

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS  
A Description of California's  
Principal Presidio, Monterey, in 1773

*Translated and edited*

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INTRODUCTION

*On November 29, 1773, Captain Pedro Fages, commandant of the Monterey presidio, sent to the viceroy, Antonio Maria Bucareli, an official report on Upper California. It bears the title: "Report concerning the development of the Royal Presidio of Monterey, its completed buildings, the cultivation of the lands attached to it, together with a report on the state of the missions and lands in these new establishments." This original document of fourteen pages written in very small lettering in Fages' own hand is found in Vol. XII, folios 177-183, in the Sección de Misiones in the Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City. A copy of this same document, dated March 20, 1777, signed by the viceroyal secretary, Melchor de Peramás, in large lettering of sixty-six pages is found in Vol. XXXVI, leaves 350-381, in the Sección de Californias in the same archive. The Santa Barbara Mission Archive contains photographic copies of both.*

*The translation of Fages' document which appears in the following pages represents about one-fifth of the total report and deals solely with the description of the presidio. The remainder of the material referring to the five missions founded by that time, San Diego, San Carlos, San Antonio, San Gabriel and San Luís Obispo, is not given here for the simple reason that Fages incorporated the mission material in his later "Continuación y suplemento a los dos impresos que de orden de este Superior Gobierno han corrido," of November 25, 1775, which has been translated and edited by Herbert Ingram Priestly under the title:*

A HISTORICAL, POLITICAL AND NATURAL DESCRIPTION OF CALIFORNIA BY PEDRO FAGES, SOLDIER OF SPAIN.<sup>1</sup> *Fages, however, did*

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*not use his presidio material in his "Continuación y suplemento" for which reason the present writer has translated it. The accompanying drawing of the presidio was prepared by Mr. Alan Brown of the University of Arizona, Tucson.*

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TRANSLATION

The presidio came into existence on June 3, 1770<sup>2</sup> when it was founded along the shore of the beach of the said port [of Monterey] not very far away from where the packet-boats anchor.<sup>3</sup> It commands a view of the roadstead. At its shoulder is an estuary of salt water.<sup>4</sup> On its sides are forests of pine and at its right is Point Pinos.<sup>5</sup>

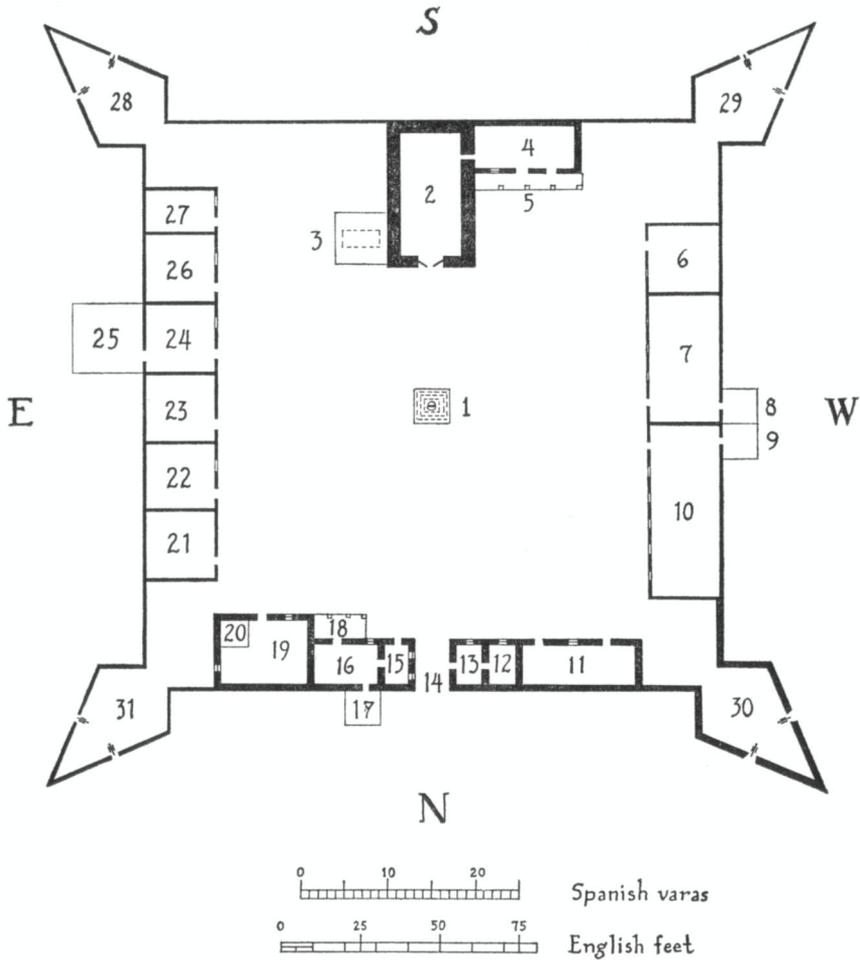
The presidio is about fifty *varas*<sup>6</sup> square. At its center is a base of adobes four *varas* square consisting of four steps, half a *vara* in height on top of which is a cupola in the shape of a half orange on which stands the holy cross of hewn wood, seven *varas* tall whose trunk and arms are one fourth of a *vara* wide. The entire base is plastered with a mixture of lime and sand.

In the wing of the presidio on the south side facing the base is an adobe church whose foundations are of stone set in mortar. These foundations extend two quarters<sup>7</sup> above the surface and are a *vara* and a half in width. Upon these foundations rise the [adobe] walls five fourths in thickness. The church is fifteen *varas* long, seven *varas* wide and seven *varas* high. Twenty hewn beams each a palm in width and ten *varas* in length have an overlay of cane and upon this rests the roof which is flat. This has a cover of lime. The roof has four spouts to carry off the rain water.<sup>8</sup>

Joined to the right of the chapel is a tower<sup>9</sup> six *varas* square also built of adobe. It is fifteen *varas* high and contains two terraces in ascending proportion in which to hang bells. The tower is surmounted by a cupola in the shape of a half orange and upon this rises an iron cross a *vara* and a half in height which also has a weather vane to show the direction of the wind. This tower has its foundation of stone mortared with lime and protrudes from the ground for three-fourths of a *vara*. The church and tower are plastered with lime within and without.

To the left of the church is an adobe dwelling for the reverend

*Monterey's Presidio in 1773*



*A.K.B.*

Location of various quarters in the Monterey Presidio: 1) central cross on pedestal; 2) church; 3) belltower; 4) missionaries' quarters, former church and sacristy; 5) porch; 6) dispensary or pharmacy—originally the first chapel; 7) Catalonian volunteers' quarters; 8) volunteers' kitchen; 9) Leatherjacket troop's kitchen; 10) quarters of the Leatherjacket soldiers; 11) government stores; 12) jail; 13) guardhouse; 14) main gate; 15) commandant's store or commissary; 16) commandant's quarters; 17) commandant's kitchen; 18) porch; 19) storehouse; 20) bin for grain; 21) postriders (mails) and smithy; 22) carpenter shop; 23) storage for muleteers' pack gear; 24) servants' quarters; 25) kitchen; 26) Indians' quarters; 27) storage for field implements; 28-31) ravelins with cannon in place.

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fathers who come here to administer to our spiritual life.<sup>10</sup> This dwelling is about twelve *varas* long and about six *varas* wide. It has its small outside corridor along its length with its pillars and wooden corbels upon which lies the beam supporting the roof. The roof is flat and is covered with lime. The corridor has fifteen hewn beams ten *varas* in length. This building communicates with the church. It is plastered with lime in its entirety.

Along the east wing of the presidio there are six rooms, five of which are eight *varas* square, the other eight by five *varas*. One is used by the mail couriers and the blacksmith, another serves as the carpenter shop, the third contains the gear of the muleteers, the fourth is the dwelling of the servants and the fifth is for the use of Indians who happen to sleep at the presidio. The sixth room is used to store building tools and field implements. All these rooms are built of poles of pine and are plastered, their roofs being of earth. Behind the servants' dwelling is their kitchen, eight *varas* square with an inside connection. It is built of the same construction.

In the west wing there are two quarters for soldiers, the one fifteen *varas* long and eight *varas* wide which is used by the volunteers [of Catalonia]. The other, twenty *varas* long and eight *varas* wide, is used by the leather-jacket soldiers. To the rear of these quarters are two kitchens, each four *varas* square, for the use of the two afore-mentioned groups. There are inside connections between the kitchens and the respective quarters. At the head of the wing of the presidio facing the south there is a dwelling place eight *varas* square which serves as a pharmacy containing the medicine chests.<sup>11</sup> All these constructions are the same as those in the aforementioned wing. The two entrances to the garrisons face the plaza of the presidio.

In the north wing there are two storehouses for food and for royal property. Attached to this are two small rooms occupying the space of the width of the wing of the presidio, both of which are four *varas* wide and six *varas* long. The first serves as a prison, the second as a guard house and as sleeping quarters for soldiers [on guard duty] with a rack for firearms inside with another outside. Next one comes to a large main entrance which is four *varas* wide.<sup>12</sup> Next to it is a small room with its display table and shelves with a stock of goods, made of wood. This is the store and

### *Monterey's Presidio in 1773*

sales room for clothes which are sold and distributed to the dependents of these establishments. There is a door connecting it with the main entrance and an inside connection to the door of the commander. This room is about six *varas* in length and eight *varas* in width. Along it is a corridor six *varas* in length and three in width with two pillars and their corbels of cypress supporting the roof beam. Behind this is a kitchen with a chimney to carry off the smoke. It measures four *varas* square.

Then one comes to the second store room<sup>13</sup> which is ten *varas* long and eight *varas* wide. To one side is a storage bin five *varas* square. Almost all of this wing is of adobe, its foundation being of stone. The walls of the buildings are five *varas* high and three fourths in thickness. The beams are hewn and are covered with a roof topped with lime which has its corresponding spout to carry off the rain water from the presidio.

Most of the doors of the dwellings of the presidio which number about thirty, are of pine. Some are of redwood which is very similar to cedar, while still others are of cypress, sawed and fashioned at the presidio. At the four corners of the presidio are ravelins with two embrasures each containing batteries with a bronze campaign cannon placed in each. One of the ravelins is of adobe with a sentry box facing the point [of Pinos] together with three trenches which command the front of the presidio. At the front the foundations are of stone while on the other three sides they are constructed of logs of pine wood. However, stones have already been cut and adobes fashioned which will be used to build walls similar to that in front because the humidity of the place tends to rot and destroy the wood. Consequently, buildings so constructed have little advantage.

For the east and west wings of the presidio already 100 beams have been hewn. They are ten *varas* long and a quarter of a *vara* wide. They are roof supports so that these sections of the presidio will be the same as the others. The kitchens will be incorporated with them in a corner of the presidio leeward to the northwest. There is a very large cesspool, a subterranean outlet going towards the estuary. In another place there are three hogstyes for the sows with the doors facing the open country. And at a distance of forty *varas* there is another large one. The roofs are covered with lime. Outside the stockade at a distance of forty *varas*

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there are two corrals fifty *varas* in circumference which are for the cows and mules.<sup>14</sup> Next to the first is a hogsty for breeding purposes.

At about a fifteen minutes walking distance from the presidio, on the other side of the estuary is the powder magazine<sup>15</sup> four *varas* square, built of poles plastered inside and out. It has its door and lock. At a distance of four *varas* there is a stockade of poles four *varas* high. At a musket shot away leeward to the northwest, in which the wind prevails for the greater part of the year, is a small house four *varas* square for the soldiers who stand guard.

For labor service at the presidio I had ordered to be made two *carretas*, one for transporting poles, the other being of the ordinary type.<sup>16</sup> Both are now in service. They have been used to haul all the stone used for the foundations of the structures of the presidio. Mules are used for hauling. The *carretas* were built also to haul from the beach to the presidio the goods brought by the ships, a musket shot away and this is over level land. They also transport salt from the salt beds to the northeast about three leagues away<sup>17</sup> over good land which the *carretas* can negotiate. This year I ordered about 200 loads of salt to be dug up. This I had piled up and refined. Lest the rains deteriorate it I intend to build a house with a good roof in which to store it. The salt marshes are located in estuaries which are about nine in number and which each year in the months of June, July, August and September are filled with very good salt which looks like stone. If this were sought each year one could obtain hundreds of loads. Also I have appointed six transport teams to conduct the salt hither with one man in charge of each for supplying the establishment.

To the mission, San Carlos by the Carmel River, I will give a *carreta*. I shall do the same for Missions San Antonio and San Luís [Obispo] when they are made. The terrain is accommodated to their use. I have also constructed a launch of eight ribs at its keel with its sail and oars to aid in disembarkment to shore and for the transportation of salt should this be necessary, as well as for the transportation of logs. These latter are obtainable along the seashore about six leagues from the presidio. The frame and keel had already come from San Blas. I also had a mast altered

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which rises from a basket<sup>18</sup> seven *varas* in length and three fourths in width for use at the presidio should it be needed.

At a distance of half a league from the presidio is a garden<sup>19</sup> 120 *varas* in length, its width varying from seventy to eighty *varas* in places. It decreases even to forty *varas* at its narrowest. Therein have been sown and harvested various vegetables. At present we are gathering many of them by means of irrigation. Next to it is fallow land which I shall order to be sown with two and a half *fanegas*<sup>20</sup> of wheat all to be under irrigation. On one side of the garden is a house, four *varas* square, for two of the [Catalonian] volunteers. It has its door and lock and a battery embrasure within for whatever contingency may arise. The roof of the house is of earth. About eight minutes walk from the presidio there are some fallow lands which were sown during the past year with about four *fanegas* of wheat and I shall see if it can be sown again.

Next to the presidio on the side in the direction of the church is where the mission of San Carlos was founded. There it remained until May of 1771 when an order came from His Excellency the Marquis de Croix, your predecessor, to transfer the mission site to the banks of the Carmel River since it is [only] one league away from the presidio. Moreover, the site offers better lands for cultivation than those which the port has.<sup>21</sup>

The transfer was soon effected, the change of the mission from one site to the other having been accomplished by the end of December of the said year although the Reverend Father President with his companion<sup>22</sup> went out to the Carmel River to that mission [earlier] to administer it.<sup>23</sup> He left at this presidio the two missionaries<sup>24</sup> destined for the founding of Mission San Lu s Obispo who were to remain [here] until that mission would be actually established. So they remained administering and saying Mass at the presidio until the beginning of June, 1772<sup>25</sup> when they went to found said mission.<sup>26</sup> From that time on the presidio was without a resident priest although on Sundays and holy days one of the two missionaries from San Carlos Mission comes over to say Mass.

Now that the Reverend Father President, Fray Francisco Pal u,<sup>27</sup> has arrived from [Lower] California with five additional religious<sup>28</sup> to found the other three missions ordered to be

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established he offered to me one of the religious to stay at the presidio. This I considered very proper for it has been my experience that in years of heavy rain it is impossible to travel over the roads.

In consideration of the fact that that same [original] church was destined for the royal presidio and for mission purposes, although the order came for their separation, there did not come for the presidio church, church goods or other items useful for the church and sacristy. For the presidio church only those things served which belonged to the missions which have been ordered to be founded. Wherefore I beseech Your Excellency to deign to order that the church be furnished with everything necessary to celebrate the holy sacrifice of the Mass and to administer the sacraments. Meanwhile those things will serve which belong to the missions as they have supplied up to the present. The same holds true for bells. . . .<sup>29</sup>

Royal Presidio of San Carlos de Monterey, Sept. 29, 1773.  
Pedro Fages.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Berkeley, 1937. Fages wrote: "I reproduce what I previously reported to Your Excellency in my letter of reply dated at the Presidio of San Carlos de Monterey, November 24, 1773." *Ibid.*, p. 8. This date, however, should read November 29.

<sup>2</sup>Fages was present when the presidio was founded at which time the Mission of San Carlos was co-founded. He took over the command after the departure of Portolá in July, 1770.

<sup>3</sup>This landing place was about three-quarters of a mile away in the area of the Customs House.

<sup>4</sup>To the east about a block away. The former estuary still called El Estero, is part of a city park between Del Monte Avenue and Fremont Extension.

<sup>5</sup>Point Pinos is distant about five miles to the northwest forming the final point of the southern shore of the Bay of Monterey.

<sup>6</sup>A *vara* is the equivalent of 2' 9."

<sup>7</sup>A *cuarta* or a 'fourth' is a measurement of eight and a fourth inches, a little larger than a palm.

<sup>8</sup>The church with the cross in the center of the plaza may be seen in one of the drawings made during the Malaspina visit in 1794. See Donald C. Cutter, *Malaspina in California* (San Francisco, 1960), opposite p. 18.

<sup>9</sup>This tower is not shown in any of the drawings of the Malaspina visit. It probably fell and was not replaced.

<sup>10</sup>As Fages notes later on, once the mission was moved to the Carmel Valley, its missionaries came weekly to the presidio to give spiritual ministrations.

<sup>11</sup>It will be noted that Fages mentions no room for the royal physician. Doctor Pedro Prat, who had come with the Portolá expedition, had returned to Mexico by this time and no other physician came until 1774.

<sup>12</sup>This faced the north looking to the bay.

<sup>13</sup>This was used as a storeroom for goods belonging to the missions still to be founded.

<sup>14</sup>The two corrals on either side of the presidio are shown in a Brambila drawing of 1794. Cutter, *Malaspina in California*, after p. 10.

<sup>15</sup>This location was near the western side of the present U.S. Naval School.

<sup>16</sup>The *carreta* for carrying poles of necessity would be considerably longer than the ordinary type. A sample of such a *carreta* may be seen in a drawing of Carmel Mission by J. Sykes who accompanied the Vancouver visit in 1792. See Elizabeth Egenhoff, *Fábricas* (1952), 29, figure 10.

<sup>17</sup>Where the Salinas River empties into the Bay of Monterey.

<sup>18</sup>Though Fages uses the word 'canasta' or basket, perhaps a better word might be receptacle. Into this would be placed the sail when not in use.

<sup>19</sup>This garden was located in the area of the present Del Monte Golf Course and the Monterey Peninsula Airport.

<sup>20</sup>A *fanega* is equal to a hundredweight or about two and a half bushels.

<sup>21</sup>It was Serra who suggested that the mission be located in the Carmel Valley rather than at Monterey. See Antonine Tibesar, O.F.M. (ed.), *Writings of Junipero Serra* (4 vols., Washington, D.C., 1956), I, 171.

<sup>22</sup>Serra and Fray Juan Crespi.

<sup>23</sup>Serra raised the cross at the new mission site on August 24, 1771. Serra to Fages, San Carlos, July 10, 1784. Colección de Documentos para la Historia de Mexico. Segunda serie. Vol. II. No. 95. Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico. There is a photograph copy of this document in the Santa Barbara Mission Archives.

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<sup>24</sup>Fray José Cavaller and Fray Domingo Juncosa.

<sup>25</sup>Actually the group started out from Monterey only on August 24. *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup>The mission was founded on September 1, 1772.

<sup>27</sup>Palóu was only *acting* or substitute president at the time while Serra was in Mexico negotiating with viceroy Bucareli concerning the missions.

<sup>28</sup>With Palóu came Fathers Fermín Francisco de Lasuén, Vicente Fuster, Gregorio Amurrió, Juan Prestamero and José Antonio Murguía. Zephyrin Engelhardt, O.F.M., *San Diego Mission* (San Francisco, 1920), p. 46.

<sup>29</sup>A short description of the presidio is also given by Palóu in his report to the viceroy of December 10, 1773. Herbert E. Bolton (tr.), *Palóu's New California* (4 vols., Berkeley, 1926), III, 228-229.