

# Life in Presidial California

## Introduction

The presidio, one of three frontier institutions upon which Spanish colonization relied, was a fortified place—a garrison. Its function was to provide military protection to a district. Soldiers were assigned to scout, eject intruders, and provide *escortas* (escorts) for missionaries. The presidio also served as the heart of government and judicial activities and a communication and supply center. Enlisted men were assigned construction duties at the presidio, or to agricultural and ranching tasks on the *rancho del rey* (presidial farm). During off-duty hours the soldiers worked as skilled artisans or laborers as time allowed (1).

While some of the garrisons were temporary, the substantial construction of others suggests that they were intended as permanent structures. Presidios stretched along the northern frontier of the viceroyalty of New Spain, from St. Augustine and Pensacola, through New Orleans and San Antonio, to the northernmost outpost at San Francisco. Through these outposts Spain controlled a defensive perimeter twice as long as the Rhine-Danube line held by the Roman empire (2).

The strategic location of military settlements was a prime consideration. The presidio at San Diego, established by Captain Gaspar de Portolá during the initial colonization of California in 1769, overlooked San Diego Bay. The presidio of San Carlos Borromeo de Monterey was established on Monterey Bay at the same time the mission was founded in 1770. Juan Bautista de Anza chose to strategically locate the San Francisco Presidio at the entrance to the Golden Gate in 1776. José Francisco Ortega in 1782 established the presidio at Santa Barbara slightly inland, close to fresh water, to a large Chumash Indian settlement, and to the planned site of Mission Santa Barbara Virgen y Mártir (3).

The fortified enclosures included two to four bastions, which housed three or four twenty-four-pound cannons and a variety of eight-to-twelve-pound artillery. Ammunition was stored nearby. Weapons included broadswords, muzzle-loading pistols, and muskets and lances with thirteen-inch blades (4). Presidio supplies sent from New Spain via San Blas included plough shares, sickles, hoes, hammers, pincers, scales, compasses, awls, needles, and more. Requests for supplies for the California settlements included large

amounts of chocolate, sugar loaves, barrels of wine, pharmaceuticals, and all manner of textiles and ribbon (5).

Within the stone or adobe garrisons were officers' quarters, barracks for unmarried enlisted men, and dwellings for married personnel and their dependents, who at San Francisco in 1776 numbered 48 military and 150 dependents (6). In addition to the commandant's quarters, the church, and the chaplain's quarters, there were horse corrals and several warehouses stocked with jerky, chile, chick peas, and beans, largely harvested from the presidio's own ranch, which became an essential source of supplies as a result of Spain's increasing neglect after 1810 (7). Food and supplies like blankets, textiles, and metal implements were acquired from the missions.

The average military complement included both unmounted Catalonian volunteers and leather-jacketed mounted lancers, the latter recruited mostly from Spain's northern frontier provinces. In command was a *teniente* (captain), and subalterns who were appointed by the civil authorities or by the captain with the approval of higher authorities (8). The number of soldiers was never large. In all of California in 1796 there were 370 men in presidial companies, including 12 commissioned officers, 35 noncommissioned officers, 260 privates (mostly mestizos), 160 pensioners, 4 or 5 mechanics, and a surgeon (9).

## Time Frame

The following exercises could be included as part of a unit on colonial settlements in America. The lesson plan, focusing on presidial California, requires two class periods. It can be integrated with complementary lessons on the mission and the ranch.

## Student Objectives

1. To understand the importance of utilizing a variety of historical resources to gain a clear understanding of historic events and situations.
2. To understand the chronological context of events in presidial California in relation to developments in the English colonies and Europe.
3. To develop a degree of visual literacy.

4. To understand how and why many different perspectives can evolve from a shared event or experience.

#### Connections to National Standards of History

United States History Standards for Grades 5-12:

Era 2: Colonization and Settlement (1585-1763)

Standard 1: *The early arrival of Europeans and Africans in the Americas, and how these people interacted with Native Americans.*

#### Procedure

In order to provide students with background reading on the presidios in Alta California, distribute copies of the Introduction or appropriate selections from books listed in the endnotes. Use the four handouts included with this article for individual, small group, or general class assignments. Assessment should be made through the culminating activity, the student development of an independent project such as a diary entry, a first-person narrative, or an original letter using information and understandings derived from the preceding exercises. Final extension activities offer students ways to pursue further study of the subject on their own.

#### I. Placing Presidial California in Chronological Context

Distribute copies of the Introduction or appropriate selections from books listed in the endnotes to provide students with background information. In order to place Alta California's Spanish presidios in chronological context, have the students use classroom reference books to supply the missing information on the timeline that appears on Handout 1.

#### II. Placing the Presidio in Physical Context

To place the presidio in physical context have small groups jointly examine the plan for the presidio at Santa Barbara reproduced on Handout 2 and answer the questions that follow.

#### III. Placing the Presidio in Visual Context

As a homework assignment or small group activity, have students examine the view of the presidio at Monterey sketched in 1790 by José Cardero, which appears on Handout 3, and answer the questions that follow.

#### IV. Examining Life in the Presidios from Different Points of View

To help students understand how common experiences can be viewed from different perspectives and produce contradictory opinions, distribute Handout 4, which contains two accounts of life in presidial California. After students read each passage, have them complete the *Multiple Viewpoints of Presidio Life* graphic organizer and then enter into a class discussion of the passages, answering the questions that follow the readings.

#### Assessment

Ask students to write a diary entry, a narrative account, or a letter using information and understandings drawn from the background reading and the four exercises.

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This lesson offers a series of activities designed to teach students about the Spanish presidio by placing it in chronological, physical, and visual context. Letters from the period provide further insight.

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#### Extension Activity

Ask students the following questions:

1. If you were interested in learning more about the presidios, could you plan a trip to see any of them? What is located there now?
2. Would you like to visit some web sites that will tell you more about Spanish presidios in Alta California? (See list of related web sites below.)
3. Where else would you go to learn more about presidial life? □

#### Endnotes

1. Charles E. Chapman, *A History of California: The Spanish Period* (New York: MacMillan, 1926), 389-91. For fuller accounts of the function of the presidio along the Spanish frontier, see Herbert E. Bolton, *The Spanish Borderlands: A Chronicle of Old Florida and the Southwest* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1921); David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); and John Francis Bannon, *The Spanish Borderlands Frontier, 1513-1821* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974).
2. Bolton, *Spanish Borderlands*, 201-2.
3. Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of California*, vol. 1 (Santa Barbara, CA: W. Hebbard, 1963), 289, 335; and Richard S.

- Whitehead, *Alta California's Four Fortresses* (Los Angeles: Zamorano Club, 1985).
4. J. Phillip Langellier and Daniel Rosen, *El Presidio de San Francisco: A History Under Spain and Mexico, 1776-1846* (Spokane, WA: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1996), 80-86. See also Max L. Moorhead, *The Presidio: Bastion of the Spanish Borderlands* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1975); and Odie B. Faulk, *The Leather Jacket Soldier: Spanish Military Equipment and Institutions in the Late 18th Century* (Pasadena, CA: Socio-Technical Publications, 1971).
  5. Giorgio Perissinotto, ed., *Documenting Everyday Life in Early Spanish California: The Santa Barbara Presidio, Memorias y Facturas, 1779-1810* (Santa Barbara, CA: Santa Barbara Trust for Historic Preservation, 1998), 27-33.
  6. Langellier and Rosen, *El Presidio de San Francisco*, 194-97.
  7. *Ibid.*, 107-47, 251; Perissinotto, *Documenting Everyday Life*, 20.
  8. Langellier and Rosen, *El Presidio de San Francisco*, 86-90. See also Charles W. Polzer, S. J. and Thomas E. Sheridan, eds., *The Presidio and Militia on the Northern Frontier of New Spain*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1977).
  9. Bancroft, *History of California*, 2:189. See also Joseph P. Sánchez, *Spanish Bluecoats: The Catalan Volunteers in Northwestern New Spain, 1767-1810* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990); and Sidney B. Brinckerhoff and Odie B. Faulk, *Lancers for the King: A Study of the Frontier Military System of Northern New Spain* (Phoenix: Arizona Historical Foundation, 1965).

#### Related Web Sites

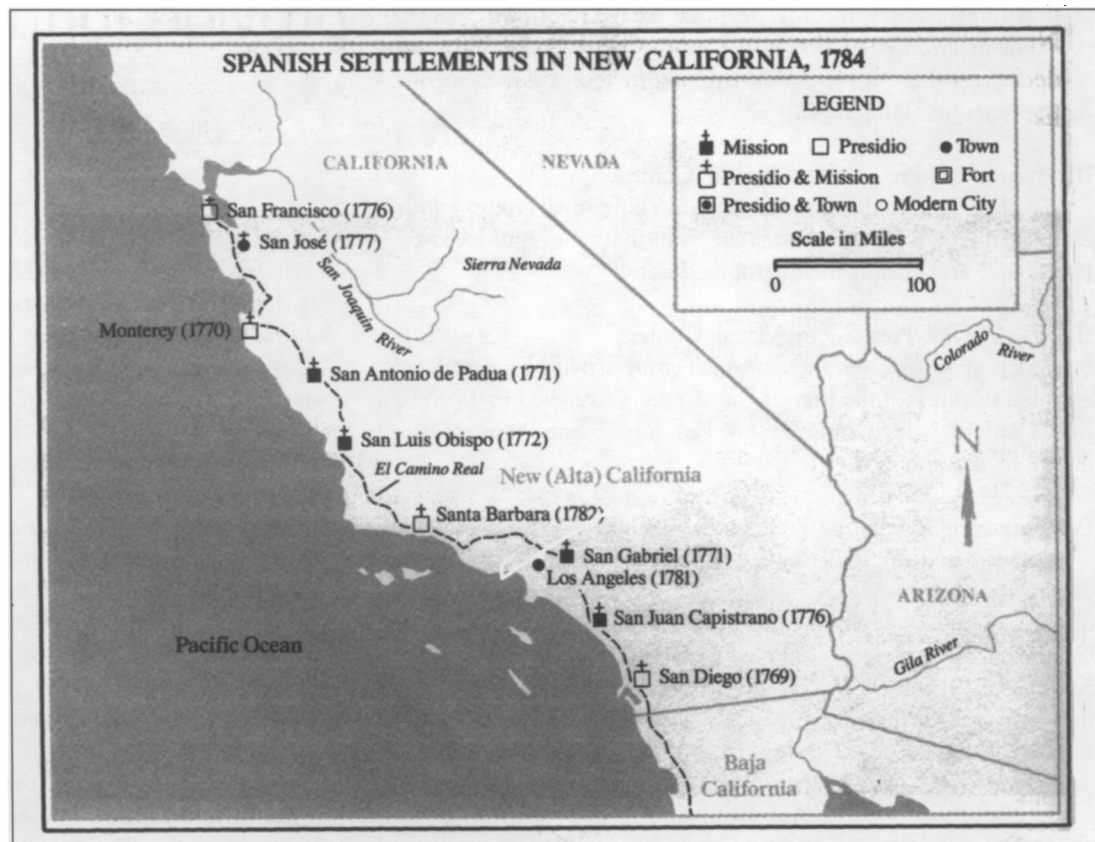
- Santa Barbara Trust for Historic Preservation, *Le Presidio de Santa Barbara Historic Park*: <<http://www.rain.org/~sbthp/presidio.htm>>.
- Los Soldados: Soldiers of the Royal Presidio of Santa Barbara*: <<http://www.vitrex.net/~quatroiv/StBarbara/>>.
- California Mission Studies Association, *Missions in the Californias and Northern New Spain*: <<http://www.ca-missions.org/biblio.html>>.
- Monterey County Historical Society, *Monterey's First Years: The Royal Presidio of San Carlos de Monterey*: <<http://users.dedot.com/>

mchs/presidio.html>.

- Presidio History*: <<http://www.nps.gov/prsf/prsfphoto/newmedia.htm>>.
- The National Park Service, *Presidio of San Francisco*: <<http://www.nps.gov/prsf/index.htm>>.
- San Francisco Presidio, *Overview: A History of the Presidio: From 1776-2000*: <<http://www.envcleanup.gov/capresid/overview.htm>>.

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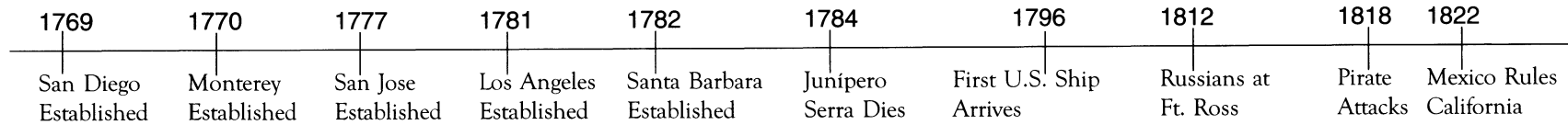
Spanish Settlements in New California, 1784. (David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992], 262. Courtesy of Yale University Press.)

# Handout 1

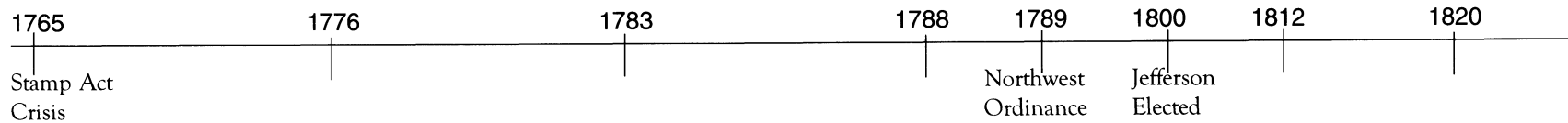
## Placing Presidial California in a Chronological Context

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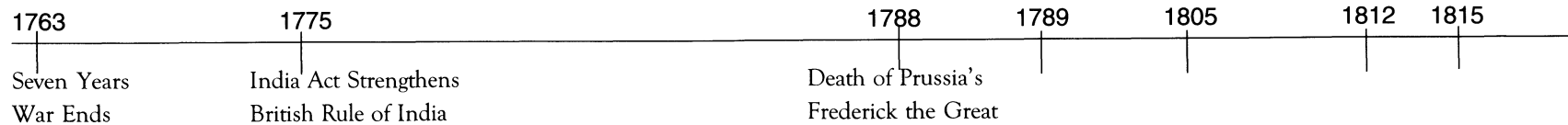
### Events in California



### Events in Early American History

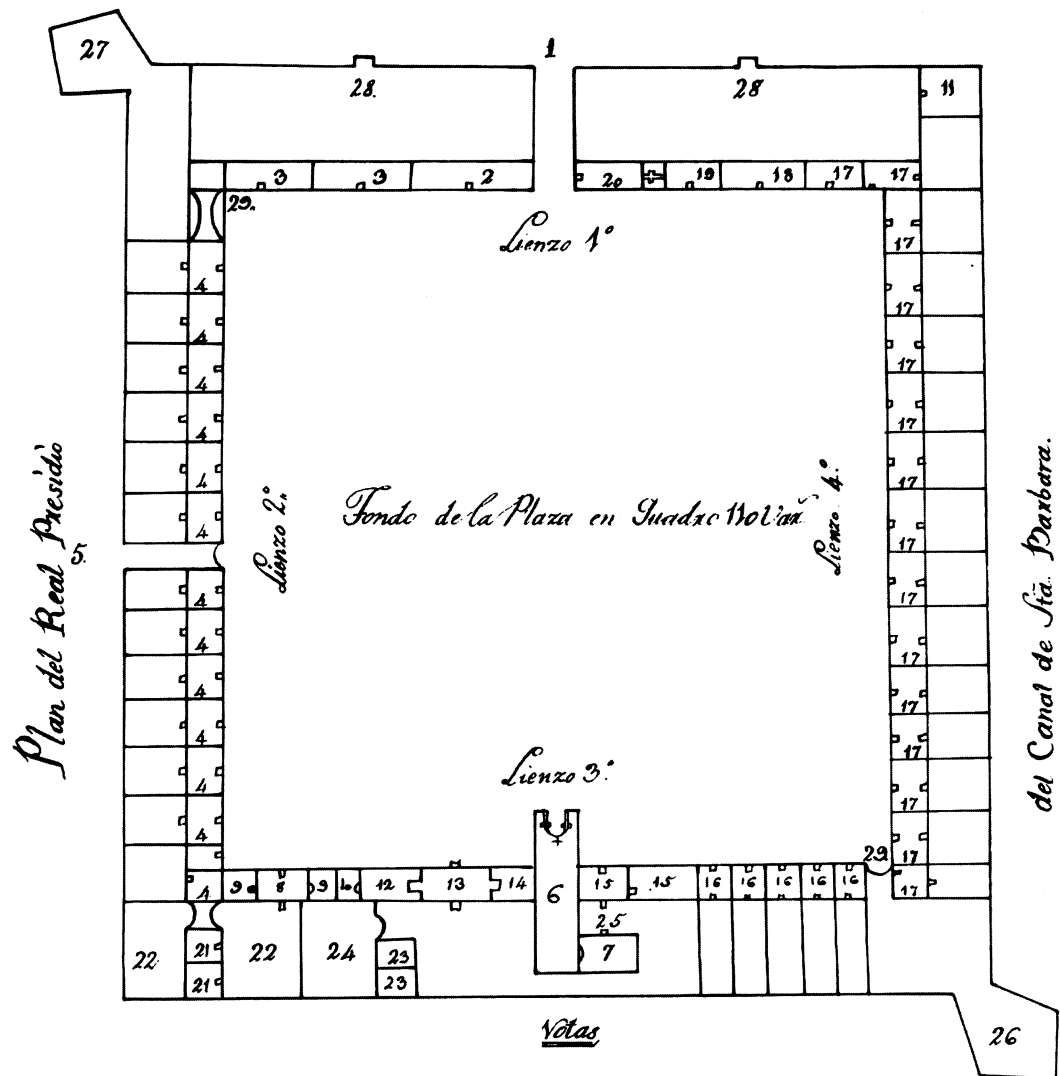


### Events in Europe



# Handout 2

The Plan of the Royal Presidio of Santa Barbara (right), signed by Pedro Fages, 16 September 1783. It was accompanied by detailed notes, translated below by Richard S. Whitehead in his article, "Alta California's Four Fortresses," *Southern California Quarterly* 65 (Spring 1983): 84. The plan itself is reproduced courtesy of the Edward E. Ayer Collection, Newberry Library, and the translation, courtesy of the *Southern California Quarterly*, Historical Society of Southern California.



## NOTES

Of the thirteen houses shown on the fourth front of the quadrangle, the walls are finished, three-quarters [of a vara] thick, and three varas high without the ridge of the roofs, which are to be the same as the other [houses] for the soldiers, and also the corresponding woodwork has been put into seven of them, and the little that is lacking for the rest is being brought, and more than four thousand tiles are made for their roofs. [Note: a vara = 2.75 ft. or 33 in.]

All of the outer wall shown in this plan is ready to be built, and it will be started beginning with the month of November, at which time the quadrangle will be completed. The front walls of the first front are standing; they are one and a half adobes [bricks] thick, mortared, because of the poor quality of the soil for adobes.

1. Main gate with an opening of 4 varas.
2. A storehouse for supplies, 20 varas in length and 5 1/2 in width, its roof of beams, finished boards, and good quality tile.
3. Two of the same, of the same size, for provisions and other effects, the roof of beams, wattles, and tile as above.
4. Thirteen houses for families—8 varas in length and 5 in width—the roofs of rafters, wattles and good tile.
5. Private gate with an opening of 3 varas, roofed like the houses.
6. Church, 20 varas in length, 8 in width, and 7 1/2 in height, lined with mortar and whitewashed—its roof of beams and finished boards and good tile, and adorned with painting.
7. Sacristy, 5 varas in length and 4 in width—its roof like the church.
8. Living-room of the second lieutenant, 8 varas in length, 5 in width—its roof of rafters, wattles, and good tile.
9. Two bedrooms for the above—5 varas in the clear—the roof like the living-room.
10. Bedroom of the Comandante—5 varas in the clear, its roof of beams, finished boards, and good tile.
11. House for the sentry.
12. A living-room for the Comandante, 11 varas in length and 5 in width, its roof of beams, finished boards, and good tile.
13. Entrance-hall of the above—4 varas in the clear—4 in height (sic).
14. Office for writing, 5 1/2 varas in length, 5 in width.
15. Living-room and bedroom of the chaplain, 11 varas in length for both rooms, and 5 in width, the roofs of rafters, wattles, and good tile.
16. Five houses for families—8 varas in length, 5 in width—their roofs like that of the chaplain.
17. Fifteen houses on the fourth front for families—9 varas in length and 5 in width—their roof like those before-mentioned.
18. House of the sergeant, 15 varas in length, 5 1/2 in width—its roof as above.
19. Barracks for the soldiers—20 varas in length, 5 1/2 in width—its roof as above.
20. Guard-house—12 varas, and two small cells of 4 varas.
21. Kitchen and pantry of the second lieutenant, 6 varas in length and 4 in width, its roof as above.
22. Two yards for the second lieutenant's house—one of 14 varas and the other of 7.
23. Kitchen and pantry of the Comandante, 6 varas in length and 4 in width, roofed as above.
24. Two yards for the Comandante—one of 25 varas in length and 14 in width, and the other 14 in length and 8 in width.
25. Yard of the chaplain's house, 14 varas in length and 11 in width.
26. Bastion facing the west, of 6 varas.
27. The same, facing the east, of 6 varas.
28. Gates to two corrals for stock—60 varas in length and 14 in width.
29. Gates or passage-ways to enter the bastions—2 1/2 varas in width.

—Felipe de Goycochea (but signed by Pedro Fages), "Santa Barbara Presidio in 1783," *The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA.*

# Handout 2

## Questions

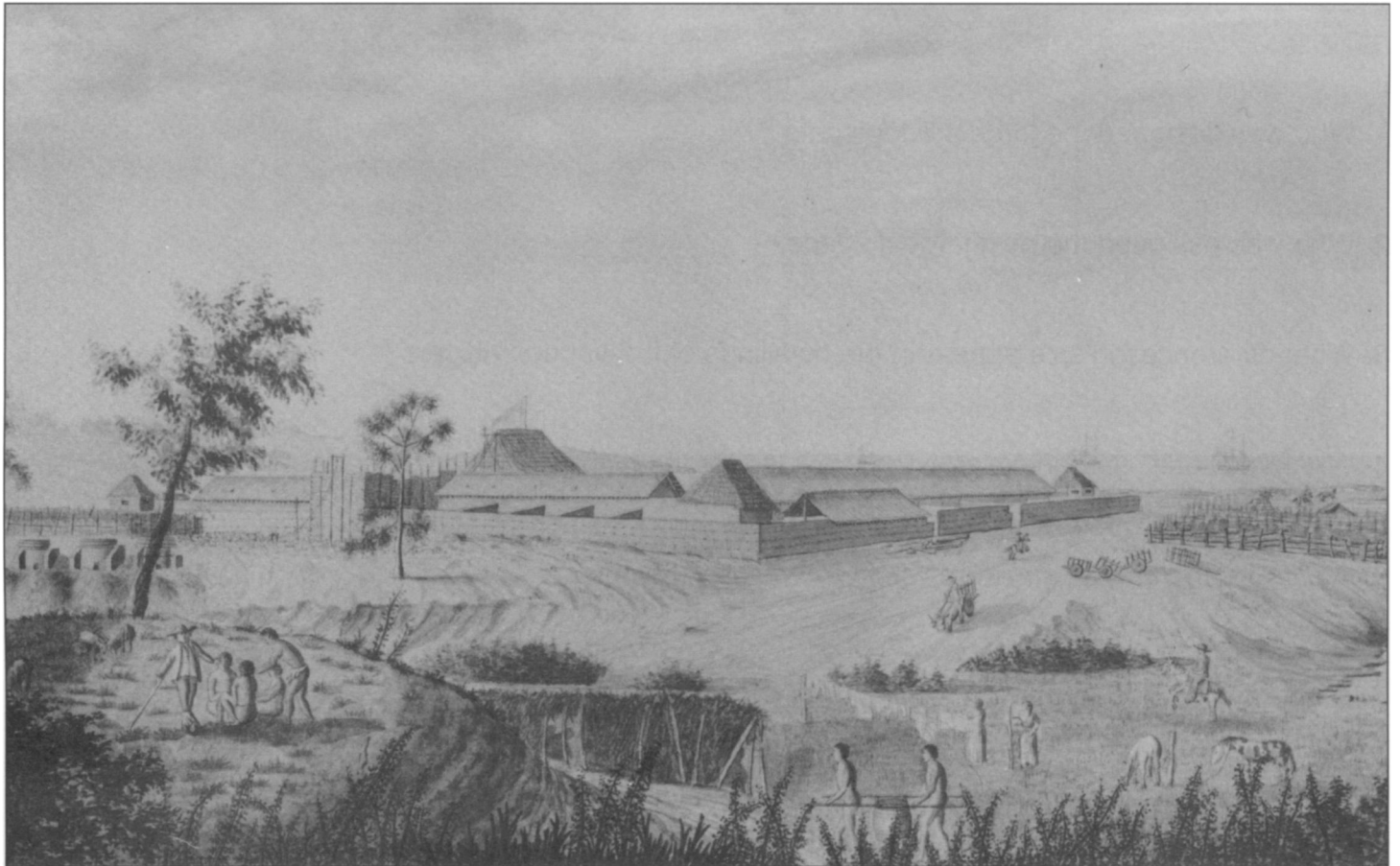
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1. Who was assigned the largest living space?
2. Who was assigned the next largest space?
3. What differences in size appear in the dwellings of the various officers?
4. What additional conveniences were provided for the highest ranking officer at the presidio?
5. What was the largest structure within the *cuartel* (enclosure)?
6. What is its location and position?
7. What, in your opinion, does this reveal about the values of the Spanish colonists?
8. Given that a *vara* equals thirty-three inches, how much total space was devoted to the storage of supplies?
9. What means were taken to protect the bastions from unauthorized entry?
10. Why were the corrals located along a *lienzo* (façade)?
11. Since the purpose or function of the presidio was to provide military protection to the surrounding district, analyze the design and the floor plan in terms of its advantages and disadvantages.
12. Which items are missing from the floor plan that would tell us more about the soldiers' ability to protect the district?

# Handout 3

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What can you learn about daily life at a California presidio by examining this sketch by José Cardero of the presidio at Monterey?



José Cardero, *Vista del Presidio de Monte Rey*, 1790, (Courtesy of the Bancroft Library, Berkeley, California. Robert B. Honeyman Collection; Banc Pic, 1963.002:1310.)

## Questions

1. Describe any land form or terrain visible.
2. What period of time is depicted by the artist? What are the reasons for your conclusion?
3. What types of activities are individuals engaged in?
4. What forms of transportation are depicted?
5. What evidence of fortification can you identify?
6. Can you distinguish the Native American dwellings from those of the colonists? How?
7. Why do you think there were separate dwelling spaces for them?
8. Using the preceding plan for the presidio at Santa Barbara, locate the bastions, warehouses, corrals, and church at the Monterey presidio.

# Handout 4

After reading the background information, read the passages and complete the appropriate sections of the graphic organizer. Prepare for the class discussion by considering your responses to the questions following the readings.

## Background Information

While the presidio and the mission represented two essential components in the colonization of California, the two institutions were sometimes in disagreement. Franciscan friars, led by their father president, saw some of the soldiers as exploitative and corrupting influences upon the newly converted Indians. The friars also raised the issue of their independence from the military and their right to a military guard. The military, in turn, complained that Mass was rarely celebrated for them at the presidio. They also complained of the scarcity of supplies from the missions and asserted their right to have an inventory of mission supplies.

The two letters that follow, written by Fray Junípero Serra, Father President of the Alta California missions, and Governor Don Pedro Fages, reflect these positions.

## First Reading

From Antonine Tibesar, O.F.M., ed., *Writings of Junípero Serra*, 4 vols. (Washington, DC: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1955-1966), 1:275-77. Reproduced here with permission of the Academy.

September 22, 1772

*Hail Jesus, Mary, Joseph!*

Captain Don Pedro Fages.

My dear Sir:

*Having arrived in your company...at this port and Mission of San Diego...as regards the missions, which, insofar as they belong to our Apostolic College of San Fernando de México, are under my care, I have received a letter from my Superiors in which they order me once more to proceed with great prudence in founding new missions, and not to begin any without the necessary equipment and provisions.*

*Now seeing that you and I—each of us attending to what belongs to his own office, and, of course, carrying out the repeated injunctions from higher authority are under obligation to set up the Mission of San Buenaventura...; after having carefully gone into every aspect of the question of the foundation, and after consulting with religious who have had years of experience in such matters, I have come to the conclusion that the following points are necessary*

*First,...the said mission, owing to its being situated on the Santa Barbara Channel, should not be begun with less than twenty-five men, because the great population and the unrest among the gentiles there calls for so large a number, I ask that there be assigned to it at least twenty men, to be made up in the following way: leather jacket soldiers—fifteen, sailors—four, and one muleteer....Likewise, I ask that it should be agreed upon, with all points determined, and the agreement written down, in order to obviate disputes between the Fathers and the Corporal—that the sailors and muleteers are to remain there as servants of the mission, subject to the orders of the missionary Fathers, in the same way that the soldiers are to their corporal and other superiors....*

*Likewise, about mules and horses: if those belonging to the King, or to the King's presidio, do not transport from this port to the mission, or the place provided for it, all the equipment and provisions, it is evident that the number of eight transport mules that was given to the other missions is quite insufficient. And if such transportation is not provided, I ask for this mission especially, which, above all others, is the one most removed from every port, that twelve mules should be given to it immediately....*

*Likewise, with reference to the provisions brought by His Majesty's packet boats, given for the maintenance of the mission and its escort for a period of one year, more or less, I ask that there should be a separate account for what is provided for the mission: I mean for the Fathers, the servants and the Indians. And a separate account for the escort, viz: the corporal, soldiers and couriers. And I ask that this second account, if possible, be handed over to the corporal or anyone else you may prefer, other than the Fathers, so that he may distribute, according to his method and account, the weekly rations. In this way complaints will cease between soldiers and Fathers concerning rations; and you yourself will find it all the easier to examine and verify if there have been losses in the assigned quantities.*

*Likewise, if it is conceded that the soldiers, who are only for escort, are to have a servant, I ask that the presidio supply one—with salary or not—so that they may not weary the Fathers with requests to provide them for such service with an Indian of the two or less who can work for the mission....*

*Kissing your hand, I am  
Your most affectionate servant and chaplain,  
Hail Jesus, Mary, Joseph! Forever!  
Fray Junípero Serra*



# Handout 4

## Second Reading

From Antonine Tibesar, O.F.M., ed., *Writings of Junípero Serra*, 4 vols. (Washington, DC: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1955-1966), 1:399-401. Reproduced here with permission of the Academy.

*Very Reverend Father President.*

*Dear Sir:*

*In answer to the request Your Reverence makes in the letter before me, I reply that I quite agree with you that I came in your company from the Presidio and Mission of San Carlos de Monterey to this port of San Diego, where lay anchored his Majesty's—whom God keep—two packet boats called the San Antonio, alias El Principe, and the San Carlos, both destined and ordered to Monterey, and carrying the equipment belonging to Your Reverence and other missionary Fathers, as well as loaded with provisions, articles and effects, all destined to help the men in the new establishments of the presidio and the missions.*

*I likewise concede that in what concerns the illustrious Apostolic College of San Fernando de México, the missions are put in Your Reverence's care—that is, the spiritual care of all, and political governance of all within the enclosure of the missions, the Indians; and of all the lands and cattle belonging to them, you are the administrator. Nor will Your Reverence call into question that political and military authority belongs to me, as well as the foundation of the missions—but this in agreement with Your Reverence, following the orders of the Most Excellent Lord the Marquis de Croix.*

*And as to the duties assigned to each of us it is true that the place assigned for the foundation of the Mission San Buenaventura is near the village of La Asumpta at the entrance to the Santa Barbara Channel.*

*1. I point out that, putting on one side the opinions of the man you quote, or of anyone else whatever, my own opinion concerning the establishment of the said mission is that twelve to fifteen leather-jacketed soldiers would be sufficient; of sailors eight could be found, which would mean two for each of the other missions, and three or four for the presidio. One muleteer will be provided for the mission....And at such times as the service of His Majesty requires it, the soldiers will lend a hand, but always with this well in mind—that when they have fulfilled their assignment, they shall return to their quarters.*

*2. In case sailors are appointed to work for the mission, the Fathers will be free to direct them in their work without any interference from the Corporal in that regard. The same will apply to the mule driver destined for the same mission....*

...

*Very Reverend Father, I want to remind you once more of the request I made of you a few days ago by word of mouth, concerning the provisions that were delivered into the possession of this mission by the Sergeant Ortega, Corporal Mariano Verdugo, and Señor Don Juan Pérez; by knowing the exact amounts of these provisions I will be able to make a division in all fairness between this mission and the others, and the presidio in proportion to the number of the escort soldiers, and the servants of these establishments; such a method of handling the matter seems to me very fitting and necessary for the peace and satisfaction of all concerned.*

*In the Mission of San Diego, September 30, 1772.  
Kissing the hand of Your Reverence,  
Your most devoted, affectionate and loyal servant,  
Pedro Fages*

### What do you think?

1. What does each writer consider to be of the greatest importance?
2. Who does each believe to be the highest authority?
3. Which words are used to strengthen each argument?
4. Describe the various reasons and/or background experiences that may have caused these two men to have different perceptions about life in early Alta California?
5. Based on the stated expectations and the tone of each selection, what do you infer to have been the relationship between the two men?

# Handout 4

## Multiple Viewpoints of Presidio Life Graphic Organizer

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<b>Source</b>	<b>Location, Date</b>	<b>Brief Description of Situation</b>	<b>Perception/Viewpoint</b>
First Reading: Junípero Serra			
Second Reading: Pedro Fages			