

# San Juan Capistrano's Juaneño Indian Heritage

(Part III of III)

## THE GREAT RESURGAM

By Jerry Nieblas, as told to Janice Pickartz



*The Juanenos reclaim land and livestock.  
Photo courtesy of San Juan Historical Society*



*The local depot and railroad; things would  
never be the same.  
Photo courtesy of San Juan Historical Society*

Mission lands, being of Catholic faith, having the knowledge of Catholicism and local history was required to work at the Old Mission. The Juanenos had the faith, the knowledge and history and that's who embraced the guests. They welcomed ALL guests, while always maintaining genuine, sincere Franciscan hospitality up until Reverend Monsignor Paul Martin retired from the Mission in 2003, with great humility and acceptance.

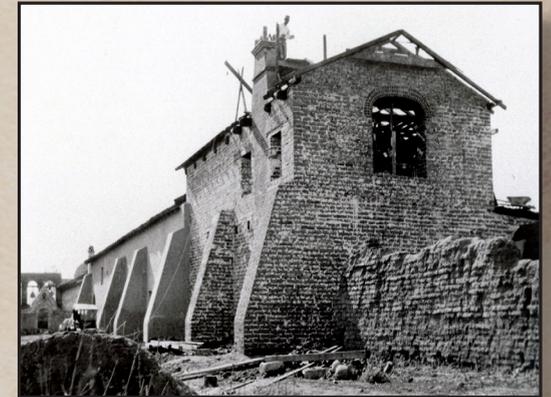
The Juaneno men also proudly served their country, (WWI, WWII, Korea & Vietnam-for many years their contribution considered so great an honor that a list titled Honor Roll of This Parish hung in the back of Blessed Serra Chapel with their names so people could take a moment and remember their sacrifice - the Honor Roll has since vanished.)

The great RESURGAM had begun. With the Old Mission's restoration underway and having fought a hard battle to keep it alive, the Juanenos claimed their land, livestock and their way of life again. By taking stock in how far they'd come, the Juanenos saw that they were the very backbone of the Old Mission and San Juan Capistrano's re-birth.

In 1887, the railroad came to town. This mixed blessing brought cattle, sheep, grain and perishables. The railway brought tourism- visitors were travelers, authors, artists and educators. However, it also brought expansion and development. While businesses began to prosper, the Juanenos remained steadfast and cautious towards modern times that came with the railroad.

The Juanenos were turned away from the Old Mission and became victims of the political unrest, thanks to governments in chaos. They were forced to integrate themselves amongst the changes. Through the turmoil and upheavals, the Juanenos made sure the large Ranchos thrived, (many other large Ranchos in surrounding areas were dying off) their crops flourished, and finally their Old Mission restored by their own hands. Defeat was never an option before and certainly wouldn't be now. As the town expanded over time, it witnessed the growth of tourism, new residents and business.

In 1910, Right Reverend Monsignor St. John O'Sullivan was put in charge of the Old Mission. He put up fencing, creating a place that guests wanted to visit and parishioners would call their home. Being a descendant of



*The RESURGAM had begun; the Juane-  
nos would rebuild their Mission.  
Photo courtesy of San Juan Historical Society*



*SJC bursting with prosperous agriculture.  
Photo courtesy of San Juan Historical Society*



**The Right Reverend Monsignor St. John O'Sullivan.**

*Photo courtesy of San Juan Historical Society*

As we enter current time, sadly so much has changed. The layers of history have not been kind to the Juanenos, their lives, their beliefs & culture, their kindness, humility and faith, their sacred lands and their hearts. Beautiful hills once covered with wild roses, poppies, mustard seed, sweet peas and hollyhock are now dotted with houses.

Crisp and clear creeks have been dammed up, resulting in water flow being altered and re-directed. The acres of farmland and crops have been ripped from the earth and replaced with asphalt. The corn fields and orange groves have been replaced with condominiums and retail centers.

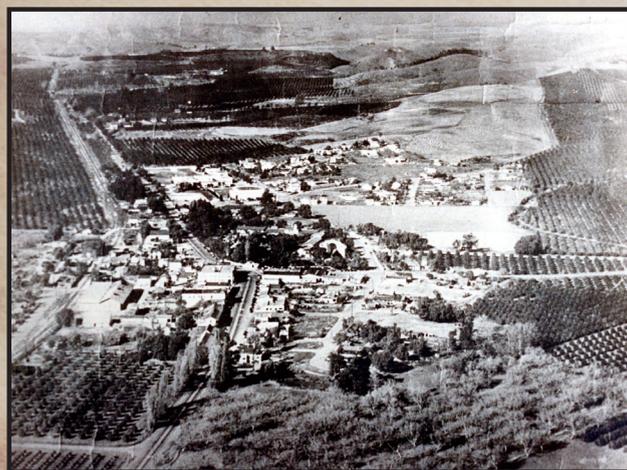
There's no deer, few opossum, skunks, squirrels and rabbits. The natural landscape has been desecrated,

neglected, abused and forever scarred. And, the air that hung heavy with the scent of orange blossoms is now polluted with exhaust fumes from too many vehicles. Skies once black with swallows returning on St. Joseph's Day are blue on March 19th. The behavior of those swallows many years ago, told the Juanenos what weather was to come and now, swallows are rarely seen in town. St. Joseph's Day used to be a day for the town to celebrate their beloved bird, gather to share food and stories. Now, it's a shoot 'em up, bang, bang cowboy show. The swallows have left for quieter, open spaces. They won't be back no matter how many artificial means the Mission uses to entice the birds. Some



**Old San Juan in all her glory.**

*Photo courtesy of San Juan Historical Society*



**Modern SJC**

*Photo courtesy of San Juan Historical Society*

of the things most sacred to the Juanenos are no longer within reach...they can no longer freely come and go to their home away from home. Wide open, welcoming doors no longer exist....all in the name of progress, greedy developers who couldn't care less about San Juan Capistrano's rich, diverse history and of course, the almighty dollar.

For the first time in decades, now some developers are willing to listen, sit down with them, hear their history, hear their stories. While development can't be stopped, it does have the ability to tell their stories by incorporating their history into the new structures through architecture and photographs. The stories serve as a reminder that everything you see in San Juan

Capistrano is because of the Juanenos - the Mission, her ruins, her chapel, protected liturgical items, the names of streets, the historical adobes & buildings, the creeks full with water after a winter's rain, the priceless artifacts throughout the town. Today, Juanenos are watching the sacred circle complete itself.

Jerry Nieblas was told several times "out with the old, and in with the new" and "things are no longer a Mom & Pop organization". But don't misunderstand these statements. The Juanenos will FOREVER be the backbone of the Mission and San Juan Capistrano. They have entrusted their sacred lands to all of us. They MUST be the example in order to be worthy of such an honor. The Juanenos will never go away. They will be here, standing in humility for whatever the future brings, continually picking themselves up, brushing themselves off, and starting all over again. That's who they are as a people and that's who they will always be.



**The Sacred Mission garden is the backbone of the Juanenos; their heart and soul.**

*Photo courtesy of San Juan Historical Society*