

TUMAMCACORI MISSION

In the late 17th Century, the natives living in villages along what was to be called the Santa Cruz River were the Sobaipuri, a branch of the O'odham people. The Spanish referred to these people as the Pima and called this area of New Spain the Pimeria Alta (Upper Pima Land). In 1687, Father Eusebio Francisco Kino was assigned as the first Jesuit missionary to be permanently assigned to the Pimeria Alta. Father Kino's task was to found missions and convert the natives to the Christian faith.

In January of 1691, Father Kino visited the villages of Tumacacori and Guevavi at the request of the Indians and established the missions of San Cayetano de Tumacacori and San Gabriel. The Tumacacori mission was originally established on the east side of the Santa Cruz River. In 1701, the San Gabriel Mission at Guavavi was made the headquarters mission with a resident priest who provided services to Tumacacori and the other missions in the area that did not have a resident priest.

The establishment of the several missions in the Pimeria Alta led to the influx of Spanish and Mexican settlers into the area and the gradual loss of the autonomy and territory of the Indians. This, in turn, led to the Pima Revolt of 1751 where two priests and over 100 settlers were killed, numerous mission buildings were destroyed and the missions at Tumacacori and Guavavi were abandoned. A settlement was made with the Pima leaders in March of 1752. In response, the Spanish built a presidio at Tubac and the mission at Tumacacori was relocated to the west side of the river and renamed Mission San Jose de Tumacacori. The new priest completed a small church at Tumacacori that served for the next 65 years.

In 1767, King Carlos of Spain ordered the arrest and expulsion of the 678 Jesuits who were living in New Spain. Concurrent with their expulsion, the crown acquired their personal properties and auctioned them off resulting in a significant increase to the King's treasury. Franciscans were assigned to the former Jesuit missions.

In 1771, mission headquarters was moved from Guavavi to Tumacacori and the mission had a resident priest for the first time. During the next few years the church was redecorated, adobe dwellings were added and a wall was constructed. About 1800, the Franciscans begin building a larger church, today's Tumacacori Mission, to replace the small church. Construction ebbed and flowed over the next several years depending on the availability of money. This larger church was never totally completed. In 1828, all Spanish-born residents were ordered to leave the country leaving only native-born Mexican priests to care for the missions. Tumacacori was left without a resident priest to push for the completion of the church. Between April 1846 and February 1848 there was a state of war between the United States and Mexico resulting in a lack of support for the Pimeria Alta missions. In December 1848, the Mexican soldiers abandoned the Tubac Presidio and the last residents left Tumacacori. The Gadsden Purchase of 1853 resulted in the Tumacacori Mission site becoming part of the United States.

The significance of the Tumacacori Mission in the history of southern Arizona led to it being proclaimed as a national monument by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1908. The monument at this time though was rather small and included only 10 acres of land. It wasn't until 1918 that a custodian was finally assigned to the monument. The clean-up and stabilization of the buildings began in 1919 and a visitor center and museum was built in 1937. The status of the mission was changed from a National Monument to a National Historical Park in 1990 with the addition of the missions of Calabasas and Guavavi. A major expansion of the Historical Park occurred in 2002 with the addition of 310 acres of neighboring land.



Fig. 1 Tumacacori Mission in 2017



Fig. 2 Ranger in Priest's Clothing



Fig. 3 Mission Interior in 2015



Fig. 4 Artist's Conception of Mission

Summary by T. Johnson in 2019 from various National Park documents and Wikipedia. Figures 1, 2 and 3 by T. Johnson. Figure 4 is a photo of a display.