

San Juan Capistrano's Jauneno Indian Heritage

THE BEGINNINGS

(Part I of III)

By Jerry Nieblas, as told to Janice Pickartz

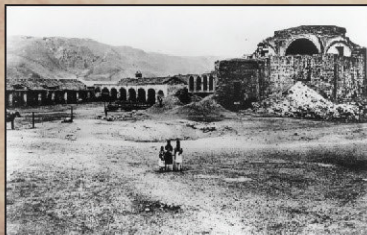


Photo courtesy of San Juan Historical Society



Juaneno and Early Californio Rancho Vaqueros gather at a local rancho. Photo courtesy of San Juan Historical Society



A portrayal of early life in San Juan Capistrano and the Mission. Many Juanenos married into the early Spanish families from this area. Photo courtesy of San Juan Historical Society

As a pre-Mission descendant of the Juaneno Band of Mission Indians and two early Californio Rancho families, I have been invited to share the accurate, factual story of our historical connection to this land and Mission called San Juan Capistrano.

San Juan Capistrano began with natural resources, clean environment, fresh water and prosperous villages of the Juaneno Indians, who were hunters and gatherers. There was a simplicity, a bond with Mother Earth and her elements.

With the establishment of the Mission, early Californios, Rancho families and European settlers became a part of San Juan Capistrano. They brought money, influence, political power, religion and education. It also meant the introduction of illnesses to the valley, wreaking havoc among the Juanenos. Life was changing. What was familiar to the Juanenos was a contradiction to the newcomers, forcing the Juanenos to change their ways. In order to survive, resisting the new ways was not an option. And, those ways affected every single part of daily life, forever changing the people and its landscape.

The Juanenos became Vaqueros, Care-givers, Craftsmen, Candle-makers, Stone masons, Carvers, Laborers, Flock tenders and guardians of the land. More importantly, guardians of the very Mission they were forced to build. They kept the valley going. Giving of their hearts and souls, they built "zanjas" (aqueducts), created the bountiful orchards and vineyards, worked the ranches, constructed the early adobes, out-buildings and "placitas" (plazas). As a result, growing out of what was becoming a vital part of the Mission's and early ranchos very survival. Also, out of all the chaos and confusion that change brought to the lives of the Juanenos, somehow through it all, a happy marriage was formed. Through the struggle, a stronger bond grew. A bond with the land, and a bond with the Mission.

The Juanenos not only survived, they flourished. Who and what they were became so very important...

Jerry Nieblas is the co-founder and President of Capistrano Historical Alliance Committee and a lifelong resident of San Juan Capistrano. In this first of a three-part series, Mr. Nieblas shares his historical knowledge of the establishment of San Juan Capistrano.



Ajachemen/Juaneno hunters and gatherers netting fish, one of their many food sources.

Photo credit: missionscalifornia.com



Juaneno and Early Californio Rancho Vaquero descendants take rare time to relax, share stories and a meal. Photo courtesy of San Juan Historical Society

San Juan Capistrano is Celebrating... National Historic Preservation Week

Saturday, May 7, 2016 10am - 2pm

At Historic Los Rios Street - "The Oldest Residential Neighborhood in the State of California."

Activities for the whole family include:

- Private historic homes open to the public, providing a rare glimpse of architectural treasures
- Docents recounting stories of the area's early years

Annual Fiesta Family Day Celebration with:

- Corn Husk Doll making & Traditional Pinatas • Juaneno cultural displays, shell jewelry making & basket weaving
- Hand-Made Tortillas, Music – Games - and more!

START at the SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO HISTORIC SOCIETY

At the O'Neill House & Museum

31831 Los Rios Street

San Juan Capistrano, CA 92675