George Vancouver
1792

Father-president Junípero Serra died in 1784 after baptizing about 6,000 Indians and founding nine missions (including two in the San Francisco Bay Area). He was succeeded the following year by Fermín Francisco de Lasuén, an urbane and diplomatic administrator more inclined than Serra to work with California's military and civilian leaders rather than against them. In his eighteen years as father-president, Lasuén doubled the number of missions in Alta California and quadrupled their neophytes from 5,800 to about 20,000. He replaced Serra's ramshackle stick-and-mud mission buildings with elegant tile-roofed stone and *adobe* churches, arcades, and courtyards—creating what is today considered "mission architecture." He envisioned the missions as equal parts church, school, and factory, employing neophytes as carpenters, masons, and *vaqueros,* and processing raw materials into clothing, pottery, candles, soap, and furniture.

While the missions grew, they hardly prospered. Despite Lasuén's attempts at economic diversification, late-eighteenth century California missions relied heavily on cattle raising, which furnished not only meat but horns, hides, and tallow. Mission agriculture utilized a mix of Spanish and New World crops but struggled with soil depletion, inefficient fertilization, and frequent droughts. Indian workers tended to be malnourished, depressed, and often sick (almost 60 percent of mission Indians died during the 1890s). Spanish

settlement was confined to a swath of coastal land 500 miles long but only thirty miles wide.

Spain, conscious of its tenuous grasp on California and the New World, officially closed the entire coast north of Chile to all foreign vessels, hoping its once-fearsome reputation as a colonial and naval power would hide its vulnerability. But in 1784 English explorer James Cook's journal stirred European imaginations with its descriptions of abundant Pacific Northwest furs (Cook sold his modest cargo in Hong Kong for 2,000 pounds); five or six private fur traders a year began to make the difficult journey from China. None of these ships stopped at California, but Spain, alarmed by the potential threat, attacked and captured several English ships near Nootka, Alaska, in 1789. War between the two nations was averted only by Spain's realization that it had no vessels with which to fight the armada that England was rapidly assembling. In 1790 the two governments agreed on the Nootka Sound Convention, wherein Spain relinquished exclusive sovereignty of the northern Pacific coast, opening it to entrepreneurs of both nations. By pressing its claims to the entire coastline, Spain had revealed how little power stood behind them.

George Vancouver, a British naval captain who had sailed as a midshipman on Cook's second and third voyages, was commissioned in 1791 to repossess the property seized from the English traders and to survey the coast and visit California settlements in the process. Born in Norfolk, England, in 1757 to an upper-class deputy customs collector, Vancouver dropped out of school at age fifteen to join the navy. After sailing to virtually every point in the Pacific during his eight years with Cook, Vancouver spent most of the 1780s exploring in the West Indies. His unique knowledge of the Pacific and meticulous cartographic skills made him a natural choice to command the *Discovery*'s voyage to California.

Vancouver first stopped at Nootka to discuss points of repossession with Spain's representative, Juan Francisco de la Bódega y Cuadro. While regaling the officers of the *Discovery* with lavish dinner parties, Bódega y Cuadro attempted to renegotiate a more favorable

northern California boundary for Spain. Although impressed with Spanish hospitality, Vancouver had no authority to reopen negotiations and so departed with the northern limit of California left undefined. Sailing south, the *Discovery* stopped often to chart the coastline, dispatching boats up navigable rivers and fjords (proving once and for all that there was no Northwest Passage to the Atlantic among the channels of Puget Sound). The problem of exactly locating the ship's position was solved through the use of chronometers set to Greenwich time, supplemented through tedious astronomical observations—no less than eighty-five observations of the moon were taken off Cape Mendocino.

It took a month to reach San Francisco Bay from Nootka. The trip was harrowing at times—heavy rains and turbulent waves buffeted the ship, washing one sailor overboard. Some of the seamen began showing signs of scurvy, a condition that could have been alleviated had fresh fruit been found onshore, but despite their fastidious surveying, they had encountered no harbor safe enough to enter. The *Discovery* anchored in San Francisco Bay on November 14, 1792. Vancouver surely had in mind an image of Spanish colonial life founded on three centuries of Spanish dominance of the western hemisphere, an image reinforced by Bódega y Cuadro's court at Nootka. But instead of a proud military *presidio* he found a collection of impoverished mud huts protected by two antiquated cannons. Clearly, the defense of California rested not on these guns but on the ignorance of the rest of the world.

The *Discovery* was the first non-Spanish ship to sail into San Francisco Bay but not the first to visit Spanish settlements in Alta California. For ten days in 1786, French navigator Jean François de La Pérouse and his team of engineers, artists, and scientists sojourned at Monterey, gathering information on the region's geography, natural resources, and government. In his widely read journal, La Pérouse sang California's praises, calling the soil "inexpressibly fertile," adding that "no country is more abundant in fish and game of every description." Five years later, Italian naval officer Alejandro

Malaspina, leader of a Spanish round-the-world scientific expedition, likewise stopped at Monterey. His naturalists and artists completed surveys of Monterey Bay Area birds, sea life, and trees (including the first scientific description of a redwood).

The military leaders of California had received La Pérouse and Malaspina with much fanfare but argued over how to treat Vancouver. On one hand, the *Discovery* offered exotic gifts and news of the outside world to isolated California, but on the other, it reported back to England, Spain's greatest rival for the Pacific. José Darío Argüello and Hermenegildo Sal (temporary commanders of Monterey and San Francisco while Gobernador José Arrillaga was visiting Baja) extended Vancouver every hospitality during his initial two-month visit to California, providing free supplies, entertainment, and tours. But when Vancouver revisited California in 1793 after sailing to the Hawaiian Islands, Arrillaga had returned, and he was barely permitted to leave his ship.

Vancouver's life after his voyage on the *Discovery* was marked by scandal and ill health. He most likely suffered from a hyperthyroid condition (probably Graves' disease) that accounted for his bouts of irritability, loss of temper, and fatigue. In 1796 a young midshipman named Thomas Pitt, who had sailed with Vancouver, accused him of mistreatment. Although a dozen lashes with the cat-o'-nine-tails was a common naval punishment, Pitt alleged that Vancouver brutally flogged and shackled his men for the slightest offense. Ship records indicate Vancouver administered a total of ninety-five floggings during the four-and-a-half-year trip (ranging from twelve to seventy-two lashes each), a record similar to other long voyages of the time. But because Pitt hailed from an influential family, he managed to launch a formal investigation into Vancouver's conduct. Controversy continued to swirl around Vancouver until his death two years later at age forty-one.

The popularity of *A Voyage of Discovery*, published in 1798, suffered from Vancouver's reputation as cruel and tyrannical. But his portrayal of California's enticing landscape and the Spaniards' pitiful

defenses did increase interest in the region and further encouraged European ships to defy Spanish policy. Today, *A Voyage of Discovery*'s greatest value lies in Vancouver's descriptions of early life in the missions. However, it should be noted that Vancouver's disgust at California's poverty and the mistreatment of the Indians was, at least in part, influenced by Spain's status as a rival power. Modern defenders of the mission system have also suggested that his misgivings were likely bolstered by "the Black Legend," a two-centuries-old tradition of gruesome stories by French, Dutch, and English propagandists that detailed Spanish cruelties toward indigenous peoples of the New World. Nevertheless, one cannot help but notice the profound differences between early descriptions of native peoples (from Crespí, Santa María, and other observers) given before the missions were established and Vancouver's depiction of Indians under the mission system as miserable, dispirited, and degraded. That Vancouver held little sympathy for the depressed Indians he observed illustrates his failure to perceive that they had not always been so.

In fact, the San Francisco Bay Area had been radically altered between 1776 and 1792. The traditional, communal life the region's various Indian groups had known for millennia had been increasingly replaced by forced assimilation, oppression, and death. Indians, first attracted to the missions out of curiosity or self-interest, discovered they were not allowed to leave. Massive environmental changes were triggered by the prohibition of controlled burnings and the overgrazing of mission livestock. And a host of diseases, most notably dysentery and syphilis, devastated entire Bay Area tribal groups, especially infants. By the time of Vancouver's visit in 1792, the Indians of San Francisco Bay had been rendered, in the words of anthropologist Randall Milliken, "a culturally shocked and broken people living in a bewildering foreign environment." This account of Vancouver's visit begins Thursday, November 15, 1792, on the *Discovery*'s first morning in San Francisco Bay.

Portrait believed to be of George Vancouver (1757–1798). The goiter-like appearance of his neck supports historians' belief that he suffered from a hyperthyroid condition (probably Graves' disease). *Courtesy of The Bancroft Library.*

GEORGE VANCOUVER

from *A Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean*

Thursday morning, November 15, we discovered our anchorage to be in a most excellent small bay, within three-fourths of a mile of the nearest shore, bearing by a compass south; one point of the bay bearing N 56 W, the other S 73 E; the former at the distance of two-and-a-half, the latter about three miles. The herds of cattle and flocks of sheep grazing on the surrounding hills were a sight we had long been strangers to and brought to our minds many pleasing reflections. These indicated that the residence of their proprietors could not be far remote, though we could perceive neither habitations nor inhabitants. On hoisting the colors at sunrise, a gun was fired, and in a little time afterwards several people were seen on horseback coming from behind the hills down to the beach, who waved their hats and made other signals for a boat, which was immediately sent to the shore. On its return, I was favored with the good company of a priest of the order of San Francisco and a sergeant in the Spanish army to breakfast. The reverend father expressed, and seemingly with great sincerity, the pleasure he felt at our arrival and assured me that every refreshment and service in the power of himself or mission to bestow, I might unreservedly command since it would be conferring on them all a peculiar obligation to allow them to be serviceable. The sergeant expressed himself in the most friendly manner and informed me that in the absence of the commandant, he was directed on our arrival to render us every accommodation the settlement could afford.

We attended them on shore after breakfast, where they embraced the earliest opportunity of proving that their friendly expressions were not empty professions by presenting me with a very fine ox, a sheep, and some excellent vegetables. The good friar, after pointing out the most convenient spot for procuring wood and water, and repeating the hospitable offers he had before made in the name of the fathers of the Franciscan order, returned to the mission of San Francisco, which we understood was at no great distance, and to which he gave us the most pressing invitation.

From these gentlemen, we learned that the station we had taken was far within the general anchoring place of the Spanish vessels, which they said was off that part of the shore where the light was shone and guns fired the preceding night on the beach, near the entrance into the port. Our situation was, however, perfectly commodious and suitable to all our purposes, and with permission of the sergeant, I directed a tent to be pitched for the accommodation of the party employed in procuring wood and water, whilst the rest of the crew were engaged on board in repairing the damages sustained in our sails, rigging, etc., during the tempestuous weather with which we had lately contended.

We amused ourselves with shooting a few quails on the adjacent hills and, in the afternoon, returned on board to partake of the excellent repast, which had been supplied by our hospitable friends. Whilst we were thus pleasantly engaged, our boat brought off Father Antonio Danti,[1] the principal of the mission of San Francisco, and Señor Don Hermenegildo Sal,[2] an ensign in the Spanish army and commandant of the port. This gentleman, like those who visited us in the morning, met us with such warm expressions of friend-

[1] Father Antonio Danti oversaw Mission San Francisco from 1790 to 1796.

[2] Hermenegildo Sal, born in Spain, had accompanied Anza to San Francisco in 1776. He served as *comandante* of the San Francisco *presidio* from 1791 to 1794. Vancouver, impressed by Sal's hospitality, later named Point Sal on the Santa Barbara County coast after him.

ship and goodwill, as were not less deserving our highest commendations than our most grateful acknowledgments....

The little we had seen of Port San Francisco enabled us to decide that it was very extensive in two directions; one spacious branch took its course east and southward to a great distance from the station we had quitted in the morning, the other apparently of equal magnitude led to the northward. In this were several islands. Although I had been informed by Señor Quadra[3] that the boundaries of this inlet had been defined, I was anxious to be more particularly acquainted with its extent, having since been given to understand that Señor Quadra's was by no means correct.

Near the branch leading to the east and southeastward above mentioned is situated the mission of Santa Clara.[4] These gentlemen informed me that this branch had been thoroughly examined, but that the branch leading to the north never had. I was, however, obliged to remain contented under the uncertainty of such contradictory information; for the port having been established by Spain, I did not consider it prudent authority for so doing; nor was the weather favorable for such an undertaking, though it did not prevent the exercise of those friendly dispositions in the Spanish *comandante*, which he had before professed. He had been sometime on the beach in the rain before we anchored, for the purpose of instantly affording us any assistance in his power to supply.

A message to this effect was brought by three of the native Indians who spoke Spanish and who came on board in a canoe of the country; which with another, (though perhaps the same) seen crossing the harbor the evening we entered it, were the only Indian vessels we had met with, and were without exception the most rude and

[3] Juan Francisco de la Bódega y Cuadro, the Spanish lieutenant Vancouver negotiated with at Nootka.

[4] Mission Santa Clara de Asís was established in 1777 on the bank of the Guadalupe River in the present-day town of Santa Clara.

sorry contrivances for embarkation I had ever beheld. The length of them was about ten feet, the breadth about three or four. They were constructed of rushes and dried grass of a long broad leaf, made up into rolls the length of the canoe, the thickest in the middle, and regularly tapering to a point at each end. These are so disposed that on their ends being secured and lashed together, the vessel is formed, which being broadest in the middle, and coming to a point at each extremity, goes with either end foremost. These rolls are laid and fastened so close to each other that in calm weather and smooth water I believe them to be tolerably dry, but they appeared to be very ill-calculated to contend with wind and waves. The wind now blew strong with heavy squalls from the SW, and in the middle of this spacious inlet, the sea broke with much force; notwithstanding which, as soon as these people had delivered their message, they crossed the inlet for the purpose of catching fish, without seeming to entertain the least apprehension for their safety. They conducted their canoe or vessel by long, double-bladed paddles, like those used by the Esquimaux [Eskimo].

The SW wind, attended by much rain, blew very hard until Saturday morning the 17th; when the weather became more moderate, I visited the shore. I was greatly mortified to find that neither wood nor water could be procured with such convenience, nor of so good a quality, as at the station we had quitted a league-and-a-half within the entrance of the port on the southern shore. But as our Spanish friends had informed us that the water here was far superior in its quality to that at Monterey, there was now no alternative but that of taking what the country afforded. A tent was immediately pitched on the shore, wells were dug for obtaining water, and a party was employed in procuring fuel from small, bushy, holly-leaved oaks, the only trees fit for our purpose. A lagoon of sea water was between the beach and the spot on which these trees grew, which rendered the conveying the wood when cut a very laborious operation.

Whilst engaged in allotting to the people their different employments, some saddle horses arrived from the commandant with a very cordial invitation to his habitation, which was accepted by myself and some of the officers. We rode up to the *presidio*, an appellation given to their military establishments in this country and signifying a safeguard. The residence of the friars is called a mission. We soon arrived at the *presidio*, which was not more than a mile from our landing place. Its wall, which fronted the harbor, was visible from the ships; but instead of the city or town, whose lights we had so anxiously looked for on the night of our arrival, we were conducted into a spacious verdant plain, surrounded by hills on every side, excepting that which fronted the port. The only object of human industry that presented itself was a square area, whose sides were about 200 yards in length, enclosed by a mud wall and resembling a pound for cattle. Above this wall, the thatched roofs of their low, small houses just made their appearance. On entering the *presidio*, we found one of its sides still unenclosed by the wall and very indifferently fenced in by a few bushes here and there, fastened to stakes in the ground. The unfinished state of this part afforded us an opportunity of seeing the strength of the wall and the manner in which it was constructed. It is about fourteen feet high and five feet in breadth, and was first formed by uprights and horizontal rafters of large timber, between which dried sods and moistened earth were pressed as close and as hard as possible; after which the whole was cased with the earth made into a sort of mud plaster, which gave it the appearance of durability and of being sufficiently strong to protect them, with the assistance of their firearms, against all the force which the natives of the country might be able to collect.

The Spanish soldiers composing the garrison amounted, I understood, to thirty-five; who, with their wives, families, and a few Indian servants, composed the whole of the inhabitants. Their houses were along the wall within the square, and their fronts uniformly

"Soldier of Monterey," 1791, by José Cardero, an artist with the Malaspina expedition. Gabriel Moraga, the twenty-six-year-old soldier depicted, came to California with his mother in 1781 and later became the leading explorer of the Central Valley. *Courtesy of The Bancroft Library.*

extended the same distance into the area, which is a clear open space, without buildings or other interruptions. The only entrance into it is by a large gateway; facing which, and against the center of the opposite wall or side, is the church, which, though small, was neat in comparison to the rest of the buildings. This projects further into the square than the houses and is distinguishable from the other edifices by being whitewashed with lime made from seashells (limestone or calcareous earth not having yet been discovered in the neighborhood). On the left of the church is the commandant's house, consisting, I believe, of two rooms and a closet only, which are divided by massy walls, similar to that which encloses the square and communicating with each other by very small doors. Between these apartments and the outward wall was an excellent poultry house and yard, which seemed pretty well-stocked. Between the roof and ceilings of the rooms was a kind of lumber garret; those were all the conveniences the habitation seemed calculated to afford. The rest of the houses, though smaller, were fashioned exactly after the same manner; and in the winter, or rainy seasons, must at the best be very uncomfortable dwellings. For though the walls are a sufficient security against the inclemency of the weather, yet the windows, which are cut in the front wall, and look into the square, are destitute of glass, or any other defense that does not at the same time exclude the light.

The apartment in the commandant's house, into which we were ushered, was about thirty feet long, fourteen feet broad, and twelve feet high; and the other room, or chamber, I judged to be of the same dimensions, excepting in its length, which appeared to be somewhat less. The floor was of the native soil raised about three feet from its original level, without being boarded, paved, or even reduced to an even surface. The roof was covered in with flags and rushes; the walls on the inside had once been whitewashed; the furniture consisted of a very sparing assortment of the most indispensable

articles, of the rudest fashion and of the meanest kind; and ill-accorded with the ideas we had conceived of the sumptuous manner in which the Spaniards live on this side of the globe.

It would, however, be the highest injustice, notwithstanding that elegancies were wanting, not to acknowledge the very cordial reception and hearty welcome we experienced from our worthy host, who had provided a refreshing repast, and such a one as he thought likely to be most acceptable at that time of the day; nor was his lady less assiduous, nor did she seem less happy than himself in entertaining her new guests.

On approaching the house we found this good lady—who, like her spouse, had passed the middle age of life—decently dressed, seated cross-legged on a mat, placed on a small, square wooden platform raised three or four inches from the ground, nearly in front of the door, with two daughters and a son, clean and decently dressed, sitting by her; this being the mode observed by these ladies when they receive visitors. The decorous and pleasing behavior of the children was really admirable and exceeded anything that could have been expected from them under the circumstances of their situation, without any other advantages than the education and example of their parents; which however seemed to have been studiously attended to and did them great credit. This pleasing sight, added to the friendly reception of our host and hostess, rendered their lowly residence no longer an object of our attention. Having partaken of the refreshments they had provided, we remounted our horses in order to take a view of the surrounding country before we returned on board to dinner, where Señor Sal and his family had promised to favor me with their good company, and who had requested my permission to increase their party by the addition of some other ladies in the garrison.

Our excursion did not extend far from the *presidio*, which is situated as before described in a plain surrounded by hills. This plain

"The Wife of a Monterey Soldier," 1791, by José Cardero. She likely came to California from Sonora with Juan Bautista de Anza in 1775. *Courtesy of The Bancroft Library.*

is by no means a dead flat, but of unequal surface; the sod is of a sandy nature and was wholly under pasture, on which were grazing several flocks of sheep and herds of cattle. The sides of the surrounding hills, though but moderately elevated, seemed barren, or nearly so; and their summits were composed of naked, uneven rocks. Two small spaces in the plain, very insecurely enclosed, were appropriated to kitchen gardens. Much labor did not appear to have been bestowed either in the improvement of the soil, in selecting the quality of the vegetables, or in augmenting their produce; the several seeds once placed in the ground, nature was left to do the rest without receiving any assistance from manual labor.

Señor Sal, having been made acquainted with the difficulties we had to encounter in removing our wood to the sea side, politely offered us the carts he had for the use of the *presidio*; but on their being produced, I was greatly disappointed, as they were by no means so well-calculated as the miserable straw canoes for the service they were intended to perform.

Thus, at the expense of very little examination, though not without much disappointment, was our curiosity satisfied concerning the Spanish town and settlement of San Francisco. Instead of finding a country tolerably well-inhabited and far advanced in cultivation—if we except its natural pastures, the flocks of sheep, and herds of cattle—there is not an object to indicate the most remote connection with any European or other civilized nation.

This sketch will be sufficient, without further comment, to convey some idea of the inactive spirit of the people and the unprotected state of the establishment at this port, which I should conceive ought to be a principal object of the Spanish crown, as a key and barrier to their more southern and valuable settlements on the borders of the north Pacific. Should my idea of its importance be overrated, certain it is, that considered solely as an establishment, which must have been formed at considerable expense, it possesses no other

means for its protection than such as have been already described; with a brass three-pounder mounted on a rotten carriage before the *presidio*, and a similar piece of ordnance which (I was told) was at the SE point of entrance lashed to a log instead of a carriage; and was the gun whose report we heard the evening of our arrival. Before the *presidio* there had formerly been two pieces of ordnance, but one of them had lately burst to pieces.

The examination of these few objects, and the consequent observations upon them, occupied our leisure until dinnertime, when we returned on board, accompanied by Señor Sal, his wife, and party, and one of the fathers of the mission of San Francisco, Martín de Landaeta, who brought me a pressing and polite invitation from his brethren, and who proved to be a very pleasing and entertaining acquisition to our society.

The next day, Sunday the 18th, was appointed for my visiting the mission [San Francisco]. Accompanied by Mr. Menzies and some of the officers, and our friendly Señor Sal, I rode thither to dinner. Its distance from the *presidio* is about a league in an easterly direction. Our ride was rendered unpleasant by the soil being very loose and sandy, and by the road being much incommoded with low, groveling bushes.

Its situation and external appearance in a great measure resembled that of the *presidio*; and, like its neighborhood, the country was pleasingly diversified with hill and dale. The hills were at a greater distance from each other and gave more extent to the plain, which is composed of a soil infinitely richer than that of the *presidio*, being a mixture of sand and a black vegetable mold. The pastures bore a more luxuriant herbage and fed a greater number of sheep and cattle. The barren sandy country through which we had passed seemed to make a natural division between the lands of the mission and those of the *presidio*, and extends from the shores of the port to the foot of a ridge of mountains, which border on the exterior

coast, and appear to stretch in a line parallel to it. The verdure of the plain continued to a considerable height up the sides of these hills; the summits of which, though still composed of rugged rocks, produced a few trees.

The buildings of the mission formed two sides of a square only and did not appear as if intended, at any future time, to form a perfect quadrangle like the *presidio*. The architecture and materials, however, seemed nearly to correspond.

On our arrival, we were received by the reverend fathers with every demonstration of cordiality, friendship, and the most genuine hospitality. We were instantly conducted to their mansion, which was situated near, and communicated with the church. The houses formed a small, oblong square; the side of the church composed one end, near which were the apartments allotted to the fathers. These were constructed neatly after the manner of those at the *presidio*, but appeared to be more finished, better contrived, were larger, and much more cleanly. Along the walls of this interior square were also many other apartments adapted to various purposes.

Whilst dinner was preparing, our attention was engaged in seeing the several houses within the square. Some we found appropriated to the reception of grain, of which, however, they had not a very abundant stock; nor was the place of its growth within sight of the mission, though the richness of the contiguous soil seemed equal to all the purposes of husbandry. One large room was occupied by manufacturers of a coarse sort of blanketing, made from the wool produced in the neighborhood. The looms, though rudely wrought, were tolerably well-contrived and had been made by the Indians, under the immediate direction and superintendence of the fathers, who, by the same assiduity, had carried the manufacture thus far into effect. The produce resulting from their manufactory is wholly applied to the clothing of the converted Indians. I saw some of the cloth, which was by no means despicable, and, had it

received the advantage of fulling, would have been a very decent sort of clothing.

The preparation of the wool, as also the spinning and weaving of it, was, I understood, performed by unmarried women and female children, who were all resident within the square and were in a state of conversion to the Roman Catholic persuasion. Besides manufacturing the wool, they are also instructed in a variety of necessary, useful, and beneficial employments until they marry—which is greatly encouraged—when they retire from the tuition of the fathers to the hut of their husband. By these means it is expected that their doctrines will be firmly established and rapidly propagated, and the trouble they now have with their present untaught flock will be hereafter recompensed, by having fewer prejudices to combat in the rising generation. They likewise consider their plan as essentially necessary, in a political point of view, for ensuring their own safety. The women and girls being the dearest objects of affection amongst these Indians, the Spaniards deem it expedient to retain constantly a certain number of females immediately within their power, as a pledge for the fidelity of the men, and as a check on any improper designs the natives might attempt to carry into execution, either against the missionaries or the establishment in general.

By various encouragements and allurements to the children or their parents, they can depend upon having as many to bring up in this way as they require. Here they are well fed, better clothed than the Indians in the neighborhood, are kept clean, instructed, and have every necessary care taken of them. In return for these advantages they must submit to certain regulations; amongst which, they are not suffered to go out of the interior square in the daytime without permission, are never to sleep out of it at night, and to prevent elopements, this square has no communication with the country but by one common door, which the fathers themselves take care of, and see that it is well secured every evening, and also the apartments of

the women, who generally retire immediately after supper.

If I am correctly informed by the different Spanish gentlemen with whom I conversed on this subject, the uniform, mild, and kind-hearted disposition of this religious order has never failed to attach to their interest the affections of the natives, wherever they sat down amongst them. This is a very happy circumstance, for their situation otherwise would be excessively precarious, as they are protected only by five soldiers who reside under the directions of a corporal in the buildings of the mission at some distance on the other side of the church.

The establishment must certainly be considered as liable to some danger. Should these children of nature be ever induced to act an ungrateful and treacherous part, they might easily conceal sufficient weapons to effect any evil purpose. There are only three fathers[5]—these live by themselves—and should any attempt be made upon them at night, the very means they have adopted for security might deprive them of any assistance from the guard until it might be too late; individually, they could make but little resistance. Should a conspiracy for their destruction take place, the mission would soon fall, and there would be little doubt of the conspirators being joined by the Indians of the village, which is in the vicinity of the mission and was said to contain 600 persons, but on visiting it, I considered their number greatly overrated. The major part of them, I understood, were converted to the Roman Catholic persuasion; but I was astonished to observe how few advantages had attended their conversion.

They seemed to have treated with the most perfect indifference the precepts and laborious example of their truly worthy and benevolent pastors, whose object has been to allure them from their

[5] Actually two: Fathers Danti and Landaeta. Vancouver likely thought Father Diego Noboa, who often visited Mission San Francisco, lived there.

life of indolence and raise in them a spirit of emulous industry; which, by securing to them plenty of food and the common conveniences of life, would necessarily augment their comforts and encourage them to seek and embrace the blessings of civilized society. Deaf to the important lessons and insensible of the promised advantages, they still remained in the most abject state of uncivilization; and if we except the inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego and those of Van Dieman's land [Tasmania], they are certainly a race of the most miserable beings—possessing the faculty of human reason—I ever saw. Their persons, generally speaking, were under the middle size and very ill made; their faces ugly, presenting a dull, heavy, and stupid countenance, devoid of sensibility or the least expression. One of their greatest aversions is cleanliness, both in their persons and habitations; which, after the fashion of their forefathers, were still without the most trivial improvement. Their houses were of a conical form, about six or seven feet in diameter at their base (which is the ground) and are constructed by a number of stakes, chiefly of the willow tribe, which are driven erect into the earth in a circular manner, the upper ends of which being small and pliable are brought nearly to join at the top, in the center of the circle; and these, being securely fastened, give the upper part or roof somewhat of a flattish appearance. Thinner twigs of the like species are horizontally interwoven between the uprights, forming a piece of basket work about ten or twelve feet high. At the top, a small aperture is left, which allows the smoke of the fire made in the center of the hut to escape and admits most of the light they receive. The entrance is by a small hole close to the ground, through which with difficulty one person at a time can gain admittance. The whole is covered over with a thick thatch of dried grass and rushes.

These miserable habitations, each of which was allotted for the residence of a whole family, were erected with some degree of uniformity, about three or four feet asunder, in straight rows, leaving

lanes or passages at right angles between them; but these were so abominably infested with every kind of filth and nastiness as to be rendered not less offensive than degrading to the human species.

Close by stood the church, which for its magnitude, architecture and internal decorations, did great credit to the constructors of it, and presented a striking contrast between the exertions of genius and such as bare necessity is capable of suggesting. The raising and decorating this edifice appeared to have greatly attracted the attention of the fathers; the comforts they might have provided in their own humble habitations seemed to have been totally sacrificed to the accomplishment of this favorite object. Even their garden, an object of such material importance, had not yet acquired any great degree of cultivations, though its soil was a rich black mold and promised an ample return for any labor that might be bestowed upon it. The whole contained about four acres, was tolerably well fenced-in, and produced some fig, peach, apple, and other fruit trees, but afforded a very scanty supply of useful vegetables—the principal part lying waste and overrun with weeds.

On our return to the convent, we found a most excellent and abundant repast provided of beef, mutton, fish, fowls, and such vegetables as their garden afforded. The attentive and hospitable behavior of our new friends amply compensated for the homely manner in which the dinner was served and would certainly have precluded my noticing the distressing inconvenience these valuable people labor under, in the want of almost all the common and most necessary utensils of life, had I not been taught to expect that this colony was in a very different stage of improvement, and that its inhabitants were infinitely more comfortably circumstanced.

After dinner we were engaged in an entertaining conversation, in which, by the assistance of Mr. Dobson, our interpreter, we were each able to bear a part. Amongst other things, I understood that this mission was established in the year 1775, and the *presidio* of

San Francisco in 1778,[6] and that they were the northernmost settlements, of any description, formed by the court of Spain on the continental shore of northwest America, or the islands adjacent, exclusive of Nootka, which I did not consider as coming under that description any more than the temporary establishment which, in the preceding spring, had formed by Señor Quadra near Cape Flattery, at the entrance of the Straits of Juan De Fuca [in northwest Washington State]; and which has been already stated to be entirely evacuated. The excursions of the Spaniards seemed to be confined to the neighborhood of their immediate place of residence and the direct line of country between one station and another, as they have no vessels for embarkation excepting the native canoe—and an old rotten wooden one—which was lying near our landing place. Had they proper boats on this spacious sheet of water, their journeys would not only be much facilitated, but it would afford a very agreeable variety in their manner of life and help to pass away many of the solitary and wearisome hours which they must unavoidably experience.

I understood that the opposite side of the port had been visited by some soldiers on horseback who obtained but little information. Some converted Indians were found living amongst the natives of the northern and western parts of the port who were esteemed by the Spaniards to be a docile and in general a well-disposed people, though little communication took place between them and the inhabitants of this side. The missionaries found no difficulty in subjecting these people to their authority. It is mild and charitable, teaches them the cultivation of the soil, and introduces amongst them such of the useful arts as are most essential to the comforts of human nature and social life. It is much to be wished that these benevolent exertions may succeed, though there is every

[6] Both were established in 1776.

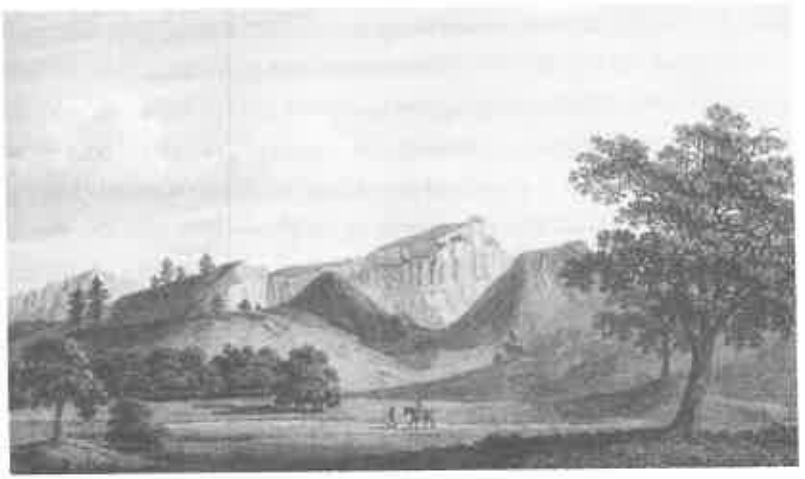
appearance that their progress will be very slow; yet they will probably lay a foundation on which the posterity of the present race may secure to themselves the enjoyment of civil society.

The next establishment of this nature, and the only one within our reach from our present station, was that of Santa Clara, lying to the southeastward at the distance of about eighteen leagues and considered as one day's journey. As there was no probability of our wood and water being completely on board in less than three or four days, I accepted the offer of Señor Sal and the reverend fathers, who undertook to provide us horses for an expedition to Santa Clara the following morning. At the decline of day we took our leave and concluded a visit that had been highly interesting and entertaining to us, and had appeared to be equally grateful to our hospitable friends....

During the night, the wind from the SW blew a strong gale and continued with much rain until Tuesday morning the 20th, when the weather being serene and pleasant, we undertook our journey to Santa Clara. We called on our way on our friends at the *presidio* and mission, with whose company we were to have been favored; but in consequence of some dispatches received by Señor Sal that required his immediate attention and of the indisposition of one of the fathers, they begged leave to decline the engagement. We therefore, agreeably with the fashion of the country, set out, attended by a drove of spare horses—more than double the number of our party—under the guidance of the sergeant of the *presidio*, who was accompanied by six stout, active soldiers, fully accoutered for our protection and for affording us such assistance as we might require.[7]

We considered our route to be parallel with the sea coast, between which and our path, the ridge of mountains before-mentioned

[7]The guard of soldiers was also sent to prevent Vancouver from spying, and Sal was reprimanded sharply by Gobernador Arrillaga for allowing the Englishman to see the interior of the country at all.



"A Remarkable Mountain near the River of Monterrey [sic]," 1794, by John Sykes, a British naval officer who visited California with Vancouver aboard the *Discovery*. *Courtesy of the California Historical Society, FN-30521.*

extended to the south-eastward; and as we advanced, their sides and summits exhibited a high degree of luxuriant fertility, interspersed with copses of various forms and magnitude, verdant open spaces, and enriched with stately forest trees of different descriptions. The plain on which we rode stretched from the base of these mountains to the shores of the port, and gradually improved as we proceeded. The holly-leaved oak, maple horse-chestnut, and willow were increased from dwarf shrubs to trees of tolerable size, having some of the common English dwarf oak scattered amongst them.

Our journey was estimated at eighteen leagues, in which distance the country afforded no house, hut, nor any place of shelter excepting such as the spreading trees presented. About noon, having then advanced about twenty-three miles, we arrived at a very pleasant and enchanting lawn, situated amidst a grove of trees at the foot of a small hill, by which flowed a very fine stream of excellent water. This delightful pasture was nearly enclosed on every side and afforded sufficient space for resting ourselves and baiting our

cavalry. The bank, which overhung the murmuring brook, was well adapted for taking the refreshment that our provident friends had supplied; and with some grog we had brought from the ship (spirits and wine being scarce articles in this country), we all made a most excellent meal; but it required some resolution to quit so lively a scene, the beauty of which was greatly heightened by the delightful serenity of the weather. To this, however, after resting about an hour, we were obliged to submit, when a fresh supply of cavalry being selected from the drove of horses, we mounted and pursued our journey.[8]

We had not proceeded far from this delightful spot, when we entered a country I little expected to find in these regions. For about twenty miles it could only be compared to a park, which had originally been closely planted with the true old English oak. The underwood that had probably attended its early growth had the appearance of having been cleared away and had left the stately lords of the forest in complete possession of the soil, which was covered with luxuriant herbage and beautifully diversified with pleasing eminencies and valleys; which, with the range of softly rugged mountains that bounded the prospect, required only to be adorned with the neat habitations of an industrious people to produce a scene not inferior to the most studied effect of taste in the disposal of grounds.[9] Especially when seen from the port or its confines, the waters of which extend some distance by the side of this country; and though they were not visible to us, I was inclined to believe they approached within about a league of the road we pursued. Our

[8] Through a mix-up in communication, a number of Vancouver's men had understood the distance to Mission Santa Clara to be eighteen miles rather than eighteen leagues (about fifty-four miles); the sailors, unaccustomed to riding for such a long distance, soon required a slow pace. When they finally reached the mission, several men went straight to bed.

[9] In fact, an "industrious people"—the Indians—had helped create this "park" through controlled burnings and land management.

riding was attended with some inconvenience on account of the fox earths and burrows of rabbits, squirrels, rats, and other animals, but our sure-footed horses avoided every danger; notwithstanding, we rode at a brisk rate.

Having passed through this imaginary park, we advanced a few miles in an open, clear meadow and arrived in a low, swampy country, through which our progress was very slow, the horses being nearly knee-deep in mud and water for about six miles. The badness of our road rendered this part of our journey somewhat unpleasant. About dark we reached better ground, and soon after the night closed in, we arrived at the mission of Santa Clara, which according to my estimation is about forty geographical miles from San Francisco. Our journey, excepting that part of it through the morass, had been very pleasant and entertaining, and our reception at Santa Clara by the hospitable fathers of the mission was such as excited in every breast the most lively sensations of gratitude and regard. Father Tomás de la Peña appeared to be the principal of the missionaries. The anxious solicitude of this gentleman and that of his colleague, Father José Sanchez,[10] to anticipate all our wishes, unequivocally manifested the principles by which their conduct was regulated. Our evening passed very pleasantly, and after a most excellent breakfast the next morning (the 21st), on tea and chocolate, we took a view of the establishment and the adjacent country.

The buildings and offices of this mission, like those of San Francisco, form a square, but not an entire enclosure. It is situated in an extensive fertile plain, the soil of which, as also that of the surrounding country, is a rich black productive mold, superior to any I had before seen in America. The particular spot, which had been selected by the reverend fathers for their establishment, did not appear so suitable to their purpose as many other parts of the

[10] Father José Bernardo Sánchez (1778–1831) later served as father-president of the Californian missions from 1827 to 1831.

plain within a little distance of their present buildings, which are erected in a low, marshy situation for the sake of being near a run of fine water; notwithstanding that within a few hundred yards they might have built their houses on dry and comfortable eminencies.

The stream of water passes close by the walls of the fathers' apartments, which are upon the same plan with those at San Francisco: built near, and communicating with the church, but appearing to be more extensive and to possess in some degree more comforts, or rather less inconveniences, than those already described. The church was long and lofty, as well built as the rude materials of which it is composed would allow, and when compared with the unimproved state of the country, infinitely more decorated than might have been reasonably expected.

Apartments within the square in which the priests resided were appropriated to a number of young female Indians—and the like reasons were given as at San Francisco for their being so selected and educated. Their occupations were the same, though some of their woolen manufactures surpassed those we had before seen and wanted only the operation of fulling, with which the fathers were unacquainted, to make them very decent blankets. The upper story of their interior oblong square, which might be about 170 feet long and 100 feet broad, were made use of as granaries, as were some of the lower rooms—all of which were well stored with corn and pulse of different sorts. Besides these, in case of fire, there were two spacious warehouses for the reception of grain detached from each other and the rest of the buildings, erected at a convenient distance from the mission. These had been recently finished, contained some stores, and were to be kept constantly full as a reserve in the event of such a misfortune.

They cultivate wheat, maize, peas, and beans; the latter are produced in great variety, and the whole in greater abundance than their necessities require. Of these several sorts they had many

thousand bushels in store, of very excellent quality, which had been obtained with little labor and without manure. By the help of a very mean and ill-contrived plow drawn by oxen, the earth is once slightly turned over and smoothed down by a harrow. In the month of November or December, the wheat is sown in drills, or broadcast on the even surface, and scratched in with the harrow; this is the whole of their system of husbandry, which uniformly produces them in July or August an abundant harvest. The maize, peas, and beans are produced with as little labor; these are sown in the spring months and succeed extremely well, as do hemp and flax, or linseed. The wheat affords in general from twenty-five to thirty for one according to the seasons, twenty-five for one being the least return they have ever yet deposited in their granaries from the field; notwithstanding the enormous waste occasioned by their rude method of threshing, which is always performed in the open air by the treading of cattle. The product of the other grains and pulse bears a similar proportion to that of the wheat. I was much surprised to find that neither barley nor oats were cultivated; on inquiry I was given to understand that as the superior kinds of grain could be plentifully obtained with the same labor that the inferior ones would require, they had some time ago declined the cultivation of them. The labors of the field are performed—under the immediate inspection of the fathers—by the natives who are instructed in the Roman Catholic faith and taught the art of husbandry. The annual produce is taken under the care of these worthy pastors, who distribute it in such quantities to the several persons as completely answers all the useful and necessary purposes.

Besides a few acres of arable land, which we saw under cultivation near the mission, was a small spot of garden ground producing several sorts of vegetables in great perfection and abundance. The extent of it, however, like the garden at San Francisco, appeared unequal to the consumption of the European residents: the priests

and their guard, consisting of a corporal and six soldiers. Here were planted peaches, apricots, apples, pears, figs, and vines, all of which excepting the latter promised to succeed very well. The failure of the vines here, as well as at San Francisco, is ascribed to a want of knowledge in their culture; the soil and climate being well adapted to most sorts of fruit. Of this we had many evidences in the excellence of its natural unassisted productions. In this country the oak, as timber, appears to take the lead. A tree of this description near the establishment measured fifteen feet in girth and was high in proportion, but was not considered by the fathers as of an extraordinary size; and I am convinced that on our journey we passed several oaks of greater magnitude. The timber of these trees is reputed to be equal in quality to any produced in Europe. The elm, ash, beech, birch, and some variety of pines grew in the interior and more elevated parts of the country in the greatest luxuriance and abundance.

Our attention was next called to the village of the Indians near the mission. The habitations were not so regularly disposed, nor did it contain so many as the village at San Francisco; yet the same horrid state of uncleanliness and laziness seemed to pervade the whole. A sentiment of compassion involuntarily obtruded on the mind in contemplating the natural or habitual apathy to all kind of exertion in this humble race. There was scarcely any sign in their general deportment of their being at all benefited or of having added one single ray of comfort to their own wretched condition by the precepts and laborious exertions of their religious instructors, whose lives are sacrificed to their welfare, and who seem entirely devoted to the benevolent office of rendering them a better and a happier people. They appeared totally insensible to the benefits with which they were provided, excepting in the article of food; this they now find ready at hand, without the labor of procuring it, or being first reduced by cold and hunger nearly to a state of famine, and then being obliged to expose themselves to great inconvenience in quest of a

precarious and often scanty means of subsistence. Not only grain, but the domestic animals have been introduced with success amongst them; many of the natives have, by the unremitted labor of the fathers, been taught to manufacture very useful and comfortable garments from the wool of their sheep. For the introduction of this animal they ought to be highly grateful, since by the mildness of the climate and the fertility of the soil, they are easily propagated and reared; and while they provided them with comfortable clothing, afford them also nourishing and delicate food.

These advantages however seemed to have operated as yet to little purpose on the minds of these untaught children of nature, who appeared to be a compound of stupidity and innocence, their passions are calm; and regardless of reputation as men or renown as a people, they are stimulated neither to the obtaining of consequence amongst themselves by any peaceful arts nor superiority over their neighbors by warlike achievements, so common amongst the generality of the Indian tribes. All the operations and functions, both of body and mind, appeared to be carried on with a mechanical, lifeless, careless indifference; and as the Spaniards assert they found them in the same state of inactivity and ignorance on their earliest visits, this disposition is probably inherited from their forefathers.

Further efforts are now making at this mission to break through the gloomy cloud of insensibility in which at present these people are enveloped by giving them new habitations; an indulgence that will most probably be followed by others, as their minds appear capable of receiving them. A certain number of the most intelligent, tractable, and industrious persons were selected from the group and were employed in a pleasant and well-adapted spot of land facing the mission, under the direction and instruction of the fathers, in building for themselves a range of small, but comparatively speaking, comfortable and convenient habitations. The walls, though not so thick, are constructed in the same manner with those

described in the square at San Francisco, and the houses are formed after the European fashion, each consisting of two commodious rooms below with garrets over them. At the back of each house a space of ground is enclosed, sufficient for cultivating a large quantity of vegetables, for rearing poultry, and for other useful and domestic purposes. The buildings were in a state of forwardness, and when finished, each house was designed to accommodate one distinct family only; and it is greatly to be wished, for the credit of the rational part of the creation, that this supine race of our fellow creatures may not long remain insensible to, and unconvinced of, the superior advantages they may derive, or the new comforts they may possess, by this alteration in their mode of living.

It is by no means improbable that by this circumstance alone they may be roused from their natural lethargic indifference and be induced to keep themselves clean, and to exert themselves in obtaining other blessings consequent on civilized society. This once effected, the laborious talk of their worthy and charitable benefactors will wear the appearance of being accomplished; and should it be hereafter attended with a grateful sense of the obligations conferred, it is not possible to conceive how much these excellent men will feel rewarded in having been the cause of meliorating the comfortless condition of these wretched humble creatures.

Our conversation admitted of no pause with these seemingly happy and benevolent priests; whilst we acquired much information we were highly entertained, and the day was far advanced by the time our curiosity was thus far gratified.

In compliment to our visit, the fathers ordered a feast for the Indians of the village. The principal part of the entertainment was beef, furnished from a certain number of black cattle, which were presented on the occasion to the villagers. These animals propagate very fast, and being suffered to live in large herds on the fertile plains of Santa Clara—in a sort of wild state—some skill and adroitness

is required to take them. This office was at first intended to have been performed by the natives, but it was overruled by Señor Paries, an ensign in the Spanish army, who, with one of the priests of Señor Quadra's vessel, had joined our party from a mission at some little distance called Santa Cruz. This gentlemen conceived the business of taking the cattle would be better performed by the soldiers, who are occasionally cavalry and are undoubtedly very good horsemen. We mounted and accompanied them to the field to be spectators of their exploits. Each of the soldiers was provided with a strong line made of horsehair or of thongs of leather, or rather hide, with a long running noose. This is thrown with great dexterity whilst at full speed, and nearly with a certainty, over the horns of the animals by two men, one on each side of the ox, at the same instant of time; and having a strong highpeaked pummel to their saddles, each takes a turn round it with the end of the line, and by that means the animal is kept completely at bay and effectually prevented from doing either the men or horses any injury, which they would be very liable to, from the wildness and ferocity of the cattle. In this situation the beast is led to the place of slaughter, where a third person, with equal dexterity, whilst the animal is kicking and plunging between the horses, entangles its hind legs by a rope and throws it down, on which its throat is immediately cut.

Twenty-two bullocks, each weighing from four to six hundred weight, were killed on this occasion; eighteen were given to the inhabitants of the village, and the rest were appropriated to the use of the soldiers and the mission, in addition to their regular weekly allowance of twenty-four oxen, which are killed for their service every Saturday. Hence it is evident, as the whole of their stock has sprung from fifteen head of breeding cattle, which were distributed between this and two other missions, established about the year 1778, that these animals must be very prolific to allow of such an abundant supply. Their great increase in so short a time is to be

ascribed to the rigid economy of the fathers, who would not allow any to be killed until they had so multiplied as to render their extirpation not easy to be effected. The same wise management has been observed with their sheep, and their horses have increased nearly at the same rate.

Although this village did not appear so populous as that at San Francisco, I was given to understand that there were nearly double the number of inhabitants belonging to it; and that in consequence of the many unconverted natives in the neighborhood of Santa Clara, several of the Christian Indians of good character were dispersed amongst their countrymen for the purpose of inducing them to partake of the advantages held out to them, in which they had not been altogether unsuccessful. All who have offered themselves as converts have been admitted and adopted, notwithstanding the artifices of several, who have remained in and about the mission until they have acquired a stock of food and clothing, with which they have decamped. This improper conduct has, however, had no sort of effect on the benevolent minds of the fathers, who have not only uniformly supplied their wants on a second visit, but also those of many wandering tribes that would be at the trouble of asking their assistance.

Thus concluded our morning's entertainment, and we retired to dinner. In the convent, a most excellent and abundant repast of the productions of the country was provided, which were in the greatest perfection. The day passed to the mutual satisfaction of all parties, and we found ourselves under some difficulty the next morning, Thursday 22nd, to excuse ourselves from accepting the pressing solicitations of these good people to prolong our stay at Santa Clara; however, necessity and not inclination obliged us to decline. We took our leave at an early hour, highly gratified by our reception and entertainment, which had amply compensated for the fatigue or inconvenience attending so long a journey, performed in a way to which we were so little accustomed.