Friends of Historic San Antonio Mission
NEWSLETTER

Volume 31, No. 2 FALL 2025

President's Message

Dear Friends,

Fall is a special time of year. For the native Salinan people of the Central Coast, this was a time when they returned to the Valley of the Oaks from a summer harvesting seafood on the coast. On their return to the Valley of the Oaks they were busy in gathering acorns from the oak trees and pine nuts from grey pine cones. They also were busy hunting for deer, rabbits, ground squirrels and other wildlife in preparation for the winter. After Mission San Antonio was established this hunting and gathering activity continued, but harvesting of agricultural commodities was added to the traditional fall practices. Wheat, barley, corn , beans , grapes , olives, citrus, pears and other produce were harvested. The wheat and corn were milled, the grapes were pressed for wine, and the olives were crushed and pressed for olive oil.

Modern Californians for the most part are almost entirely dependent on grocery stores and supply chains for sustenance. It is impressive that the Salinan people, both before and after the coming of the Spaniards, were self sufficient. The tranquil appearance of the mission today is a deceptive contrast to the diligent, productive lives of the people who first built and inhabited it.

Sincerely,

Dominic Gregorio

Mission San Antonio Visitor Hours

The Mission is closed on Mondays and Tuesdays.

Open Wednesday -Saturday 10am to 4pm

Open Sundays 11:30am to 4pm (following the 10:30am Mass).

For Specific days (may include shortened days or closures) see the Mission's website at

https://www.missionsanantonio.net/

Life Happens

By Joan Steele, Mission Administrator

Life happens. We discuss . . . we plan . . . we prepare. If we are fortunate, we are able to execute our projects and achieve success. The undercurrent that continues, without fail, is the progression of time and the marching on of life . . . with all its exciting gifts and challenges. Life at Mission San Antonio is no different.

In June of 2024, we employed Archeophysics LLC to conduct geophysical surveys of specific areas of the Mission property. The first of these areas was the location of the historic Mission's Mayordomo's house built in 1823. This building was long gone, and its foundations were partially covered over by the later building of the 1935 structure that served as a sort of construction office/caretaker area during the 1948 reconstruction of the Mission. The newer building was removed in the past

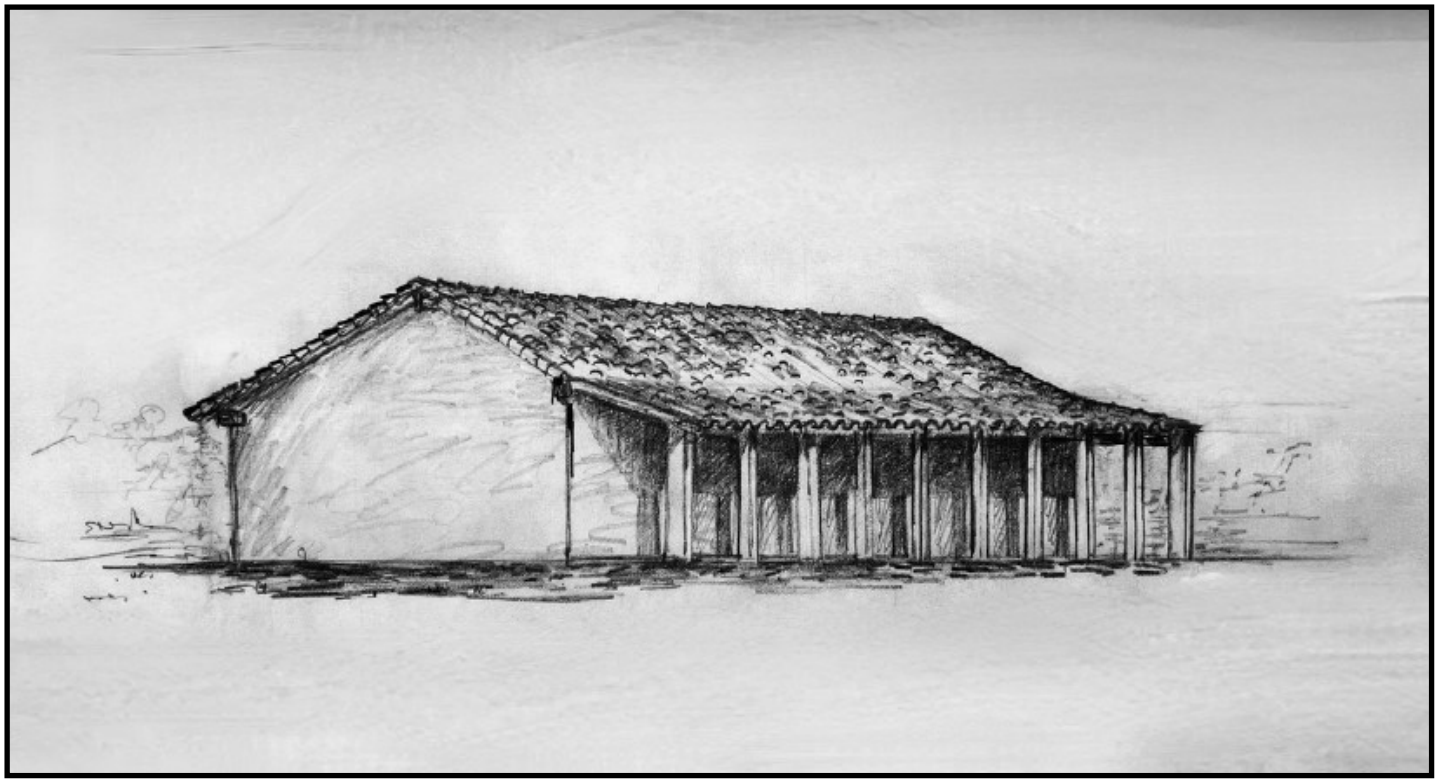
few years, with permits from Monterey County Housing and Historic offices, to enable accurate scans of the much older foundations beneath the ground level. While this area had been lightly excavated in the 1930's by the Franciscans, this time, with much improved technology, we were able to get a clear look at the foundations. The surveys revealed not only the mayordomo house structure, but also the walls that connected from the back of the building, west, to the cemetery walls. It is thought that these walls created *yards* for either small animals or areas for farming tools, etc.

We also employed the services of the K9 Forensic Institute who returned to the Mission again to survey the area around the mayordomo house in search of any potential burial sites. This was a precautionary action to confirm the site was clear for eventual excavation. The dogs found no burials.

While it was initially our intention to excavate and expose the building foundations for educational purposes, the findings propelled us to reassess our plans. Ground penetrating radar scans showed that a good portion of the foundations are now a foot or so below ground level. Excavation would create an area for water to collect and causing irreparable damage to the foundations. It was decided, after informed discussions between the geophysicist, archeologist, and the project team, that we would document the discoveries and create an information sheet for visitors, available through the Mission Gift Shop. The area is marked on the grounds by signage. Not excavating allows us to continue our protection of the historic foundations while still sharing the information gleaned by study with the public.

The next area surveyed was the eight acres of the original Mission vineyard. Our goal for these geophysical surveys was to document the historic irrigation system used in the vineyard. This is critical information and this Mission is uniquely positioned to document the information since the ground has remained relatively undisturbed since the Mission era. No other Mission can say that.

The Archeophysic LLC team began their ground surveys of the vineyard area, all done above ground and non-invasive. During their second week of work, we had the dogs and their handlers from the K9 Forensic Institute survey the vineyard area. Within the first few hours, the dogs had three hits – potential human remains. These were the only areas they found in their survey. Now, what to do about that information . . . it is always our intention to never disturb burials. The reason for hiring the Institute was to discover if there were any areas that we did not know about that could contain human remains. Are they Salinan?



Mayordomo's House, *conceptual sketch by Charles Franks July 2024*

We will never know because we will never excavate the area and conduct DNA testing. There are many possibilities for remains out in that field. It could indicate a prehistoric Salinan burial. It could also be a burial done during the colonial period, like the burials that were discovered near the church during the 1948 restoration of the Mission. There are several more known colonial burials on Fort Hunter Liggett property and at St. Luke's church at Jolon Road. There are also possibilities that it involves a much more recent burial (or lack of such). Just in the few decades that I have been at the Mission, multiple people have brought cremains to the Mission grounds and either dumped them on the ground or buried them (without permission) and then told us about it. We will never know. The point of the survey was to identify areas to avoid future disturbances; that is what we will do with these three areas.

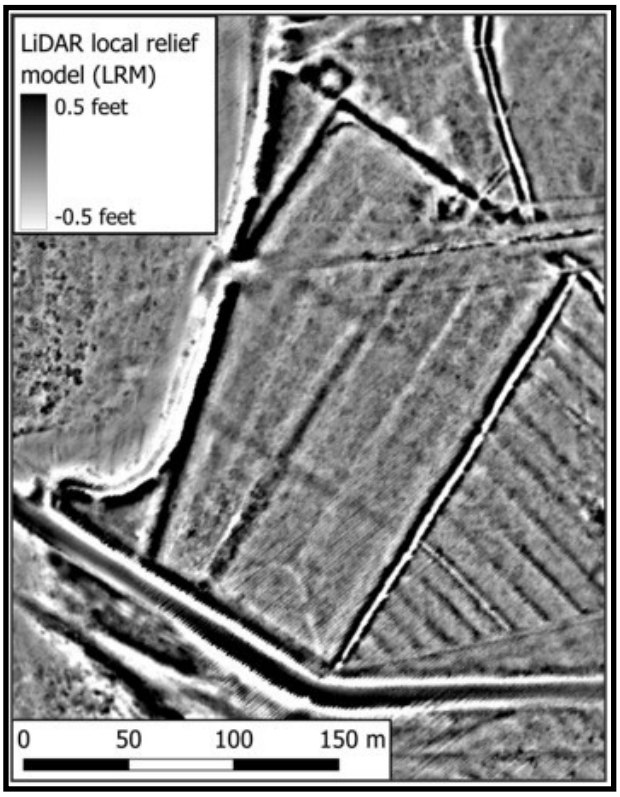
We were fortunate that the ground penetrating radar was able to identify and show us the main irrigation ditches into the vineyard, as well as secondary irrigation, all using gravity feed. We were also able to identify the drainage lines from the vineyard. All of this information is being correlated into a new 3-D, to-scale, model for the museum, with accompanying informational brochures.

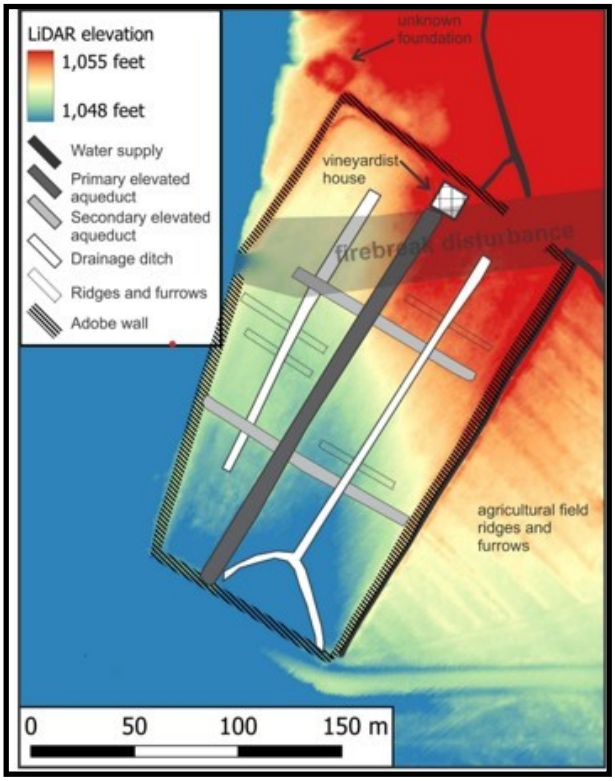
We continue to learn from the past. We have dismissed any plans to reestablish the vineyard at this time. The information we learned was very valuable and we will integrate it into our historic interpretation of the Mission era.

And as I said, life continues to happen . . .

In the past two weeks we have dealt with water main breaks, the death of our industrial washing machine, hot water heater issues, power surges frying areas of our electrical infrastructure, the death of our commercial freezer, etc. Just life at the Mission. There is never a dull moment.

Sadly, we also lost a very dear friend, Pete Vachek, just this month (September). Pete did all the restorative painting in the Mission after our seismic retrofit. He had a heart of gold and an impressive creative talent. We will miss him.





Figures from the Archeophysics *Report, showing the laser imaging, detection and ranging (LIDAR) model (right) and the color Archaeological interpretation of that data (left).*

Acorn Harvesting and Processing by Native American Indians

By Debbie Jewel

The Native American people understood how vital it was to conserve plant and animal life to insure a constant food supply. Native Americans have relied on acorns as an essential food source and dietary staple for at least 9,000 years. Acorns are said to have been the main food of as many as 3/4 of our native Californian peoples. Acorns were a popular food for many native Californian groups because they were plentiful during the harvest season, easy to gather, and could be dried and stored easily for the winter.

Example of a grinding stone used for acorn processing *(Image courtesy of https://www.thepeoplespaths.net)*

Twenty different oak tree species grow in California, with stands of coast live oak stretching from Northern California to Mexico. The Native Americans' reliance on acorns crossed both climatic and cultural lines as the nuts' variety and availability made them part of the daily lives of Indigenous peoples across California. However, not all acorns are the same.

- Black Oak acorns are known for their high fat content
- Gambel Oak acorns naturally taste sweeter and don't require leaching
- Valley Oak are cited for their better flavor and texture
- Blue Oaks
- Jolon Oaks are hybrid between Blue Oaks and Valley Oaks
- Tanoak acorns were coveted for their flavor by tribes within the trees' range

Take a hike through a California oak forest and you might come upon rocky outcroppings incised with one or more shallow, circular holes. These depressions, known as bedrock mortars, were created hundreds of years ago to pound and grind acorns, Many tribes also crafted beautiful twined and coiled baskets to use for gathering acorns.

Acorns are rich in carbohydrates, protein, and fat and they contain a significant amount of fiber. Acorns also contain vitamins, nutrients, and minerals that help to support heart, bone, and muscle health, as well as energy, metabolism and brain function. Additionally, acorns can be stored for later use - sometimes for as long as 10 years! The only downside of acorns is they have a high tannin content which gives raw acorns a bitter taste, newly picked acorns are too soft to cook with, and considerable work is required to convert the acorn into palatable food. Below are the typical steps most Indigenous groups used for harvesting and processing acorns:

- When the acorns are actually ripe, they fall from the tree, cap intact. They were gathered from the ground under the trees where they had fallen and those with holes were not harvested.

Example of circular mortars ground into bedrock *(Image courtesy of https://redwoodsinyosemite.com)*

- After being collected in baskets in the fall, the acorns were dried and usually stored for about one year before they were used. The acorns were dried in the sun or by fires to inhibit spoilage and to kill off bugs (note - some tribes shelled the acorns first and then placed them someplace safe and warm to dry).
- Once the acorns were completely dried, their shells were cracked open with small hammer stones and stone anvils to reach the nutmeat. The acorns were put into a scoop shaped basket and rubbed by hand until the skins loosened. They were then tossed into the air and their lightweight skins blew away in the breeze, and the heavy acorns dropped back into the basket (note - some tribes removed the husk and others did not).
- Native American women often spent an entire day pounding acorns into meal. After the acorn meal was pounded, it was carefully sifted into a fine flour using two types of tools: mortars and pestles and milling stones.
- Acorns contain a poison called tannic acid, so once the acorns are pounded into a meal, a very important step is to remove the poison to make them safe to eat.
    - ◊ First, women scooped out a large basin in the ground, spread the acorn meal out in the basin, and placed branches over it and poured water through the branches. Once the acorn meal no longer tasted bitter, the soaking stopped.
    - ◊ After the acorn meal drained, it was scooped out of the hole by hand and the meal was then ready to be cooked.

After processing, the acorns were ground into flour to make bread, cakes, porridge, soup, stews, and mush. Water and acorn meal were mixed together and boiled into a thin soup or thicker mush. Some of California's Indigenous people also used Tanoak acorns for medicinal reasons, such as to treat coughs.

There were two ways that California Indian women boiled acorn meal:

1. Boiling the acorn meal in a clay or stone pot over a fire.
2. Stone boiling the acorn meal with boiling baskets.

    - ◊ Boiling baskets were often coated with a thin layer of acorn gruel which coated the baskets like glue so no water would leak out.
    - ◊ Hot rocks the size of tennis balls were heated by fire and put into the boiling baskets which were filled with water and the acorn meal.

California tribes actively managed oak stands to promote production while leaving enough acorns unharvested to sustain deer and other wildlife, which also depended on them for food. Tribes lit small, low-intensity fires in forests to clear out competing vegetation, encourage seedling growth, and control pests like weevils and worms that fed on the acorns. Managing the oak woodlands allowed for a healthier and more prosperous acorn harvest in upcoming seasons.

Individual grinding stones (mortars) at Mission San Antonio..

Communal mortars carved into used grist mill stones at Mission San Antonio

Agricultural Productivity at Mission San Antonio

By Dominic Gregorio

As in any agrarian operation of the early nineteenth century, agricultural productivity at the Missions varied from year to year due to weather conditions. At Mission San Antonio, between 1806 and 1833 the total production of wheat, barley, corn, beans, and peas combined ranged from a low of 398 fanegas in 1829 to 3,626 fanegas in 1821. A *fanega* is a Spanish measure of dry capacity, approximately one and a half bushels each.

The 1831 the harvest, broken down by crop types, was 955 fanegas of wheat, 568 fanegas of barley, 115 fanegas of corn, 40 fanegas of beans, and 24 fanegas of peas (a total of 1702 fanegas, or about 2,680 bushels). Considering the density of the different grains and legumes, in terms of weight I estimate that the 1831 harvest was about 149,350 pounds. This of course was supplemented by food from animal husbandry, hunting, and gathering of wild plant foods such as acorns and pine nuts.

Our newsletters are now available in color digitally on our website at https://www.fhsam.org/ .

Please help FHSAM by updating your contact information, including your address, email address and phone number. You can receive the newsletter by email. Please let us know if you would like to get our newsletter by email.

You can mail your contact info to FHSAM, P.O. Box 603, Jolon, CA 93928, or you can email Ms. Debbie Jewell, FHSAM Secretary, at djewell461@gmail.com.

Many Thanks to Our Supporters!!

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No financial assistance is given to the Catholic Church.

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