site is a marker for the route of the El Camino Real. It is located in the northwest corner of the front garden adjacent to the path that leads to the entrance to the museum. The marker consists of a replica bell on an eleven foot high metal post shaped like a shepherd's crook or "a Franciscan walking stick". The bell was cast with 1769 - the date of the founding of Mission San Jose. A bronze plaque attached to the post notes that the bell was installed May 26, 1963 by the Washington Township Historical Society. Similar markers have been installed at key locations along the 600-mile route of the California Mission Trail. The El Camino Real or Royal Road connected Alta California's 21 missions, 4 presidios and several pueblos. This project began in 1892 and

since 1902 has been spearheaded by the California Federation of Women's Clubs.

Between the street level garden and the monastery building there is a prominent ramp that provides an accessible entrance to the museum. The sixty foot long ramp is faced in course rock with embedded shells, the path surface is concrete and there is a wrought iron handrail. Visitors walk along the monastery wing porch to enter a visitor center/gift shop. Inside there are several small rooms that currently house museum displays. One exits the gift shop to the left and enters the central outdoor space between the church and monastery wing. This space is elevated seven feet above the sidewalk at Mission Boulevard.

An 1860 photograph in the HABS collection shows a white picket fence along what is now Mission Boulevard and less grade change between the street and monastery wing. A 1928 HABS photograph shows a wooden trellis with horizontal members attached to the porch posts, planted with vines. A third photograph, dated 15 February 1934, shows date palms, Italian cypress, olive trees, thuya and salvia growing in the planting beds along Mission Boulevard.

The central space has two primary elements – a replica foundation of missing rooms and a courtyard garden. The interpretation of the missing rooms consists of mortared stone bands that outline the building foundation and interior rooms. The perimeter band of stones is 30” wide. The rooms within the building are shown with narrower bands – 24” wide. The spaces defined by these bands are filled with gold rock. Remnant adobe walls from the missing rooms are attached to the south side of the church and look like buttress walls. One wood timber about 15’ long is placed within the building footprint - a fragment from the original building. The replica foundation interpretation is surrounded by a hemp rope handrail threaded through rings on wrought iron posts.

The courtyard garden is elevated above the 11’ wide path that runs north-south between the missing rooms and the garden. There is a two foot high adobe wall between the path and courtyard garden. This wall is similar to others on site. It has a stone foundation, is made of 20” x 3” thick adobe blocks with a whitewashed plaster finish. The original block dimensions were 22” x 11” x 5” thick. The wall is capped with two 12” x 12” terra-cotta tiles, so the wall is 24” wide. As part of the interpretation a portion of the plaster has been left off exposing the adobe blocks so visitors can see how the wall was constructed.

The centerpiece of the courtyard garden is a three-tiered cast concrete fountain within a six-sided basin. The walls of the basin are made to emulate the adobe walls and the cap is a single row of 12” terra-cotta tiles. A 5’6” wide path surrounds the basin and is made of 6” square terra-cotta tiles. Broad parallelogram-shaped planting beds surround the basin. These are planted with roses, rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*), lavender (*Lavandula* sp.), red valerian

Carmel creeper (*Ceanothus griseus horizontalis*), and coyote bush (*Baccharis pilularis* `Twin Peaks'). There are eight olive trees (*Olive europae*) and one Canary Island pine (*Pinus canariensis*) in the garden.<sup>3</sup>

A few graves are located in the northeast corner of the courtyard garden. Most are modest marble slabs - one has a rusted, decorative wrought iron fence. The grave for Salvio Higuera has a granite base, a marble urn and a marble obelisk set on a pedestal topped with a figure in flowing robes. There is also a monument to World War II soldiers that was erected by the Mission M.S. Club, and a bronze plaque in the shape of the State of California mounted on a boulder that commemorates "Lt. Colonel Juan Bautista who led the DeAnza Expedition in 1775-76 to lay out the missions and colonize the San Francisco Bay. The trail is part of the 1200 mile Juan Bautista De Anza National Historic Trail."

The east portion of the courtyard garden is a patio 23' x 47', paved with 6" square terra-cotta tile pavers, and surrounded by a seat height adobe wall with a terra-cotta tile cap. The courtyard is surrounded on two sides by a 6' tall, wood picket fence painted white. There are three wooden benches in the garden.

A bronze sculpture of Father Junipero Serra 1713 – 1784, founder of the first nine missions is located in the southwest corner of the garden courtyard. Paths in this area and surrounding the missing buildings are all paved with 6" square terra-cotta tile pavers. Paths are edged with stones. Two paths lead to south facing doors into the church. Exiting on the north side of the church leads into the cemetery.

Within the cemetery there is an H-shaped path made of concrete and edged with stones. The cemetery is terraced to accommodate the grade change. There are a variety of styles of headstones and monuments – flat and upright - for whole burial and cremains. These are granite or marble, polished and rough, simple and ornate. Some graves are covered with slabs of stone or concrete and some are enclosed by decorative iron fences. The surface between paths and graves is compacted earth. There is a rustic 12' high wooden cross at the terminus of one path. From the west looking toward the cross one has a view of rounded, grass-covered hills in the background.

The dominant plants in the cemetery are eleven oleander (*Nerium oleander*) that have been sheared into upside down gumdrop-shapes 6' to 8' in diameter and about 4 ½' tall. Sheared oleander is also used for hedging in the lower portion of the cemetery. Trees include cedar, 2 redwoods (*Sequoia sempervirens*), pruned willow (*Salix* sp), and a date palm (*Phoenix canariensis*).

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<sup>3</sup> According to "Missions of California" by Don Baxter these olive trees were planted by the padres and Native Americans working at the mission.

There are several familiar names on the grave markers – names of persons for whom local towns, and streets are named. One such marker is for “Robert Livermore – the first Anglo-Saxon settler of the Livermore Valley who was born in England in 1799 and died in Livermore in 1858”. This bronze plaque mounted on an upright granite boulder depicts a covered wagon in route to California. The plaque was installed in 1935 by the Native Daughters of the Golden West.

A skull and crossbones mounted over the church door and note explain that “The bodies of hundreds of our predecessors from the Mission Period – Native Americans, Mexicans & Spaniards alike rest here.” The small wooden crosses that once marked their graves are now gone. One mile north, on a knoll is the Ohlone cemetery where 4000 Native Americans are buried.

An 1868 map of the mission property prepared by W.F. Boardman, County Surveyor<sup>4</sup> shows the extent of orchards and vineyards surrounding the complex of buildings that covered a much greater area than what the mission property currently occupies. It also shows the location of Mission Creek and a ditch and flume where a mill was built. Individual olive trees are marked as well as an orchard and a group of “Old Pear and \_\_\_ (illegible) Trees”. The town buildings and individual lots west of the church property are also shown on this survey. Today all of this land has been redeveloped.

History: Mission San Jose was founded on June 11, 1797 by Father Fermin Francisco de Lasuen. It was the fourteenth of California’s twenty-one missions and the first of five missions Father Lasuen planned to fill in the gaps between the original thirteen missions.

Expansion of the mission started slowly – in the first year only 33 natives were converted to Catholicism, but ultimately Mission San Jose became the largest and most prosperous of the northern missions. It converted more Native Americans - 6737 than any other mission except San Luis Rey. Prior to secularization Mission San Jose reported having 12,000 cattle, 13,000 horses and 11,000 sheep that grazed on a vast territory. Vineyards, olive orchards, fruit orchards and wheat fields adjoined the mission lands.

A German explorer Georg Heinrich von Langsdorff visited the mission in 1806 and described the bounty of Mission San Jose in his diary, “The quantity of corn in the granaries far exceeded my expectations ... and a proportionate quantity of maize, barley, peas, beans, and other grain. The kitchen garden is extremely well laid out, and kept in very good order; the soil is everywhere rich and fertile, and yields ample returns .... A small rivulet runs through the garden, which

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<sup>4</sup> HABS call number HABS CAL, 1-FREMO, 1--22

preserves constant moisture ... The situation of the establishment is admirably chosen, and according to the universal opinion the mission will in a few years be the richest and best in New California.”<sup>5</sup>

The Mission was known for its production of olive oil and for its Native American musicians – a band and choir taught by Father Narciso Duran. In May 1827 when Jedediah Strong Smith spent time at the mission he noted that the band had “12 or 15 violins, 5 base vials and one flute.” During the 1830’s and 1840’s Mission San Jose functioned as the social center for the ranchos on the east side of San Francisco Bay.

Father Duran and Father Buenaventura Fortuni were assigned to Mission San Jose in 1806 and are credited with its success. Father Fortuni remained at Mission San Jose until 1825 when he left to serve at Mission San Francisco Solano in Sonoma, and Father Duran continued to serve until 1833, shortly before Mission San Jose was secularized. Father Duran served three terms as President of the mission chain and was considered one of the most prominent friars in Alta California.

The original church building was completed in September of 1797 and expanded in 1798. That building was replaced by a larger adobe church in 1809. Other buildings in the quadrangle housed the padres, a granary, schoolrooms, workshops, dwellings for converts, and barracks for soldiers, guestrooms, storage areas and a gristmill on Mission Creek. At its peak there were more than 100 buildings in the complex. See the HABS records for details on the dates of construction of buildings. There was a reservoir east of the quadrangle and aqueducts that brought water to the complex.

The 1809 edifice stood until it was destroyed in an earthquake on October 21, 1868. In 1869, the adobe church was replaced by a wooden gothic-style church built over the original foundation. That building was moved to the City of Burlingame in 1982 and an authentic replica of the 1809 adobe church was reconstructed and completed in 1985. An 1852 daguerreotype made by Thomas Houseworth & Company – one of the oldest extant mission photos – illustrates that the reconstruction accurately reflects the 1809 structure, except a tower element was added to the northwest corner.

Mission San Jose was the second to last to be secularized in 1836 and Jose de Jesus Vallejo was placed in charge. Vallejo was fired by William Hartnell for neglecting the welfare of the Native Americans living on mission lands.<sup>6</sup> Between 1936 and 1946 four ranchos were carved out of mission property and became Washington Township (Rancho Aqua Caliente), Rancho Arroyo de la

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<sup>5</sup> “The Diary and Copybook of William E.P. Hartnell: Visitador General of the Missions of Alta California in 1839 and 1840”.

<sup>6</sup> Hartnell

Alameda, Rancho Potrero de Los Cerritos, and Rancho Ex-Mission San Jose Lands. In 1846 the mission was sold by Governor Pio Pico to his brother Andres Pico and Juan Bautista Alvarado for \$12,000 even though the property was valued at \$155,000. That sale was annulled when the United States acquired California from Mexico. The property was returned to the Catholic Church in 1858.

For a short time portions of the mission were used by renters and squatters. During the California Gold Rush it served as a trading post run by Henry C. Smith, a member of General Fremont's California Battalion. In the 1860s a tavern and hotel occupied space at the mission.

Ultimately 3500 acres of the lands of Mission San Jose were acquired by Elian Lyman Beard who lived at the mission until 1876. The Beard homestead became the motherhouse and novitiate of the Sisters of the Holy Family, now known as Palmdale – so named because of a row of very tall Mexican fan palms (*Washingtonia robusta*) and other palm species on the property.<sup>7</sup>

See the HABS records for more detail on the dates of construction and history of the site. Today the mission church is part of St. Joseph's Parish in Fremont, and is part of the Diocese of Oakland.

Mission San Jose is California State Landmark No. 334, and listed on the National Register of Historic Places NRIS No. 71000131.

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<sup>7</sup> "Palmdale: Convent of the Sisters of the Holy Family".

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<http://www.solideas.com/DeAnza/TrailGuide/>

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West facing front of the church with the semi-circular steps. The cemetery is seen at the left and the De Anza Trail mission bell on the right. (Chris Pattillo, February 2012).



View of the church from the cemetery. Rusted, decorative, wrought-iron fences surround some graves. (Chris Pattillo, February 2012).



The central space with the “Missing Rooms” interpretation in the foreground, a low adobe wall, tile pavers, and the courtyard garden in the background. Olive trees in this photo may be original. (Chris Pattillo, February 2012).



The courtyard garden with the central fountain, tile paths edged with stone and sculpture of Father Junipero Serra (1713 – 1784). Olive trees, graves and the church in the background. (Chris Pattillo, February 2012).



Looking over the “Missing Buildings” interpretation at the original monastery wing (now restored). (Chris Pattillo, February 2012).