Eden
Above: The reconstructed bell tower at La Purisima Mission State Historic Park is based on the one at Mission Santa Ynez. The pink color was determined from plaster fragments discovered by the archaeologists. Prickly pear cactus (Opuntia sp.) is native to the southwest and was used by the Spanish for food and hedging. Photo by Susan Chamberlin.
A Brief History and Description of Mission La Purisima

DOUGLAS NELSON
HISTORICAL LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

The beautiful and dramatic rural agricultural setting of the mission remains largely unchanged from its historic period. The mission is located at the base of the Burton Mesa and the Purisima Hills. This view looks across the Santa Ynez Valley. Photo by the author.
Between 1769 and 1823, the Spanish Empire set out to colonize California by establishing a chain of missions along the California coast. Eventually, twenty-one missions were established along El Camino Real, spaced about thirty miles apart, the distance traveled on horseback in a day or three days on foot. The missions were established to convert the local natives to Christianity and to support and protect the frontier colony. In turn, the Spanish introduced European livestock, fruits and vegetables, horses, and grazing to the region. The missions have gone through many phases since their origin as thriving settlements under the Spanish Empire. During Mexican rule, 1821 to 1848, the missions entered a period of declining...
population and resources, leading eventually to the abandonment of many of the missions. A revival of interest in California history and the romanticization of California’s Spanish heritage in the early twentieth century led to many of the missions being restored and preserved as historic landmarks. Some missions remain active as Catholic parish churches. Today, the missions are some of California’s oldest and most significant structures and serve as important educational and interpretive centers of the state’s cultural history.

SIGNIFICANCE

La Misión de La Purísima Concepción de la Santísima Virgen María was founded in 1787 as the eleventh mission in the chain. The site was established as an important mid-point between the missions at San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara. After an earthquake in 1812 that destroyed the original pueblo, a new mission was started the same year a few miles away. La Purisima is notable among the missions because of its extensive and well-researched reconstruction in the 1930s by the National Park Service and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). The reconstruction project involved rebuilding nearly the entire property with original tools and methods. The mission is now part of the California State Parks system. Also of note, La Purisima is one of the few missions still situated in a rural and agricultural area that closely resembles the setting of the mission’s early history.

The mission’s primary period of significance begins with the start of construction on this site in 1812 by the Spanish and continues through 1834 and its secularization under the Mexican government. A secondary period of significance, 1934 to 1941, recognizes the twentieth-century historic preservation and reconstruction work by California State Parks, the National Park Service, and the Civilian Conservation Corps.

DESCRIPTION

The site of the mission is in Purisima Canyon (historically called “La Cañada de los Berros,” the Valley of the Watercress) near where it meets the larger Santa Ynez River Valley. The site is entered by an access road that leads to a twentieth-century visitor center and adjacent parking lot. From there, visitors follow a path along a small riparian corridor to a footbridge that crosses the creek. Once on the other side, the riparian tree cover opens to a dramatic view of the mission with open fields in the foreground and the mission buildings set against a wooded hillside in the background.

The three main buildings of the mission are set in a row along the base of the valley’s north hills and comprise the church, the shops and soldiers’ quarters, and the padres’ residence. Visitors first approach the church and bell tower as they walk across the grassy field. With its pink-painted stucco exterior, the bell tower is the mission’s most prominent structure and serves as a focal point. The bell tower is part of a larger adobe wall structure that surrounds the historic cemetery. Aside from a small portion of the original church walls that remained when the reconstruction of the property began in 1935, the bell tower, cemetery walls and church have been reconstructed. Directly adjacent to the church is the rebuilt Shops and Quarters which include two courtyards on the rear side of the building that are enclosed by walls and interconnected by a doorway. The courtyards are functional spaces that had served as extensions of the workshops and now include outdoor ovens called “hornos,” an olive crusher and vessels for rendering tallow. Next to the Shops and Quarters is the padres’ residence. When the Civilian
Conservation Corps arrived on site in 1935, this building was in ruins with only remnants of the original adobe brick and stucco walls and columns. Still, this building contains more original wall structure than any other building on site. It has stone buttressing on its west side and a wide covered walkway with large columns on its south side. Adjacent (south) to the mission’s main buildings are open fields, gardens, and an olive grove. A portion of the open fields is used for livestock corrals that have been created using rustic wood fences. A small vegetable garden has been built between the open fields and the wooded area. Though a vegetable garden was likely original to the site, the current location and spatial arrangement are not thought to be historically accurate. As one moves northeast into the valley, the open fields become more wooded with olive trees. This olive grove functioned historically in part as a laundry washing area as evidenced by two original lavanderias that have been restored and filled with water. A raised stone fountain sits in the center of the grove where several unpaved paths converge. Also in this area, a reservoir constructed of brick has been excavated and restored. The reservoir is a remnant of a larger water supply and irrigation system established by the mission population in the nineteenth century. The system included reservoirs, cisterns, flumes and aqueducts that carried water from the springs in the canyon to the lavanderias, and then out to the open fields. The aqueduct structure, a stone trench, be seen running through the fields. On the south side of the valley is the historical Chumash dwelling site, where straw huts have been reconstructed as an interpretive feature, demonstrating how the native Chumash people once lived on the site during the nineteenth century.

Several other ancillary buildings are set throughout the site and include a pottery shed with outdoor kiln and kitchen on the north (rear) side of the padres’ residence, the blacksmith shop situated along the dirt road leading into Purisima Canyon, two infirmary buildings, and a building called Mosquito, which was historically the dormitory for neophyte girls. Pedestrian circulation throughout the site consists of informal paths of decomposed granite.
remains on site but were given charge of only the church buildings. As a result of the declining Mission population, operated in part by the revolt, as well as secularization, the mission was soon largely abandoned and gradually fell into ruin. In 1836, the church building collapsed.

In 1845, the mission passed into private ownership when the property was sold to Don Juan Temple of Los Angeles for $1,100. It was passed from owner to owner, continuing in its dilapidated state until the 1930s. In 1933, then owner Union Oil Company deeded the mission and surrounding land to Santa Barbara County, and in 1934 the State of California acquired the 507-acre property under the Division of Parks.

The National Park Service studied the history of the site and developed an extensive set of plans, which the Civilian Conservation Corps (company #1951) used when it began reconstruction work in 1935. The CCC established a camp on the site and rebuilt the mission in its entirety. Upon arrival, the only original structures on site were ruined brick and stucco walls and columns of the padres’ original structures on site were ruined brick mission in its entirety. Upon arrival, the only original structures on site were ruined brick and stucco walls and columns of the padres’ residence and a few smaller ruins throughout the site. From 1935 to 1937, the CCC completed the initial phase of the project by reconstructing the padres’ residence, and in 1941 the church was rebuilt.

By the end of 1951, the CCC had completed work on the mission, using original tools and methods where possible, such as using clay from the site to make adobe bricks and roof tiles. As a result of this impressive and thorough reconstruction, La Purísima is one of the most fully restored missions in California. Today, the mission is a State Park operated by the California Department of Parks and Recreation and is visited by many each year.

The site is California Historical Landmark No. 340, a National Historic Landmark, is listed in the National Register of Historic Places, and is HABS CA-211.

About the Author:
Douglas Nelson is a historical landscape architect and principal at RHAA Landscape Architects in Mill Valley, CA. His work focuses on parks and historic landscapes with particular expertise in national parks. He has completed two decades of projects in Yosemite National Park and he is a co-author of the Golden Gate Park Master Plan and its nomination to the National Register.

He has prepared numerous cultural landscape reports, documentation for the Historic American Landscape Survey (HALS), and successful nomination reports for the National Register of Historic Places.

Chronology of Events

1812 – 1822
Mission is relocated to second site 4 miles northeast of the original site. A decade of prosperity follows with the mission becoming self-supporting. The church is reconstructed.

1815
Padres’ residence is constructed.

1816
Series of workshops are constructed between church and padres’ residence.

1821
Mexico declares independence from Spain and stops sending supplies and money to the missions.

1824
Chumash neophyte revolt in nearby Santa Ynez spreads to La Purísima. Neophytes seize possession of the mission for a month before the revolt is quelled by Mexican soldiers.

1833
Secularization (settlement of government land)

1834
Mission is largely abandoned and lapses into ruin.

1834 – 1845
Church building collapses.

1836
Mission is sold to Don Juan Temple for $1,100.

1845
The mission property is passed from owner to owner and deteriorates further.

1845 – 1933
Union Oil and Catholic Church deed the property to Santa Barbara County.

1935
State of California acquires the property under the Division of Parks.

1934 – 1935
National Park Service studies the history of the site and develops a series of preservation treatment plans.

1935
Cultural Conservation Corps sets up a camp on the site and begins reconstruction/ restoration of the site.

1935 – 1937
Reconstruction of the padres’ residence.

1941
Reconstruction of the church.

DECEMBER 6, 1878
Mission Founded by Father Fermín Lasuén.

MARCH 1788
Construction begins on the mission (original site).

1801 – 1802
New adobe structures are built following the ruin of first buildings.

1802 – 1812
Period of prosperity and population growth.

DECEMBER 21, 1812
Major earthquake destroys the entire mission site.

1815
Reconstruction of the church.

1816
Reconstruction of three main buildings complete; mission is dedicated as a State Historical Monument.

1941
Reconstruction of three main buildings complete; mission is dedicated as a State Historical Monument.

1941 TO PRESENT
Additional buildings reconstructed and visitor center added.

Endnote
1. The definition of ‘neophyte’ in this context is: A religious convert, a newly baptized mission Indian. At the missions, neophytes would be required to adopt Christianity, learn agriculture, carpentry, weaving, and other vocational skills, and “adopt European modes of dress.”

Above: The vegetable garden, a more recent addition, is adjacent to the shops and soldiers’ quarters. Photo by the author.
The CCC “Mission Garden” at La Purisima and its Forgotten Designers

SUSAN CHAMBERLIN
Mission La Purisima Concepcion in Lompoc is unique among the twenty-one missions established by the Spanish colonizers of California. It is surrounded by enough undeveloped land to give a sense of it as an isolated, self-sustaining, eighteenth-century pioneer outpost, and it was completely reconstructed by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal program, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), during the Depression in the 1930s. Actually, not completely—its garden was not a reconstruction. Like so many other places where the original architecture is respected, the landscape was not. Rather it was conceived as an attractive “setting” for the buildings. Wallace C. Penfield, Louis Brandt, and Edwin Denys Rowe are the forgotten designers of this landscape and what was once called the “Mission Garden” at La Purisima.

From the beginning, it was recognized that La Purisima had the potential to uniquely represent Spain’s settlement of the colonial southwest and thus achieve educational significance equal to Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia or the replica Lincoln village in Springfield, Illinois. Prior to the arrival of the Spanish colonists in Alta California in 1769, the Native American Indian inhabitants managed California’s natural resources using different techniques depending on the cultural group, region, and season. Only as recently as the late twentieth-century was this “protoagriculture” examined and considered as a new perspective on the history of agriculture. However, the concept that the Indians were simple hunter-gatherers who relied on acorns and shellfish in an untouched wilderness is still widespread. Certainly, the abundant acorns from the live oak trees (Quercus agrifolia) in the Lompoc Valley where La Purisima was established were important food sources for the Chumash Indians who lived there. Other plants were utilized for food, medicines, fibers, and intricately-crafted Chumash baskets. Many medicinal plants used by the Indians were adopted for medicinal purposes by the Spanish. Some of these native plants were incorporated into the CCC garden at La Purisima in one of the early acknowledgments of Indians’ lives in a State Park.

Much has been written about the CCC reconstruction of La Purisima from almost total ruins. The story of CCC Company #1951 and their project at Camp SP-29 is readily available in print and online. The story of the garden there is more difficult to parse, and published information about its several designers is virtually nonexistent. Most of what is in print about Ed Rowe, the landscape architect who located, propagated, and then planted the garden with mission-era fruits, flowers, and vegetables plus native plants familiar to California Indians, is incorrect.

“No longer are the bare ruined choirs of Mission La Purisima Concepcion a cause for weeping; no longer does the wild mustard grow rampant and the wild licorice rear its loathsome green spires where formerly the mission fathers walked knee-deep in roses.”
Two Mission La Purisima Sites

For a chronology and history of La Purisima, see “A Brief History and Description of Mission La Purisima” by Douglas Nelson in this issue. Initially a simple structure, the first 1787 La Purisima Mission site had property that stretched from the Santa Maria River to the coastline around Gaviota. With the labor of Christian-convert Indians, called neophytes, the mission grew into a large complex built around a quadrangle, or courtyard.

In front of the Residence Building was a laundry yard with three basins, sometimes called lavanderias, sometimes cisterns, sometimes fountains. Two were located close toward the building’s south-east end, and the largest one was located closer to the Chumash tule-reed dwellings and facilities opposite the north-east end of the building. It is called the Indian lavanderia and bathing pool or a reservoir. These basins were part of an extensive water system with reservoirs, aqueducts, and a spring house to filter water. The southern-most of these basins, sometimes identified as a settling basin, drained into an aqueduct that irrigated the field in front of the Shops and Quarters Building and the church. Perhaps this was the location of the original mission garden or an orchard. Wherever the garden was, it probably would have been a huerta for simple foodstuffs and herbs and not an ornamental garden. There was a pear orchard near a reservoir north-east of the Residence Building. One tree remained when the CCC arrived.

Following Mexican independence in 1824, California’s Mexican governors began taking the missions from the Catholic church and distributing their lands to private individuals. In 1834, La Purisima was secularized and began its decline into ruins. About fifty years later, the artist Henry Chapman Ford (1828-1904) did an etching of La Purisima as part of a series on the California missions. He depicted the Residence Building with trees next to the colonnade. One is probably the California pepper tree (Schinus molle, native to Peru) that was later revered and photographed. Lester Rowntree (the renowned native plant enthusiast) liked to spread her sleeping bag under it on her cowpats. Also visible in the etching are two of the three basins or lavanderias in the open space in front of the Residence Building.

“No sweeter bells ere rung from mission towers than were to be heard from the arches of La Purisima.”

Toward the end of the nineteenth-century, people seeking a regional, California identity distinct from the Victorian styles that dominated in the United States looked to the missions for architectural inspiration. Fueled in part by Helen Hunt Jackson’s novel Ramona, a period of romanticizing the Spanish-era missions began. By this time, mission gardens were different than originally laid out. The utilitarian huerta (where herbs, vegetables, and a few flowers for the altar were grown outside the mission walls) had largely been replaced in the public imagination by an ornamental garden, or jardin, centered on a fountain within the mission walls similar to a medieval cloister. This Spanish para-type became the iconic mission garden tended by Franciscan priests—always called a colonnade, or covered corridor, on the east side supported by unusual square columns (henceforth Residence Building—its name in State Park materials—also called the Padres’ Residence, the Monastery, or monasterio, and the living quarters.) The site plan is unusual for a mission: the three main buildings and the cemetery south of the church were arranged in a linear fashion at the base of the mesa, rather than in a quadrangular, or courtyard, layout. El Camino Real separated these buildings from the Indian facilities.

Above: A romanticized depiction of the “Sainted Garden” at Mission Santa Barbara. Right: Gathered on the Residence Building ruins (Schinus molle) standing on the site when the CCC arrived. Will Connell, photographer. Will Connell Collection, California Museum of Photography, University of California, Riverside.

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State Parks, Photo 090-29296.

Barbara Co. Board of Forestry), Frederick Rowe (landscape architect and Camp SP-29 Landscape Foreman), Harry Buckman (Santa Barbara Co. Planning Commission Engineer and Chair of the Advisory Committee who will draw the “Preliminary Sketch Plan” for the development of La Purisima), Lawrence Uatas (NPS-CCC Fire Suppression Foreman), Arthur Woodward (Curator, Los Angeles Museum), Harvey Johnson (Camp Superintendent), Owen C. Coy (UCSC historian and Director of the California State Historical Commission), Standing from left: L. Doming Tilton (Director Santa Barbara Co. Planning Commission who helped make La Purisima a CCC project), Ronald L. Adam (Santa Barbara Co. Supervisor), Ed Rowe (landscape architect and Camp SP-29 Landscape Foreman), Frank E. Dunn (Santa Barbara Co. Forester), Harry Buckman (Santa Barbara Co. Board of Forestry), Frederick C. Hagener (Camp SP-29 eventual Senior Forester Architect), Arthur L. Dansie (NPS Engineering Foreman). Courtesy of California State Parks, Photo 090-29296.

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Above: A romanticized depiction of the “Sainted Garden” at Mission Santa Barbara.

Left: Old California pepper tree next to the Residence Building ruins (Schinus molle) standing on the site when the CCC arrived. Will Connell, photographer. Will Connell Collection, California Museum of Photography, University of California, Riverside.

State Parks, Photo 090-29296.
Edwin Denys Rowe was a tall, slim, landscape architect and California native plant expert who usually had a pipe in his mouth. He was dashing and “very gallant.” Lester Rowntree “absolutely adored” him. Although he signed his name E. Denys Rowe, he was known as Ed. The third La Purisima Project Superintendent H.V. Smith wrote that Rowe was “very intelligent,” with a “particularly pleasing personality,” attracted the “universal respect of the enrollees;” had an “extraordinary knowledge of native plants,” and could be “somewhat ‘bull-headed.’” CCC enrollees recalled that he drove a LaSalle and was “the only foreman who never got dirty.”

Born in Finchley, England on January 18, 1881, Rowe worked in nurseries before emigrating to the U.S. in 1903. He made his way to Santa Barbara in 1904 where he began working for Dr. Francesco Franciscus

Above: Early planning phase at La Purisima showing ruins before reconstruction and, from left L. Deming Tilton (Advisory Committee and Santa Barbara County Planning Commissioner), Russell Ewing (National Park Service Regional Historian), Daniel R. Hull (National Park Service Superintendent and Architect) for the State of California; Charles Wing (National Park Service Architect and California native plant expert). Rowe’s nursery beds and lath house at La Purisima with young plants in cans recycled from the mess hall. Courtesy of California State Parks, Photo 090-29553.

Below: Ed Rowe’s nursery beds and lath house at La Purisima with young plants in cans recycled from the mess hall. Courtesy of California State Parks, Photo 090-29553.
Southern California Acclimatizing Associa-
tion. By 1932 Rowe was self-employed. He
was a widower and a naturalized U.S. citizen
when he got the job at La Purisima at age 53.
In the 1920 census he listed his occupation as
landscape architect, but in the 1930 census
his occupation is real estate. Rowe was clearly
feeling the effects of the Great Depression. Thanks to
President Roosevelt’s New Deal, Rowe began
his employment with the Department of the
Interior National Park Service’s Emergency
Conservation Work Camps at La Purisima
Camp SP-29 in 1934. He started as a “tem-
porary landscape foreman.” His title by the
time he left the CCC in 1942 was “Landscape
Foreman (Landscape Architect).”

In her excellent book, New Deal Adobe, Christine Savage relates the memory of a CCC
employee that “Rowe was not experienced
with California native plants and spent time
picking the brains of Construction Foreman
Ed Nagui’s wife, Martha, who was a school
teacher with botany training.” In fact, Rowe
was recognized as an important early authority
on native plants by Maunsell Van Rensselaer
(teacher with botany training).” In fact, Rowe
was hired by the ECW on July 23, 1934, and he attended
the first Restoration Policy Meeting held at
La Purisima on August 8, 1934. Notes on the
meeting compiled by L. Deming Tilton
correctly describe Rowe not as a horticulturist
but as a “Landscape Architect.” His career
before Rowe met Martha was probably well known
to County Forester Frank E. Dunne, who
was also present at the meeting and was one of
Rowe’s references when he filled out his
May 22, 1935 application for permanent
employment with the Department of the
Interior. Rowe began propagating plants for
the project almost as soon as he was hired.

THE “MISSION GARDEN”

The “Mission Garden” was a large four to five-acre formal garden with a traditional
fountain on axis with the center of the
Residence Building colonnade serving as the focal point. From the fountain, wide paths
radiated to the lavendarias. How this design
was arrived at was not a simple process.

In February 1935, the La Purisima
Advisory Committee was named to guide the
reconstruction process. These important
civic and academic leaders held their first
meeting in March. Committee Secretary
Wallace C. Penfield drafted a letter with their
recommendations, number one being “Any
development of the park should be designed
with the idea of preserving the mission ruins
and surrounding them with a harmonious
and appropriate landscape. The location for
what will be named the “Mission Garden”
had already been selected because Penfield
recommended moving the CCC tent camp “in
what should be the mission garden area.”
The camp was relocated to the Burton
Mesa and barracks were built to house the
men. The Committee wanted to ensure that
when the park opened to the public, they
would experience completed buildings in
an established landscape. To achieve this, it
was suggested that a nursery be started as soon
as possible. By February 1936 Rowe had 8,000
plants growing in containers in the nursery
area of La Purisima, including 125 different
kinds of native plants. Like the other CCC
projects in California, La Purisima’s reconstruction was a cooperative venture between the Department of the
Interior’s National Park Service and the
California Division of State Parks. The young
mons of CCC Company #193 manufactured
oversize adobe bricks out of mud and straw,
ried their own clay roof tiles, and hand-cut
massive wooden rafters. The first building to
be reconstructed was the Residence Building,
and the “Mission Garden” was laid out in front of
the other structures were completed.
A garden was mentioned in the church
records that were studied during the historic
research phase, but what type of garden it
was, its location, and how to design and
interpret it, was the subject of intense debate.
Daniel Hull, the Chief Landscape Architect
for California State Parks, noted that “…an
ornamental garden probably never existed
at La Purisima.” Rowe later described the
dilemma “…the question arose—how
should the immediate foreground of the main
building be treated? Originally it was a dusty
plaza, but a garden seemed logical if the visitor
of today was to be interested.” However,
he was not the one who came up with this
philosophy or the design of the garden, which
Penfield believed had to be “…of generous
scale in accord with the buildings and outlying
structures [and]…should provide a setting.”

The garden philosophy was summarized
by Superintendent H. Y. Smith. “This was not
intended as a restoration of a mission
garden. it was rather intended as an exhibit of
plants introduced to California by the mission
padres and the early Spanish and Mexican
colonists.” Because an exhibit of these plants
would have been “disproportionately small by
comparison to the building group, the garden
was expanded to include a remarkably fine
collection of some 235 varieties of native
flowering plants and shrubs, many of which
were used medicinally by the Spaniards,
Mexicans and Indians.” This philosophy and
the design to carry it out would be the subject
of innumerable letters and meetings arguing about
This excerpt from an April 20, 1936 letter between Wallace Penfield, head of the Advisory Committee for the La Purisima mission reconstruction by the CCC, and its consultant Harry Shepherd of UC Berkeley makes evident that tensions were high between the local authorities and State and National Parks officialdom. The letter indicates that National Park Service Regional Historian Russell Ewing, apparently, and ironically, recommended by Shepherd for that position, is objecting to the Berkeley landscape architect’s plans for La Purisima. In the process of contempting Ewing, Penfield also manages to disparage San Francisco landscape architect Emerson Knight, also employed at this time by the National Park Service as, evidently, a frequently reassigned Inspector. In 1937 Ewing, subsequently a professor of Western history at the University of Nebraska, wrote a history of the mission for the purpose of guiding its reconstruction. (This survey was republished by the Santa Barbara Trust for Historic Preservation as part of An Archeological and Restoration Study of Mission La Purísima Concepción edited by Richard S. Whitehead, 1980 & 1991.) Knight is best known for his design for Marin County’s Mt. Tamalpais amphitheater. (See Eden, Fall 2016, Staff of the Environmental Design Archives, Emerson Knight, a Summary Biography and Description of his Collections at the Environmental Design Archives, U.C. Berkeley.)

—Phoebe Cutler

The final “Mission Garden” design was the product of a contentious process among members of the Advisory Committee, State and National Park personnel, consultant Harry Shepherd (a landscape architect who taught at UC Berkeley), and author-architect Rexford Newcomb. Newcomb’s 1925 book, The Old Mission Churches and Historic Houses of California, which Penfield relied on, is blamed by author Kryder-Reid for the formality of the design and its resemblance to the romanticized gardens at Missions Santa Barbara and San Juan Capistrano. Newcomb himself, however, hated the formality at La Purisima and warned in a 1936 letter to Penfield that all visitor facilities should be kept well away from the archaeological [building] features including the proposed garden, which “does certain violence to the whole idea of a ‘working’ museum of
mission culture." Newcomb was particularly worried about the scale and formality because a garden with "paths thirty to sixty wide is entirely unthinkable and unjustified. The old Mission gardens were simple practical affairs . . . the location and width of the paths were determined by the line of travel of the padres and their neophytes in going from building to building." He concluded by appealing to Penfield's Advisory Committee to "keep the gardens in the same spirit of the old Mission buildings, and above all do not let the thing become the type of place that lovely old Capistrano . . . has become." 39

Perhaps Newcomb's letter is why the 30-60-foot paths he loathed were reduced to 30-40 feet in the "Landscape Plan For Mission Garden" rendered in January 1937 by National Park Service associate landscape architect Louis Brandt of the NPS Regional Offices in San Francisco and Glendale. Signatures of approval include Hull, Penfield, and Primm. 40 This is essentially the final plan. Despite more than a year of criticism, numerous competing plans, and hand-wringing, in general it follows Penfield's preliminary sketch plan. 39

Only the "Mission Garden" in front of the Residence Building and the area around it are treated. A parking lot beyond it is shown. 41 In this attractive rendition, the large, existing California pepper tree (Schinus molle) is a feature of a "Plaza" in front of the Residence Building, with hollyhocks and geraniums planted around each of the building's columns. Axial paths follow the layout of Penfield's plan, but dimensions and surfaces of decomposed granite are specified. There are six Phoenix palm trees, with areas labeled "shrub masses," and "herbaceous plants" under numerous olive, fig, and California pepper trees. Several kinds of citrus, two apricot trees, and a pear tree are in planting beds subdivided by narrow paths. On its north and south edges, the garden is enclosed by two straight lines of "Mission fruit trees" and surrounded by informal groupings of oaks and pepper trees. Numerous Pterostyrax racemosa (western sycamore) are located in the riparian drainage ditch enclosing the garden on its eastern edge. Plant material thus achieved the walled garden edges, the garden is enclosed by two straight lines of "Mission fruit trees" and surrounded by informal groupings of oaks and pepper trees. Numerous Pterostyrax racemosa (western sycamore) are located in the riparian drainage ditch enclosing the garden on its eastern edge. Plant material thus achieved the walled garden being by WPA artists for carved, stone faces which they will and grow in the fashion which best pleases them" because "the padres didn't landscape—they just put the things in and let them grow in their own fashion." 51 Pear trees were propagated by cuttings from the one tree that remained in the orchard north—east of the Residence Building and grafted onto roostock, as were numerous other Mission-era fruit trees from other locations. Brandt's plan specified palm and olive trees. Mature date palms (Phoenix dactylifera) were transplanted from Goleta about 30 miles away. Rowe went even farther to transplant 27 fifty-year-old olive trees (originally

Rowe planted the Mission Garden c. 1936-1937 and also installed the landscape for the entire mission grounds. 2 He had a crew of 128 CCC men to help him propagate plants (mainly from seed), move mature trees, plant the Mission Garden, and maintain it. 52 His attitude toward maintenance was loose: "The padres never pruned," so Rowe didn't prune the rose of Castile bushes, and he let things go to seed and "spring up where they will and grow in the fashion which best pleases them" because "the padres didn't landscape—they just put the things in and let them grow in their own fashion." 51 Pear trees were propagated by cuttings from the one tree that remained in the orchard north—east of the Residence Building and grafted onto roostock, as were numerous other Mission-era fruit trees from other locations. It was Brandt's plan specified palm and olive trees. Mature date palms (Phoenix dactylifera) were transplanted from Goleta about 30 miles away. Rowe went even farther to transplant 27 fifty-year-old olive trees (originally...
Above: A detail of “Planting Plan for Mission Garden” January 1935 specifies the plants that will fill the beds in Brandt’s more conceptual “Landscape Plan for Mission Garden.” Ed Rowe selected many of the plants for this garden and propagated all of them except the mature palm and olive trees he transplanted from miles away. Courtesy of La Purisima Mission State Historic Park Archive.

Far right: The formality of the January 1937 “Landscape Plan for Mission Garden” (seen here in detail drawn by Louis Brandt, Associate Landscape Architect for the National Park Service, Western Regional Office, was based on Penfield’s “Preliminary Sketch Plan” of September 1935; Community Development and Conservation Collection, Department of Special Research Collections, UCSB Library, University of California, Santa Barbara.
Opposite page, top: CCC men hoist a mature olive tree into place in the Mission Garden around 1937 with the Residence Building and the Burton Mesa in the background. The numerous olive trees at La Purisima were transplanted from an orchard that had been propagated from Mission Santa Barbara trees. Courtesy of California State Parks, Photo 090-29701.

Opposite page, bottom: The Mission Garden with central fountain surrounded by transplanted olive and date palm trees. The plants are a mixture of those introduced from Europe by the Spanish and native plants utilized by Indians. Photo by Wilkes, Community Development and Conservation Collection, Department of Special Research Collections, UCSB Library, University of California, Santa Barbara.

Above: Ed Rowe’s “Planting Plan for Slope West of Mission Area” is almost entirely native plants. Courtesy of La Purisima Mission State Historic Park Archive.
propagated from the trees growing at Mission Santa Barbara from an orchard in Santa Barbara. A 1937 NPS press release said, “no other phase of the project has contributed more to the coveted atmosphere of age than the addition of the olive trees.” The Garden was erroneously described as “a near duplicate of that planted by the padres.”

In September 1937, when the Residence Building reconstruction was complete, the La Purisima State Historical Monument officially opened to the public with a dedication ceremony that included a tour of the building and Mission Garden. However, work on the octagonal forecourt and lavanderias in the garden was not completed until 1938. Also in 1938, Rowe designed informal planting for a small part of the Burton Mesa. On Penfield September 1935 “Preliminary Sketch Plan…he had indicated a “Brush-Covered Hill-Slope” behind the main buildings. Rowe was the designer for the January 10, 1938 “Planting Plan, Slope West of Mission Bldgs.” Except for two olive trees, the planting is devoted to natives including two of his Ceanothus arboreus hybrids. He eventually had 240 varieties of native plants at La Purisima including 30 varieties of ceanothus.” The Shops and Quarters Building, church, bell tower, and cemetery were completed by 1941. Many minor buildings would be reconstructed later.

In September 1941 Lester Rowntree described the “restored” garden in glowing terms: “I like to see this mixture of wild and tame, just the sort of thing which must have been going on in the padres’ day.” Three months later, on December 7, 1941, High Mass was conducted by a Catholic Priest in the reconstructed church at La Purisima to celebrate the completion of all the main buildings and “Old Mission Days” in Santa Barbara County. When people emerged from the church, they learned of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Architect Fred Hageman had left La Purisima in 1939. He worked for the Navy during World War II, lost everything on a failed development project after the war, and committed suicide in 1948. He died in Lompoc on March 18, 1954.

The Advisory Committee continued to meet after the war. A survey of the Mission Garden by Arthur Sill was recorded by Advisory Committee member Edith B. Webb, who noted that the long period of neglect and the short life span of some native plants had resulted in a shocking number of plants dying. The Mission Garden at La Purisima was a Colonial Revival-style garden, today a legitimate historic style with ideological implications. It was not a reconstruction, or replica, of the original garden at the mission. The concept that was established here—of a garden displaying authentic plants of the mission period in a sort of living museum—was the basis for similar garden projects at El Presidio de Santa Barbara State Historic Park, La Huerta at Mission Santa Barbara, and the Mission Garden Project in Tucson, Arizona. Garden merely as “setting” for historic buildings continues to haunt us. La Purisima Mission State Historic Park materials no longer mention Indian uses of plants, but say: “Buildings and grounds were painstakingly restored and furnished to appear as they had in 1820.”

Despite this disrespect for the integrity of historic gardens, still embedded in the Mission Garden at La Purisima is the remains of an early ethnobotanical display of native plants utilized by California Indians that celebrates the California landscape and the people who inhabited it before the Spanish colonizers arrived.

“There is such a splendid opportunity here to perpetuate a garden containing plants that were valuable to the Indians and to the Padres that it should never be lost sight of. Ed Rowe certainly laid the groundwork for it, and a continuing garden would be a most fitting monument to him.”

Acknowledgments

Rhoda Ceder, MLA and author, generously shared her thoughts, scans of landscape plans for La Purisima, and her unpublished chronology that was the basis for her lecture delivered to the California Preservation Foundation’s 28th Annual Conference in Santa Barbara, CA, April 26, 2023 session: “Cultural Landscapes—Garden Gems.” Many thanks also to: Carol Berrozo, Director, Living Collections, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County; Betsy Collins, Director of Horticulture, Santa Barbara Botanic Garden; Chris S. Ervin, CA, Archivist and Librarian, Presidio Research Center, Santa Barbara; Trust for Historic Preservation; Edward C. Fields, Assistant Head, and Staff, Department of Special Research Collections, University of California, Santa Barbara Library; George Fuller, Archival Reference Technician, National Archives, St. Louis, MO; Laurie Hantun, MLS librarian extraordinaire; Michael Haukevick, author, Shyra Liguori, California State Parks, La Purisima Mission SHP; Joel Michaelson, Geography Professor Emeritus, University of California, Santa Barbara; Karen Paaske, Lompoc Valley Historical Society; Susan C. Nabauer, Archivist Librarian, Los Angeles County Arboretum & Botanic Garden; John Shimabuk, eqy historian; Randy Wright, Information Resource Steward, Santa Barbara Botanic Garden Blakely Library.
Louis Brandt (1887-1939): Landscape Architect for the National Park Service in California

SUSAN CHAMBERLIN

ous Brandt was hired by the National Park Service to work in the NPS Region IV, Western office that administered Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) work crews developing parks in cooperation with the California Division of State Parks. This New Deal Depression-era program was responsible for numerous parks in California, and Brandt is associated with many of them from at least 1934 until his death in 1939 at age 52 before the program ended. He was “one of the earliest NPS landscape architects.”

Brandt was born in Boston, Massachusetts on November 5, 1887 to parents originally from Norway. He graduated from Everett High School in Everett, Massachusetts and attended Massachusetts Agricultural College in Amherst (later called Massachusetts State University) majoring in either horticulture or landscape architecture.1 Brandt was a standout student in several activities and was the “artist” on the board of editors for his 1910 yearbook as well as “Class Captain” and captain of the hockey team. Following his graduation in 1910, he worked with the City Park Department in Minneapolis, and then taught “landscape gardening” at the University of Illinois, where he may have been associated with its landscape plan.2 The 1918 “Master Builder Plan” for Bowling Green State Normal College in Ohio (later Bowling Green State University) is attributed to him.3

He practiced landscape architecture in Louisville, Kentucky, Cleveland, Ohio, and Miami, Florida where he also served as mayor of Fuford, a Miami suburb. At some point, he studied at the Institute of Urban Design and Town Planning in Liverpool, England. In the early 1930s, Brandt moved to Los Angeles to work as a landscape architect for the county designing playgrounds and parks.4 In March 1934 he is described as the landscape architect and engineer for the County of Los Angeles Forestry and Park Department in charge of the work at the Los Angeles County farmyards. By December Brandt was the landscape architect in charge of “the planning and developing of the four state parks [Natural Bridges, New Brighton, Seal Beach, and Sunset Beach] being built at this time.”5 Brandt managed the Landscape Architecture program was responsible for numerous parks in California, and Brandt is associated with many of them from at least 1934 until his death in 1939 at age 52 before the program ended. He was “one of the earliest NPS landscape architects.”

Endnotes
2. Brandt’s birth record, 1917 Draft Card, U.S. War Department, National Personnel Records Center, St. Louis, Missouri. Brandt was married in Chicago in 1916 and was living in Florida as a landscape architect in 1930. His wife and two daughters continued to live in Florida after Brandt’s move to California, and she described herself as a widow in the 1935 Florida State census. Brandt died in San Francisco on November 21, 1939.

Above: On the left and right of this path through the Mission Garden are primitive varieties of European artichokes brought from nearby Mission Santa Ynez. A native Artemisia pyracocephala (beach sagewort) is in the left foreground. Photo from the Will Connell Collection, California Museum of Photography, University of California, Riverside.

Above Left: Brandt in 1910.

Above Right: Morro Bay State Park was designed in the “Park Rustic” style of landscape architecture. Brandt’s rendering of the plan for the garden. Consistent with his artistic background, Brandt’s rendering of the plan is beautiful. The garden is quite formal with axial, symmetrical paths based on a 1989 “Preliminary Sketch Plan” by Walter C. Penfield, the Santa Barbara County Planning Commission Engineer who was later the Chair of the La Purisima Advisory Committee. With the “Mission Garden” design, tables, fire pits, and restrooms are made of local stone, and many trees and shrubs are California natives. It is considered one of the best and earliest examples of the Park Rustic style in California. Brandt is also associated with the rustic design of Big Basin in Santa Cruz County.6

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Previous spread: Some California Indians used evening primrose (Oenothera elata var. hookeri) to produce a cure-all for all ills. Their flowers are enjoyed by Gladys Pendley’s left) and Betty McLoughlin during a visit to the Mission Garden in about 1941. Photo by Wilkes, Community Development and Conservation Collection, Department of Special Research Collections, UCSC Library, University of California, Santa Barbara.

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Front Cover: The largest of the lavanderias at La Purisima in the "Mission Garden" (also called the Indian bathing pool) features a face copied from Mission San Luis Rey and crafted by WPA artists. Photograph taken in 1939, Will Connell Collection, California Museum of Photography, University of California, Riverside.

Back Cover: Not long before he died, Ed Rowe stood on Mount Tranquillon near Lompoc next to Ceanothus Roweanus, a shorter, more attractive clone of C. papillosus Roweanus. Both were collected by Rowe here and named after him by Howard E. McMinn in 1939. Photo by Katherine K. Muller, Courtesy of the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden.