

Quinn

**ADORE
CHAPEL**

**OF THE
IMMACULATE CONCEPTION**

1850-1988

**CALIFORNIA REGISTERED
HISTORICAL LANDMARK**

NO. 49

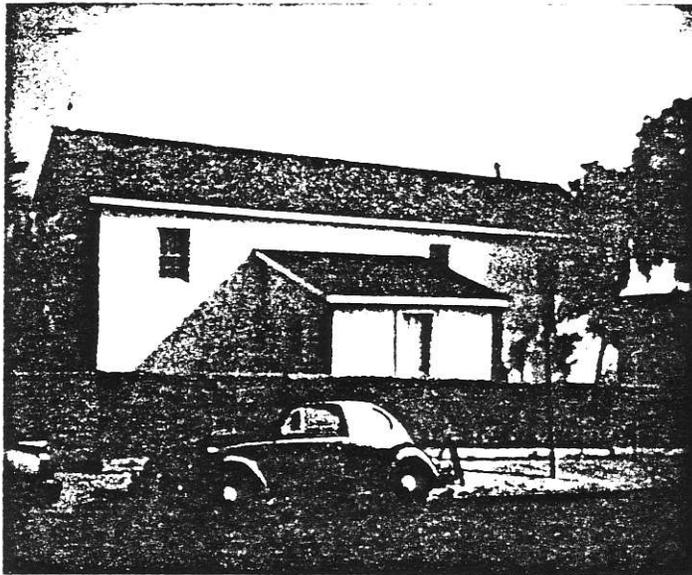
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ADOBE CHAPEL OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
1850-1988

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E CLAMPUS VITUS

Booklet prepared for the dedication of a plaque noting the building, rebuilding, and uses of this first parish church for Old Town, San Diego, as California Registered Historical Landmark No. 49.



SQUIBOB CHAPTER 1853, E CLAMPUS VITUS
OLD TOWN, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA
SEPTEMBER 24, 1988

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND INTRODUCTION

Based on its record of research and production of historical plaques and monuments, 1963-80, Squibob Chapter, E Clampus Vitus, was asked in September, 1980, to take on the backlog of unmarked and lightly researched sites already registered and numbered by the State of California, in San Diego and Imperial Counties. There were twenty-eight on the list, many dating from 1932 when an act of the Legislature (1931) had asked counties to designate historically important sites. Squibob took the whole list. In the past eighteen years we have successfully removed thirteen from the 1980 list. We have also researched and plaqued three sites previously unregistered, as well as four "points of historical interest"--places of regional or local importance. Site #49, the Adobe Chapel of Immaculate Conception, is the fourteenth of the 1980 "contract" so with it we are "half way." We already have two more for early 1989, and two others (one a new site) planned for fall, 1989. Our estimate is that by 1994-95 the "contract" will be completed.

All of these have been accomplished with private funds, for the backlog came as a result of drying up of public funding. Plaques average \$1,000 each, and the monuments, with our members supplying almost all of the labor without any cash payment, have run between \$200 and \$1500. Research expenses, too, have often been significant, and our many booklets have sold at or below cost of publication. We have proven emphatically that we are interested in California and western history, and we are doing something about this commitment.

Early in 1988 the Governor issued a proclamation honoring historical groups such as ours. E Clampus Vitus was commended for forty plaques since 1980. We of Squibob Chapter--one of about 35 chapters in California, Nevada, and Utah--have contributed forty per cent of that total. We are gratified by the honor.

Our Monument Erector, Scott Robertson, with a varied crew of members, wives, and children, have constructed monuments and mounted plaques for many years. We are proud of their visible contributions. Our membership and the many who have participated in our efforts have contributed about \$50,000 in the past twenty-five years since this chapter was chartered. Without that money the State list would still be formidable, since others who had once done this work seem to have almost given up on it.

The plaque notes the State Department of Parks and Recreation, under which operates the State Historical Resources Commission. Mrs. Sandra J. Elder, Assistant Executive Secretary, and her staff receive and check and process our applications and research carefully. They are then passed on to the Commission, two of whose members are from this county: Mrs. Patricia Cologne and Milford Wayne Donaldson. We are grateful for their support and evaluations. The County of San Diego's Engineering, Planning, and Mapping Departments (especially Don Gillfeather and staff and Ron May) have been very helpful. From the City of San Diego we have received much support. The following deserve special mention: the staff of the California and Newspaper Rooms of the Public Library; the Engineering and Mapping Division in the City Administration Building; Jane Humes of the City Property Department; Maureen Stapleton, Deputy City Manager; and for being alert to potential traffic problems on Site #49, the "Special Events" section of the Police Department. The San Diego County Historical Days Ass'n, especially President Dan McPherson, has prompted us and supplied much material. Others of the S. D. H. D. Ass'n with special aid have been Bob Young, Elizabeth Beeson, and Joe "Father Ubach Baptized Me!" Montijo. ("What do you think I am, a young kid!")

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND INTRODUCTION (cont.)

Again, Sister Catherine Louise La Coste, Archivist of the San Diego Roman Catholic Diocese, has supplied helpful materials. Though she may not recall them, the secretary of the Immaculate Conception Church has given me a couple of very encouraging comments.

The San Diego Historical Society, especially Larry and Jane Booth of the Photo Collection and Research Archives, has been of substantial help. I am sorry that I was only able to use one of their treasured photos directly-- that of the Chapel on March 28, 1931. It answered a host of questions. I appreciate the help of Amy Ross of the Presidio Museum for help in locating a much needed reference.

Matthews International Company, Sun City and Romoland, did an incredibly fast but careful job of getting the plaque out on September 16th, the day before the monument party needed it. Nancy Miller and Janice Christie are assured that I will try to allow them enough time henceforward so they will have the time to schedule production "normally."

Turning to individuals beyond these organizations, the list is certainly not complete. Dick Yale, of the S. D. Union, Old Town, gave me a good list of "who to contact" when I needed a direct line into S. D. City government. Michael J. Pallamary of Precision Survey and Mapping came through with items when I needed them. An unnamed aide at Ticor Co. gave me a key to unlocking some broadly and confusingly cataloged city maps. Mary Haggland, whose article of Jose Antonio Aguirre brought that worthy pioneer into sharper focus, contributed more than she may realize.

On the day of the plaque mounting-monument building I tried to reach a most helpful Clamper friend who had made a few insightful comments about the Adobe Chapel when I needed them. The previous day, I was told, "Jim passed away." As his fellow Clampers say, "Jim Reading has gone to the Golden Hills." We are so grateful to have known him for so long, and that his "ninety-year old mind" was sharp to the end. With a host of friends, we will miss him keenly.

EKC

ADOBE CHAPEL OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

This is not "the definitive work" on the Adobe Chapel. Work as Squibob Chapter historian rarely lets me dig as deeply as I know should be done if we are to produce "the last word" on any subject or site. A few times I have come close, but then have seen the efforts pirated by others without a credit line as to the source of their materials. This makes it even more important for me to "document" as well as possible my sources, so if errors are made in time others may correct them. That is the primary purpose of footnotes. In this booklet there are many; there should be more.

For the State Historical Resources Commission we only need to prove that a site is worthy of recognition. We do not have to exhaust the subject. When able, after the application has been approved in Sacramento, I try to "flesh it out a little." Unfortunately, there are other applications pending and more to prepare almost incessantly. (This month two have been prepared and submitted for the Historical Resources' Nov. 4th meeting: Old La Playa (and the La Playa Trail) and Fort Yuma on the Colorado.) Deadlines are always "just ahead," so I apologize for the inadequate treatment of this most historic site. EKC

The Pre-Adobe Chapel Era, to 1858:

From 1769 until 1846 the religious needs of San Diego were cared for by the Franciscans. The mission of 1769-74, and its successor up Mission Valley, 1774-1846, was both a civilizing center and a substitute "parish church." Father Vicente Pasqual Oliva (Aug. 1834-June 14, 1846)¹ was the last mission father. He left San Diego in 1847 and was replaced by Rev. Juan Crisotomo Holbein, who arrived in July, 1849. In the interval, chapels in various houses (Estudillo, Machado, and Miguel Alvarez, for examples) served residents and friends.² The next year, in August, two land sales were made in San Diego which long led to confusion. Juan M. Marron, Alcalde, sold Lot 1, Block 26, to John Brown for \$22. (Until 1870, lots and blocks were from the Cave J. Coutts survey of Old Town for the ayuntamiento or Town Council.) On Aug. 24th "the Mayor and Common Council" deeded Lot 1, Block 88, to four residents "in perpetuity" for construction of a Roman Catholic Church. These were Rev. Chris. Holbein, Jose A. Aguirre, Pedro Jose de Pedorena, and Juan Bandini. The deed stated that "if the above named persons and their lawful successors shall fail to erect said church within a reasonable period, or at any future time shall cease to use said lot for the purpose indicated, then and in that case, the grant shall cease, determine and become absolutely null and void and the ownership of the lot shall again revert to the city."³

Though Block 26 and Block 88 were different, they were in fact adjacent. The "Brown lot" was on Conde Street, on the west corner of Block 26. The "Holbein lot" was one block away, on the west corner of Arista and Congress. (The Old Town blocks and streets run diagonally to true north-south, east-west.)⁴

Lucy Brown Wentworth, daughter of John Brown, said:

My father built that little adobe church on San Diego Avenue. [Actually, Conde Street, west of San Diego Avenue.] He built it as a house for his family. He had a bowling alley near there at one time, but there were not very many people here and he didn't do very well, with the bowling alley. He deeded that place to Don Jose Aguirre, who gave it to the people as a church. My parents went on to live in the Donahoe Place. While they were living in the "church" house, I remember hearing my mother tell afterwards, that Joaquin Murrietta and his band came down over the hill one night when she was alone in the house--my father was away somewhere--

and she heard these men outside, and she turned over a chair and talked to herself in three or four different voices, and finally they went away, thinking there were many people in the house. I was born in the Donahue House, Jan. 7, 1857.⁵

If the statement above is authentic, it seems to clarify the comment that "Brown never lived in the house." He and his family did.

Meanwhile, Rev. Holbein and others laid the cornerstone on Lot 1, Block 88, for a parish church, September 29, 1851. Walls were raised in the months which followed. Holbein was a very conservative priest, and took the rising anti-Masonic fulminations of the Papacy, and especially of Pius IX (1846-78) very seriously. (The problems between Masons and the Church had been rising since Masons, especially York Ritists, had taken liberal, pro-independence, anti-Church stands during and after the French Revolution.) Father Holbein forbade Catholics to go into the streets when a Masonic parade was going by. These parades were frequent, and the punishment was threat of excommunication. Also, he preached against public schools, telling his flock that they must not send their children to these places. In short, he made himself obnoxious to those people who had power and money in Old Town, so his campaign for funds to build the new church failed. Before 1854 the lot reverted to the city. Holbein left San Diego in September, 1853. (His services had been held largely in the chapel and house of the Estudillos.)⁶

Two other priests served Old Town, 1855-57 (Pedro Bagaria); 1858-1863 (John Molinier). (Smythe gives a different sequence: Father Marincovich, "only a few days"; Father Meinrich, 1856; Father Jaime Vila, 1857; Father Juan Molinier "soon after [Vila]". Under Molinier a new church was built.

The "new church" was not "built" under Molinier. Since Smythe and Engelhardt the story has been reconstructed. Don Jose Antonio Aguirre, born of French parents in San Sebastian, Basque area, Spain, 1799, came to New Orleans with his family in 1814. He went to Mexico before 1819 and engaged in trade with Manila. Leaving Mexico, he came to California in 1821. However, anti-Spanish prejudices throughout Mexico led to his return to New Orleans in 1826. He became a U. S. citizen in January, 1831. Then he returned to California, 1833, and engaged in the hide and tallow trade. He prospered and built a home in Santa Barbara for his wife, Francisca Estudillo of San Diego, to whom he was married in 1841, at San Luis Rey Mission. Expecting their first child, Francisca died in October, 1842, and was buried in Mission Santa Barbara. Don Jose moved to San Diego.

In 1846, Aguirre remarried, to Francisca's sister, Maria Estudillo. In 1852 they moved into a new home at Twiggs and San Diego Avenue. Meanwhile, he became embroiled in a lengthy lawsuit with Abel Stearns. Noting the failure of Holbein's church attempt, Aguirre pledged to give the pueblo a parish church if he won the suit. Judge Benjamin Hayes said the two rich men would argue until both were in their graves, and that he was not going to be swayed by any pledge of Aguirre's about a church. In time, Don Jose won. He had been letting parishioners meet in his new home so was fully aware of the need. (The vestments and art work from a chapel at the old Presidio and from closed Mission San Diego were in the care of Jose Estudillo, sort of "in the family.") Further, Father Juan Molinier lived in the Aguirre home after arrival in 1857. Molinier at first planned to revive Holbein's project of 1851-53. Don Jose Aguirre found a faster way to supply the parish church.

The Adobe Chapel, 1858-1874:

On Feb. 3, 1858, Don Jose gave \$350 to John and Martina (de Villar) Brown to purchase their house. The sale was recorded on Feb. 12th.⁷ He then spent \$6,000 to \$20,000 and converted this into a church. On Nov. 21 (or 22) it was dedicated by "the most Reverend Father Raho, Vicar and Administrator of the Diocese of

[the Diocese of] Monterey ... in the presence of a very numerous concourse of people of various religions." The church was "dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin, the which above mentioned Church was made at the expense of the most Christian Don Jose Antonio Aguirre for the greater glory of God and the good of the faithful of San Diego, and be delivered in the form of a sale to the Most Illustrious Amat, Bishop of Monterey, the said benefactor was promised that after his death his body should rest within the said Church." The statement was signed by "J. Molinier, Curate."⁸

In this Aguirre reconstruction, the roof was tiled. After the dedication "The San Diego Guards ... fired a salute, and a dinner was given by Don Jose Aguirre who contributed largely to the building and equipment of the church." Two bells from the old San Diego Mission were brought and were hung on a beam at the southwest end of the chapel. Also, in 1860, Don Jose was buried in the chapel upon his death. Allegedly, his remains are still in their burial place.⁹

On Aguirre's grave is inscribed:

Here lie the Mortal Remains of Don Jose Antonio Aguirre, Born in the year 1799 in San Sebastian, a Province of Viscaya, Spain. California, July 31, 1860. R. I. P. Monument of Affection and Love which his Children Dedicate to him. Miguel, Dolores, Jose Antonio, Martin. He was the Benefactor of the Poor and deserved Well of God and Man. Dolores Aguirre Pico, daughter.¹⁰

There is some confusion about who served as parish priest, 1863-66. However, the "great days" of the Adobe Chapel began in 1866 when "the energetic Rev. Antonio [Dominic] Ubach began his long administration as pastor of Old Town."¹¹ A carefully compiled biography of Ubach by Sister Catherine Louise La Coste, the Archivist of the San Diego Roman Catholic diocese, adds much beyond the Smythe account. She notes that Ubach was born in Spain in 1835. He came to the United States with "Most Rev. Thaddeus Amat, first bishop of the Monterey-Los Angeles Diocese." At Cape Girardeau, Missouri, he entered St. Vincent's Seminary, 1859. He came to California, 1860, was ordained by Bishop Alemany on April 7th, in St. Francis Church. He was assigned as priest at San Juan Bautista Mission, April 16, 1860. The next year he got the Daughters of Charity to open an orphanage at the mission. They soon had a school operating, with 120 day students and 35 orphans. He served Watsonville and then went to Sacramento, April 15, 1865. In 1866 he was at the Plaza Church in Los Angeles. He was assigned to the very poor San Diego Parish in October, 1866. It also extended from San Juan Capistrano to some 250 miles into Baja California. East and west, it ran from the Pacific to the Colorado River. There were about 3,000 Indians in the parish.

About a week after arriving in San Diego he made his first trip to see and perform religious services for "back country" Indians, at San Pasqual. Several times a year thereafter he made the then long, slow journey to be among and to work with them. They never forgot his ministry, and he was rightfully called "the last of the padres." No Indian Agent came to see the Indians in Ubach's first seven years. He wrote to Thaddeus Amat in 1873 that the National Government could save thousands of dollars if it appointed "good, honorable men." As an experiment, Pres. Grant gave Indian Affairs to churches, though southern California Indians were entrusted to Methodists, not Catholics. In a crisis, these Methodists called on Ubach for help. When the Methodist agent was in Gilroy, whites took over Indian lands at Temecula and San Pasqual. Ubach raged, but he could not stop the thefts.¹²

Meanwhile, in Old Town Ubach decided that the town needed a larger, newer church. At Twiggs and San Diego, on July 16, 1869--one hundred years to the day that Father Serra said the first Mass in Old Town--Ubach broke ground for his

brick church. At that time it appeared promising. However, 1868 was the year when Father Horton came to start again the "New San Diego" which William Heath Davis had tried, 1850-53. Father Ubach helped Horton make his famous purchase after Horton had put a roll of \$5.00 in coins into the Adobe Chapel offering in order to attract Ubach's attention. It worked. Ubach spoke with him after the services, learned that Horton needed a city election since the trustees' terms had expired and Horton wanted to buy city lands. Ubach saw to it that the voting was done and that the men Horton wanted did win. That was the start of "Horton's Addition" and New San Diego.¹³

This promotion of New San Diego soon undermined Old Town population. The brick church got very little done on it--and stood almost fifty years before the partly built walls were taken down. On the day of his cornerstone laying Bishop Amat preached in English and Spanish. Rev. Maurice O'Brien of St. Vincent's College, Los Angeles, celebrated the Mass. After vespers the cornerstone was placed. Then when much of Old Town was destroyed by a fire on April 20, 1872, Father Ubach began a church "on a mesa west of town" at 3rd and Beech Streets. Two lots were given to him by Horton. A frame building was erected and worship began there. After completion and dedication, it was named St. Joseph's Church, Jan. 31, 1875. Ubach moved from Old Town to an adobe house next to the new church in 1885, after living in various Old Town locations for 19 years.¹⁴

Before leaving this era there are two major "topics" associated with it that need attention: 1=the "weatherboarding" of the Adobe Chapel; 2=the "Ramona" story.

Accounts vary and are vague about when the adobe was covered by "weatherboards." The earliest says this was done soon after Father Ubach arrived, 1866. Others say "a few years later", dating from some unnamed year. The earliest accurate evidence comes from some photographs in the Photo Archives of the San Diego Historical Association's collection in Balboa Park. One dated "1876" shows the covering as of that date. It is the earliest known. As late as March 28, 1931, the weatherboards were still in place, though signs of their deterioration were evident. (See the March 28, 1931, photograph and comments later in this booklet.) In summary, it is only clear that the work was done between 1866 and 1876.¹⁵

The Ramona story is even more controversial. Mrs. Helen Hunt (Jackson) had already written her classic A Century of Dishonor (1881) before she came to San Diego County, 1882-83. The classic deplored, dramatically, treatment of Indians by the United States since independence. The main focus was on the Plains tribes, especially the Pawnees. Allegedly, it resulted in the Dawes Act of 1887, which tried (in error, it is now believed) to "cure the Indian Problem" by remaking the Indians into "white Americans." At least, it did show that killing them off was not the ultimate answer.

For some time she resided at Rancho Guajome, home of Cave Johnson Coutts (now a county park.) There she stirred up his Indian ranch hands and was then locked into a room to write so she could not turn the ranch "upside down." Her visits with Father Ubach came about this time, 1882-83. The priest had already shown his great and lasting concern for Indian welfare. Mrs. Jackson found a sympathetic partner for her crusade. The novel, Ramona, published in 1884, was based on her experiences, and some of Father Ubach's. The touching story of the marriage of Alessandro and Ramona is the romantic heart of the work. The "Father Gaspara" who married them is based on what she knew of Father Ubach. Like many good novels, it had a factual basis. Father Ubach did perform many marriage ceremonies for Indian couples.

Here the controversy begins. Were these two Indian lovers real individuals or were they a composite of those married by Ubach? The statements of the priest, to the San Diego Union, June 25, 1905, convinced many that he had actually done

exactly what the novel described. He said:

Although it took place forty years ago, I remember it very well-- how the couple came to me and asked me to marry them and how I was impressed with them. But it was not in the long adobe building which everybody points out as the place--that is the Estudillo place--but it took place in the little church which stands not far away, near the old cemetery where the old mission bells are. Why, I would not marry them outside of the church; Catholics know that. Mrs. Jackson herself says that the wedding took place in the chapel, and I can't imagine why the other building is the one that is usually pointed out.

Do I know who Alessandro and Ramona were? Yes, but those were not their real names. I know what their right names were, but I do not care to tell. Mrs. Jackson suppressed them because she did not care to subject the families to the notoriety that they would be sure to get from the publication of the book. They were native families who lived in the country, and I was well acquainted with them. I have never mentioned their names to anyone and of course I don't want to do it now.¹⁶

Rather than settle the controveesy, the statement only added to it. After all, Father Ubach was "an old man" (of seventy years at the time of the Union interview.) The marriage of "forty years ago" had to have been at least thirty-nine years since he came to San Diego in October, 1866. His meetings with Mrs. Jackson came sixteen or more years after that arrival. The work was a colorful, **romanticized** novel. Also, it interfered with the lucrative "tourist traffic" to the Estudillo House, at the end of the streetcar line in Old Town. So a century and more later, the speculations continue: real individuals or prototypes?

The Adobe Chapel, 1874-1930:

After start of St. Joseph's in New San Diego, Father Ubach divided his time and efforts between the Adobe Chapel and St. Joseph's. He was aided by Rev. Polydore Stockman. As sidelines to their efforts, there emerged both the present St. Thomas Indian School, at Fort Yuma on the Colorado River (1886-1900 and later under different auspices) and St. Anthony's Indian School in Old Town, begun in 1887. Father Ubach lived at St. Anthony's part of the time. The Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet staffed St. Anthony's (and the St. Thomas Indian School at Fort Yuma until it closed in 1900 from lack of money.)

According to Sister Catherine Louise La Coste, (who is of St. Joseph of Carondelet), the uncompleted "red brick" church for which the cornerstone and "five foot" walls were placed in 1869-73, was adjacent to the Adobe Chapel. On the site of his incomplete church later there was built a convent for Sisters of the Community of the Holy Spirit. (Apparently, this was on the three-quarters of "Lot 1, Block 26-- or 490 since 1870", later occupied by the Columban Fathers and currently by the Old Town Community Church.)

St. Anthony's needed expansion and in 1888, the year after it opened, Ubach borrowed \$3400 and built a "two-story frame building adjoining the half-finished red brick church." City officials asked Ubach to move the school farther from town. On Sept. 1, 1891, he moved the frame building to the 200 acres of old San Diego Mission "where he had built a large brick building the year before [1890]." The school expanded into a variety of industrial pursuits for 100 students. With debts very large due to building expenses, the city cut its subsidy (1899) down to only enough for 25 students. Even this was cut out in 1901. After Ubach's death in 1907, the Sisters had to move the school to Banning (1908). Nearly fifty years later, when the Banning school (St. Boniface's) was closed (1956), the girls were moved to Nazareth House, opened at the San Diego Mission by the Poor Sisters of Nazareth in 1923.

Another of Father Ubach's numerous projects, while still dividing his time and efforts between St. Joseph's and the Adobe Chapel, was the purchase of five acres in Mission Hills for a new Clavary Cemetery. It was here that he, ten other priests, and nearly 2,000 other persons were buried. Later, the poorly maintained cemetery was closed, the headstones scattered behind Mt. Hope Cemetery south of Market Street, and the old cemetery was landscaped as a city park. It is believed that Father Ubach's grave--once marked by a prominent stone cross--lies under the paving for the small parking lot at the park.

In 1878, Father Ubach went to Europe to visit his family, and Father Juan Pujol filled in for him until his return in July, 1880. Until 1898 his parish still covered a tremendous area. He let El Cajon Catholics, that year, solicit funds for their own chapel. Coronado was a mission of St. Joseph's until 1907. Monthly or semi-monthly, Father Ubach also held services at National City, El Cajon, South San Diego, Escondido, San Pasqual, Mesa Grande, Santa Ysabel, Capitán Grande, Descanso, [and El Cajon]. Of course, as long as there were worshippers, the Adobe Chapel got regular visits! He also ministered to the dead and dying of the U. S. Bennington when its boilers exploded on July 21, 1905, killing 60 men and injuring about that number.

While still at the Adobe Chapel full time (whatever that can mean, in view of his frequent travels!) Father Ubach was able to kill off the lingering animosity that lingered from the Mason-Holbein confrontation. He avoided such stubborn and unproductive quarrels which would undercut his work with the people he loved and who respected him as both man and priest. After services in Old Town, for many years, he would bring out a ball he owned and play in the streets with the boys. He was "people oriented" rather than a hair-splitting, dogmatic person.

With his health weakening, Father Ubach received last rites on March 19th at Mercy Hospital, where he had been partly paralysed for four days. He died on Tuesday, March 26, 1907. Services were delayed until after Holy Week. When held Wednesday, April 3rd, his funeral was swarmed by a host of people of all faiths and races. Indians from the hills brought wildflowers in tribute to the one who had been truly, "the last of the padres." Projects he had started almost always were successful, though only with passage of many years. St. Joseph's became the Cathedral of the San Diego Diocese when it was created in 1936. The work he began at the old San Diego Mission led to rebuilding and reactivating it in 1931. The Adobe Chapel, lightly used and often neglected after his death, had a rebirth, too, and serves as a reminder of the early days of American occupation of San Diego.¹⁷

After his move to New San Diego, the Adobe Chapel was a visiting station, with mostly Indian parishioners, until Father Ubach's death. In 1914, Rev. Joseph Mesny had the old red brick walls torn down and began the present Church of the Immaculate Conception at Twiggs and San Diego Avenue. He had been living in La Jolla since 1906 and felt that Old San Diego needed a new church since population in the area had been rising after the boom and bust of the 1890's. Miss Margaret McGregor sold 85 lots in Ocean Beach and turned much of the money over to Mesny. By 1917 he had the new church completed, but there were no furnishings. He had been conducting services in the Adobe Chapel from 1914 to 1917.

In 1917, Miss Ellen Scripps gave Mesny \$1,000 to complete the furnishings. The new Old Town church was opened on July 22, 1917, and the last baptism in the Adobe Chapel was held about that time. Bishop John J. Cantwell of the Los Angeles and San Diego Diocese presided at the dedication on July 6, 1919.¹⁸

From 1917 until 1922 the Adobe Chapel was used as a kindergarten. When that closed the building was boarded up and not used until the 1930's.¹⁹

Before leaving this period, it is necessary to point out another apparent discrepancy between sources. Some seem to say that the "old brick church, not completed, 1869-73" was on the corner of Congress and Conde Streets, now occupied by the Old Town Community Church. Others note that after tearing down the weathered walls the Immaculate Conception Church was built on the sturdy foundations of the "red brick" start of 1869-73. At least two and one-half city blocks separate these two sites. The accounts cannot both be right!

The Adobe Chapel since 1930:

About 1930 several San Diegans became interested in the revival of Old Town. At that time it was still without paved streets or sidewalks. The neat, right angled streets laid out by Coutts and later surveyors existed only on paper. Dirt paths led through weeds and brush. Old buildings, shacks, and a few newer structures seem to have been placed with little regard for lot lines. The old La Jolla and San Diego Beaches streetcar line cut through old "Block 26" (490) and "Block 88" (509) much as the realigned San Diego Avenue does now. Thus, the "new" Old Town is only dimly like that of about 55 years ago.

Urged by the State Chamber of Commerce, the Legislature passed Chapter 184, Statutes of 1931. This urged counties to draw up lists of historically important sites and submit them (often through local chambers of commerce) to the Director of the Department of Natural Resources for registering and numbering. Numbers he assigned were based on the order in which he received the applications. Little real documentation was required, and in many instances there was no "property owner's permission" for the numbering and registering.

This stimulated interested San Diegans to form a Historical Markers Committee, headed by Leroy A. Wright, President of the San Diego Historical Society. (His wife was a grandniece of Jed Smith, the first to make the overland trek from the East ("the States") to California in 1827.) This committee, aided greatly by John and Winifred Davidson, compiled some 25-30 sites and sent them in, 1932. In less than a year almost all were registered and numbered, though some inaccuracies were noted. Many had a notation, "Not enough documentation." Since there were few State funds, almost all of the sites remained in the files of the State Office of Historic Preservation for almost fifty years.²⁰

The local Markers Committee did become involved, 1933-34, in placing a series of concrete block monuments, with cast concrete plaques, along the "La Playa Trail," from the San Diego Mission to the original port for San Diego, Old La Playa. Also, aided by the California State Historical Society, the Native Daughters and Native Sons of the Golden West, and others, it became concerned over the badly deteriorated and boarded up Adobe Chapel.²¹

Early in 1932 a local committee was formed to promote the restoration of several Old Town historical landmarks. They focused first on the Campo Santo, lying behind the Adobe Chapel, now across San Diego Avenue from "Block 26/490." One of the many who triggered the activity was Cave J. Coutts, descendent of the soldier-surveyor-ranchero of 1849 and later. The stimulus occurred in April, 1932. The cemetery had become a public memorial park on Dec. 8, 1928, so was qualified for public funds, though volunteer contributions were solicited.²²

In 1933 the wall around the Campo Santo was built with labor paid by the State Emergency Relief Association, with materials supplied by the "Restoration Committee." Since it was public property there were few legal problems.²³

For the Adobe Chapel the problem was basic: it was owned by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Los Angeles and San Diego, a "religious corporation." Public funds are not to be given to such a sectarian organization, as a well established principle

of U. S. law and tradition. There are always organizations and individuals to raise an outcry if the principle is in real or apparent jeopardy. Well aware of this, the Restoration Committee, in 1934, tried to raise private funds for the proposed work on the Adobe Chapel. This became more urgent when water from the laundry at a nearby auto court undermined the east wall of the chapel in 1934. In early November, 1934, rains caused about one third of that wall to collapse. At that time Father James was pastor of the Church of the Immaculate Conception. (In 1932 he had given permission for the registering and numbering of the Adobe Chapel as site #49.) A separate emergency fund was set up for the chapel repairs. The work was estimated to cost \$3,000 (in hard, 1933 dollars!) By that time the two bells which had once been on the yoke at the west end of the chapel were already moved, one to the nearby Immaculate Conception Church and the other to the recently restored Mission San Diego.²⁴

The fund drive was unsuccessful. After all, 1933 was not a prosperous year. Mrs. Winifred Davidson, on January 22, 1934, had already written to Monseigneur John Hegarty of St. Joseph's to see if Bishop Cantwell could give the chapel to the city so "the CWA" Civilian Works Administration, successor to SERA and predecessor of the WPA might restore it. Already Father James had shown the interior of the chapel to Mrs. Davidson and Mr. Edgar F. Hastings, who had estimated that \$1700 would care for restoration. However, that was before the wall collapsed! As city property, the building could qualify for federal funds.²⁵

The property was deeded to the city for the rebuilding. Plans were drawn up and submitted to the city. By April 9, 1936, the city had agreed to restore the chapel. By summer, 1937, the WPA (successor to CWA, etc.) had begun work. It was not simply a repair of the building. The entire structure was razed, with all parts worth salvaging being preserved. A new foundation was prepared. Drainage was provided. Oil or asphalt was mixed with the old adobe for bonding and weather-proofing. Much of the wood was replaced due to termite damage. Plumbing, wiring, etc. were brought up to city building code requirements as of 1937. In short, the Adobe Chapel of 1937 to present is a rebuilding of the Adobe Chapel of 1858-1937. During the rebuilding the entire chapel was moved directly south from the right of way of Conde Street and from the part which intruded (overlapped) onto Lot 2 by some fifteen feet. The moving put it about fifty feet from its former location, measuring from the old altar location to the present one. It occupies about one quarter of Lot 1, Block 490 (26), with exterior plot dimensions about 75 feet by 75 feet. It is within an "ell" formed by the rest of Lot 1.²⁶

While the city was not too disturbed by the transfer of ownership it was then and still is in 1988 concerned over maintenance costs. After all, it is not a standard, 20th century structure. Budget restraints of the 1930's may have loosened since then, but annually the municipal budget is a subject for intense debate and compromise. Therefore, when the Columban Fathers Foreign Missions Society, using the rest of Lot 1 for a retreat, asked the city to let it use the chapel in return for custodial care, this was accepted. From 1938 until they closed their retreat and work in 1970, they had charge of the Adobe Chapel of the Immaculate Conception.

The Immaculate Conception Parish has often wished it had the chapel back-- but "you can't make a gift of public property to a sectarian religious group." After the Columban Fathers withdrew, the San Diego County Historical Days Ass'n, for which the late J. W. "Bill" Parker was long president, took over the work. He made it almost the most consuming effort of his last years. Since then the preservation and display work has been taken on by others of the association. This is the present status of the Adobe Chapel.²⁷

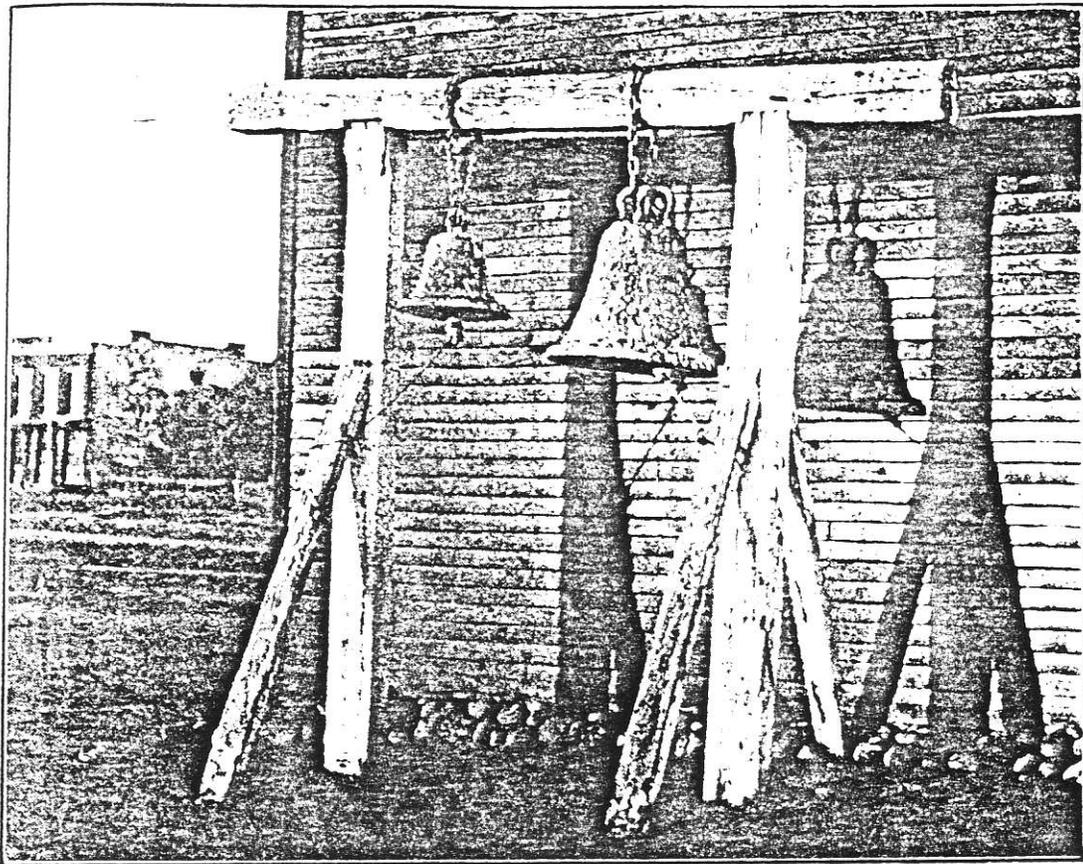
NOTES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1 Zephyrin Engelhardt, San Diego Mission (San Francisco: James H. Barry, 1920), with an 8 page supplement, "Immaculate Conception Parish, Old Town San Diego," p. 327.
- 2 William E. Smythe, History of San Diego, 1542-1908 (San Diego: History Company, 1908), p. [537]; notes from Sister Catherine Louise La Coste, S. D. Diocesan Archivist, labeled "Casa de Alvarez (Miguel)," 1 page.
- 3 Notes of "W. D." [Winifred Davidson] referring to San Diego County Recorder, Book O, page 458; S. D. City Clerk's Office, Book A, p. 52 (courtesy of Dan McPherson, Pres., S. D. County Historical Days Ass'n); various copies of the Coutts survey maps of Old Town, 1849, as found in S. D. City, Engineering and Mapping Division, "Misc. 38." There are several maps filed as "Misc. 38."
- 4 See any of the Coutts maps, Old Town, 1849.
- 5 This statement, allegedly originating in an interview of Lucy B. Wentworth by Winifred Davidson, has been quoted in several newspaper articles on the Adobe Chapel. A common note refers to "Smythe, p. 539." On that page is a picture of Father Ubach's funeral, 1907. I cannot find it anywhere in Smythe. As far as Joaquin Murieta is concerned, it is doubtful that he ever got this far south, even if there was any one "Joaquin Murieta." Foo, there seems to have been no visual proof of who the men outside actually were. It seems to be another "good story."
- 6 Smythe, p. [537]; County Board of Supervisors, Blocks and Lots in Old San Diego and to Whom They Belong as per Tax Returns for 1854 (Deposited for safe-keeping in the California Room, San Diego Public Library), p. 3, John Brown owned Lot 1, Block 26; City owned Lot 1, Block 88 (the Holbein lot.), p. 10.
- 7 Engelhardt, p. 327; fliers given to visitors at the Adobe Chapel "Don Jose Antonio Aguirre" and "The Old Adobe Chapel." See especially, Mary Haggland, "Jose Antonio Aguirre, Spanish Merchant and Ranchero," Journal of San Diego History, winter, 1983), pp. 54-68.
- 8 Notes from "John Davidson" via Dan McPherson, Pres., S. D. County Historical Days Ass'n; Record Books at St. Joseph's Rectory, via Dan McPherson.
- 9 John Davidson notes (as above); George Tays, "The Adobe Chapel of the Immaculate Conception," (WPA District #8 report for the State Division of Parks, Berkeley, 1937). Pages unnumbered, pp. [4-5]. Pages [3-4] give detailed description of the chapel "as reconstructed." These seem to be after the 1937 WPA reconstruction since the adobe had been weather-board covered when reconstruction began, end of 1936, into 1937.
- 10 This wording is conveniently reproduced in the flier, above note 7, "Don Jose Antonio Aguirre."
- 11 Smythe, pp. 175-177.
- 12 Handwritten manuscript by Sister Catherine Louise La Coste, San Diego Diocesan Archivist, Antonio Dominic Ubach, "Last of the Padres," pages 1-3.
- 13 Smythe, p. 540; Engelhardt, "Immaculate Conception Parish," p. 8; Sister La Coste manuscript, above, p. 4. Smythe, pp. [330]-351, under "Horton's Own Story," gives numerous details about starting and building New San Diego.
- 14 La Coste manuscript, pp. [4-5]; Joe Stone article, S. D. Union, Nov. 25, 1973, B-4
- 15 See especially photographs from "the Behrman Collection, #3898-1" (the chapel) and "3898-2" (the bell end). Various photographs thereafter show the wood "weatherboarding" in gradually deteriorating condition, through March 28, 1931, shortly before the rebuilding of 1936-37. These are part of the rich Photo Division of the San Diego Historical Society's Research and Photograph Archives in Balboa Park.
- 16 Smythe, p. 176.
- 17 La Coste manuscript, pp. 3-11, passim; Smythe, pp. 175-177; personal observations.
- 18 Engelhardt, "Immaculate Conception Parish", p. 8.
- 19 Flier entitled "The Old Adobe Chapel."

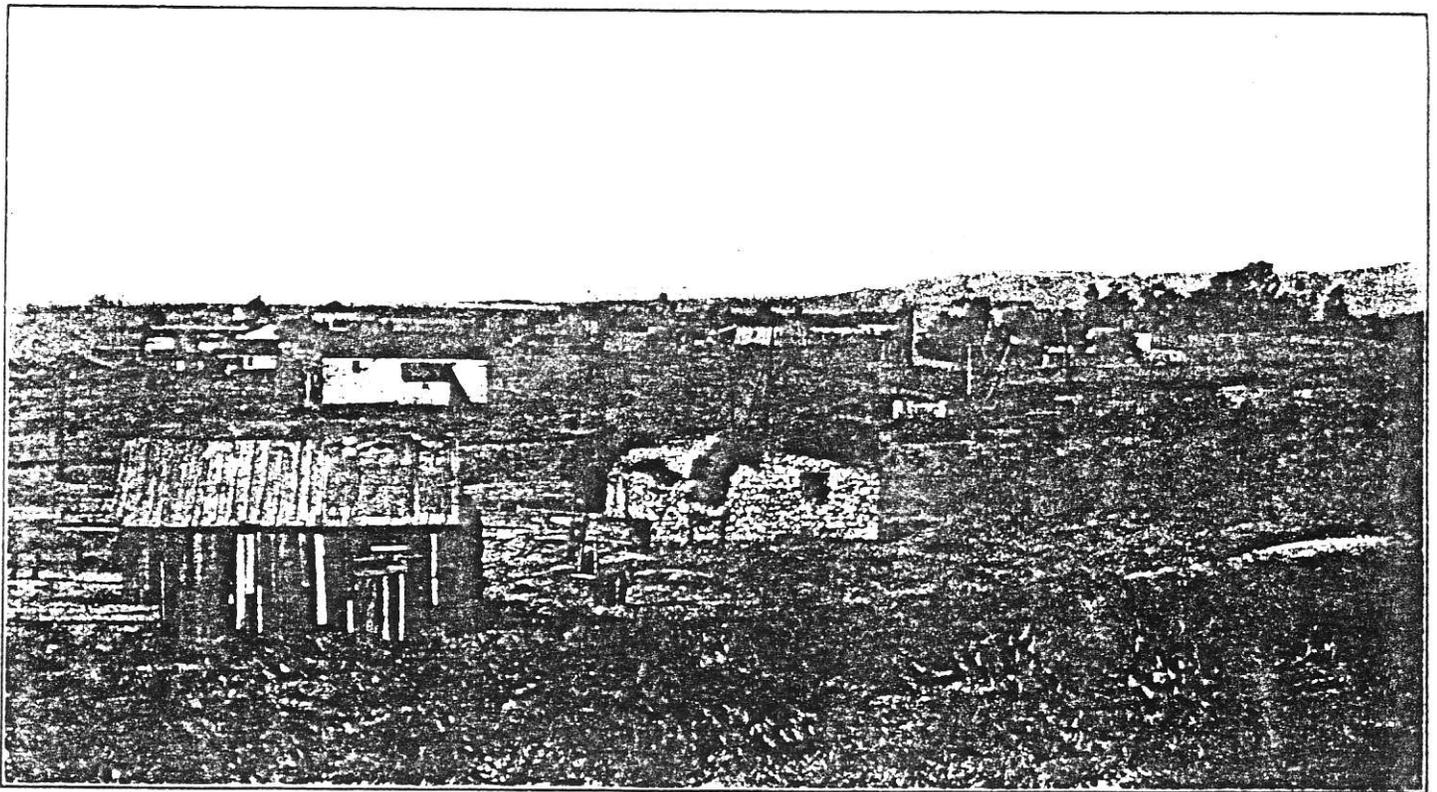
- 20 San Diego Historical Society, Photo Collection as in #15, above; maps from City of San Diego, Engineering and Mapping Division, on Old San Diego; San Diego Union, July 9, 1933, II, p. 1, col. 3; materials from State Historical Resources Commission, submitted to Squibob Chapter, 1980, for evaluation and plaquing agreement.
- 21 San Diego Union, July 9, 1933, II, p. 1, col. 3; Jan. 11, 1934, II, p. 1, col. 1; Jan. 7, 1934, II, p. 3, col. 3; Jan. 28, 1934, II, p. 8, col. 5; Feb. 17, 1934, p. 5, col. 1; Mar. 10, 1934, p. 7, col. 3; Sept. 23, 1934, p. 9, col. 2; Oct. 1, 1934, p. 6, col. 1.
- 22 Southern Cross (San Diego), Nov. 25, 1932; Mar. 24, 1933. (Clippings supplied by Sister Catherine Louise La Coste and Bob Young, Vice-Pres. of S. D. Historical Days Ass'n.)
- 23 San Diego Sun, Nov. 29, 1934 (Clipping supplied by Dan McPherson, Pres., S. D. Historical Days Ass'n.)
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 S. D. Union (?) or S. D. Sun, no label; Aug. 15, 1935. (No page, etc.) As in #23, above: from Dan McPherson.
- 26 S. D. Tribune, Aug. 19, 1937, no page. From files of S. D. Historical Society, supplied by Dan McPherson; detailed plans (7 sheets) in City Engineering and Mapping Division; letter of May 3, 1976, to Mrs. "Bill" Parker from Byrl D. Phelps, City Engineer who supervised the WPA rebuilding project (copy from Dan McPherson). There are other articles, which I have not seen, in the S. D. Union, June 7, 1936, and the Evening Tribune, June 6, 1936, calling attention to the rebuilding project. Both were written by Winifred Davidson. There is also another in the San Diego Sun, June 14, 1936, which I have not examined. Joe Stone had another article on the Adobe Chapel in the S. D. Union, May 31, 1970, with a few minor inaccuracies.
- 27 Flier on "The Old Adobe Chapel"; comments from secretary of Immaculate Conception church; others from Dan McPherson.

Addenda:

- A. A map in City Engineering and Mapping, Misc. 38, by F. H. Whaley, May 28, 1877, shows a cross shaped figure in "Lot 2" of Block 26/490, representing the Adobe Chapel. Since it overlapped lot lines until 1937 this is not much of a surprise. At least eight maps from the files were printed from the microfilmed prints and used for study.
- B. The Tays (See note 9) materials almost seem to end in 1922. However, he does refer to rebuilding in a way which makes it likely that he was aware of the 1937 WPA project.
- C. A letter from Timothy Manning, Sec'y of the Los Angeles Diocesan Office, to Rev. Patrick O'Connor of St. Columban's Foreign Missionary Society, St. Columbans, Nebraska, dated Oct. 21, 1943, tries to give the account of the Adobe Chapel. It is full of errors!
- D. The Fourth Report of the State Dep't of Natural Resources, Sept. 15, 1932, gives a summary of the 1931-32 actions which led to numbering and registering of sites. It has at the end, attached, a map which must have been added later for it shows the "St. Columbans Foreign Missions Society" on Lot 1, Block 26/490, around the Adobe Chapel, and 1938 is allegedly the year the society assumed custodial care of the chapel. The map also has the chapel occupying about half of the Conde St. right of way, which is correct for 1932.



THE FAMOUS BELLS AT THE OLD TOWN CHURCH
B



A VIEW OF OLD TOWN IN 1906—HUT OF RAFAEL MAMUDES AND OLD JAIL IN FOREGROUND

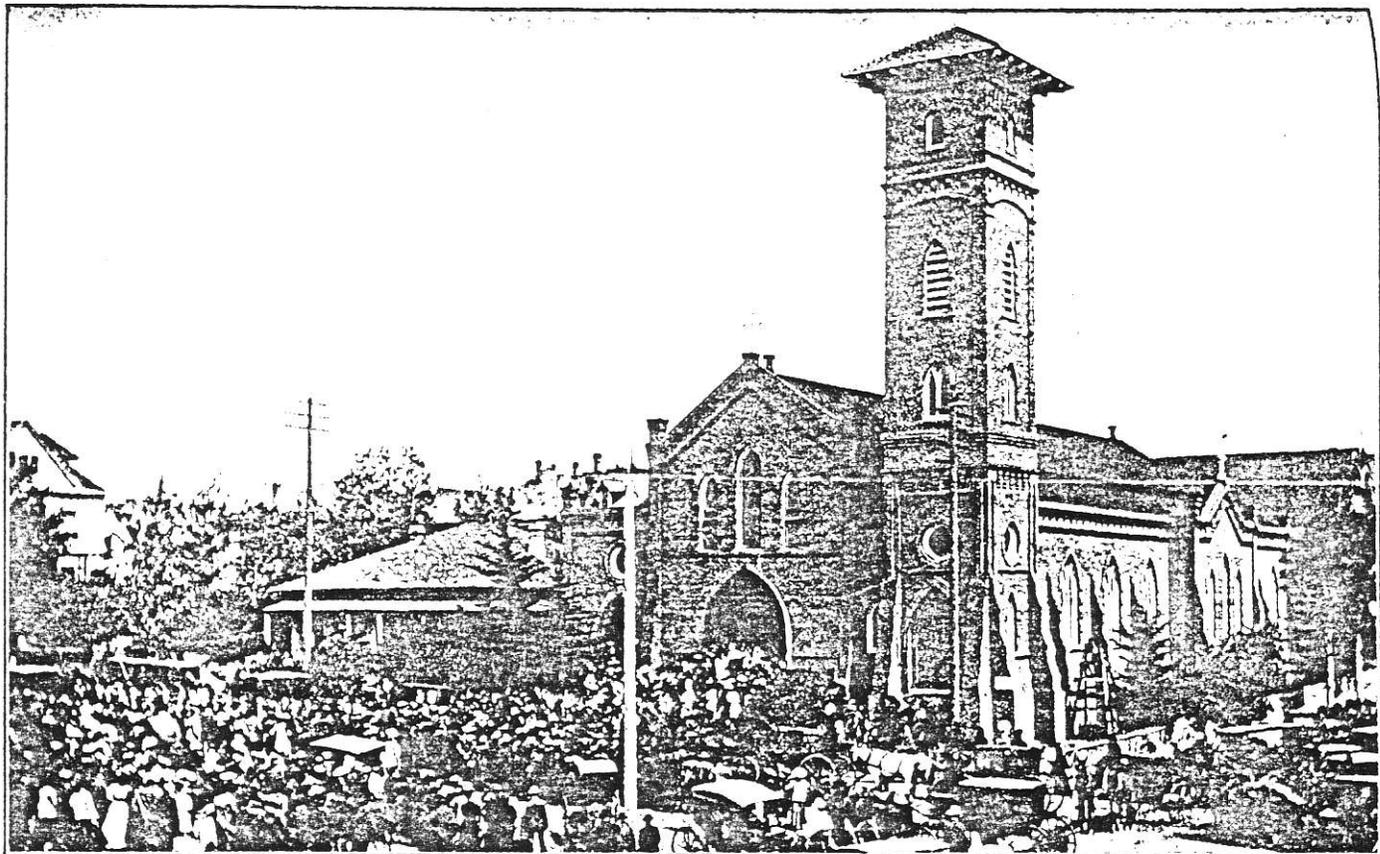
C



FATHER ANTONIO D. UBACH

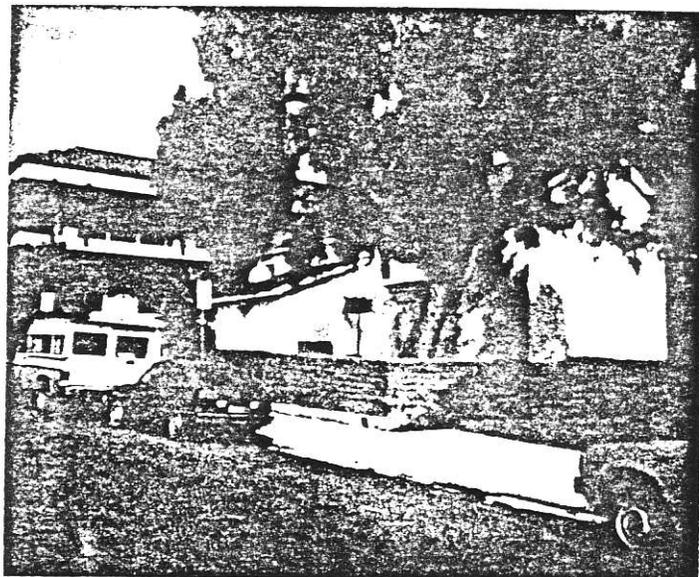
The famous priest of San Diego from 1866 until his death in March, 1907. (For biographical sketch see page 175)

D



ST. JOSEPH'S CHURCH
On the day of Father Ubach's funeral, April 3, 1907

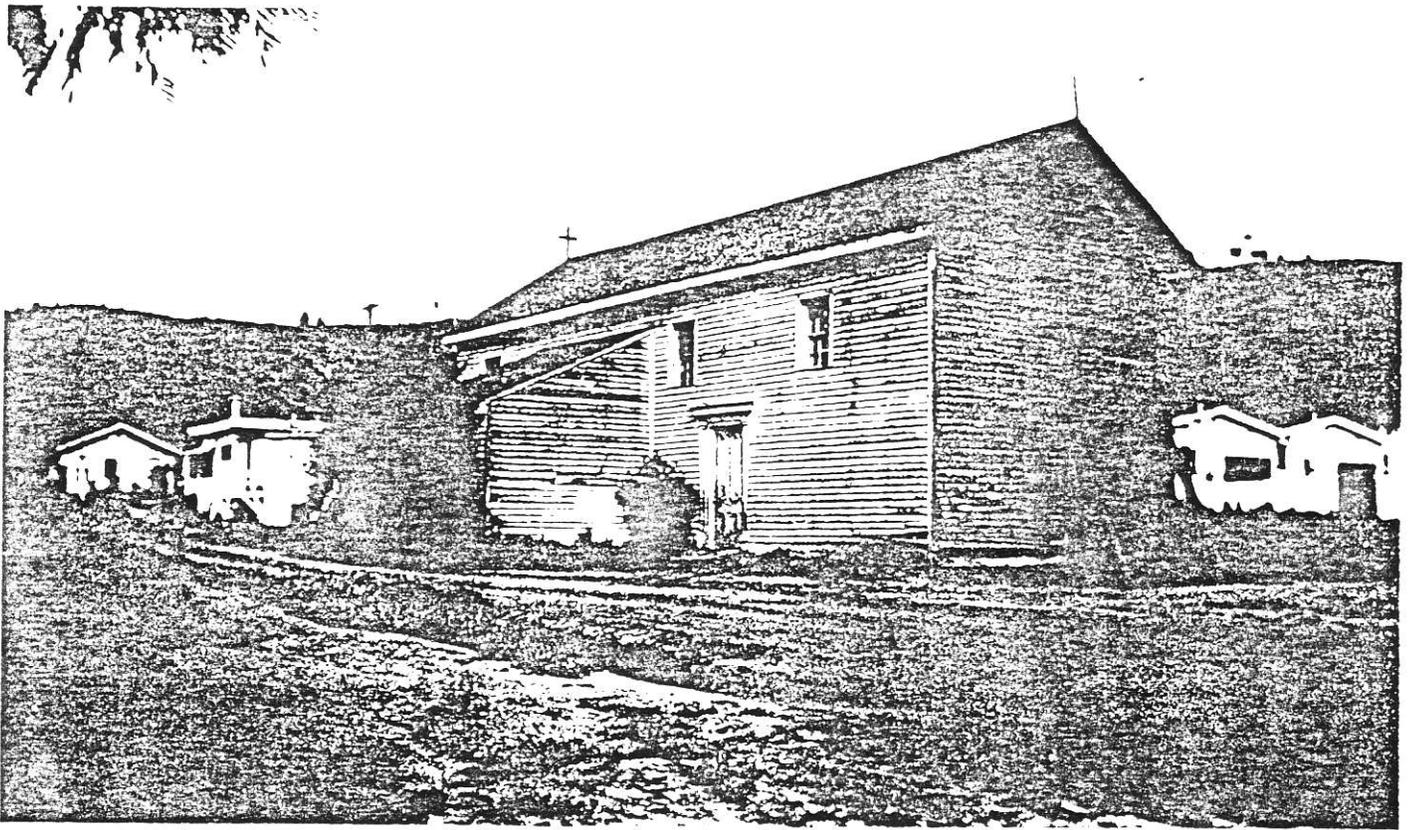
E



F



G



ADOBE CHAPEL OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION, MARCH 28, 1931
(From San Diego Historical Society--Ticor Collection)
No. 87: 16068-267

H

This photograph illustrates a host of facts and features about the Adobe Chapel six years before it was reconstructed by the W. P. A. Project in 1937.

The board siding was first applied as early as 1876 to hide (or to "protect") the deteriorating adobe. In the reconstruction this, of course, was omitted.

The two bells which had been suspended from the yoke on the right hand side of the chapel were long gone by 1931.

The tree in front of the left side of the chapel was specifically mentioned in rebuilding plans, to be preserved but moved to a new location.

Conde Street was clearly unpaved at the end of March, 1931. Note that it swerved to the left to get past the chapel. As shown in rebuilding plans, the chapel was reconstructed directly south of its original location. (Old Town streets generally run 45° from true north-south, east-west direction.) This removal made it possible to straighten Conde Street when it was paved. The chapel was placed comfortably back from the new curb line. (Had it not been moved that curb line would have bisected the chapel almost evenly, lengthwise.)

Further, the chapel was not originally sited on a single building lot. In the Coutts survey of 1849 it would be mostly in lot 1, block 26, but partly in lot 2. The southern-western strip of lot 2 was long labeled "Bishop" in the 15 foot width of the strip. This was still carried on some survey maps as late as 1950, well after the chapel had been moved in reconstruction to its present site--the northern quarter of lot 1. In 1870 a resurvey of Old Town by Surveyor James Pascoe changed the Coutts block numbers, and "block 26" became "block 490." The remaining three-fourths of lot 1 are occupied by the Old Town Community Church.

PHOTOGRAPHS AND MAP:
Identifications &
Credits

The booklet cover was produced by my eldest son, Tom Chamberlin, and his Apple II printer.

- A. Map of portion of Old Town, based on Coutts survey of 1849. Note the locations of Blocks 26 and 88, extreme right. (Printed for me by Ticor Company, San Diego.)
- B. Bells which once were at Adobe Chapel; later divided between San Diego Mission and Church of the Immaculate Conception. (Smythe, p. 257)
- C. Old Town view, 1906. Note Adobe Chapel, bells, and surrounding weeds. (Smythe, p. 261)
- D. Father Ubach, late in life. (Smythe, p. 538)
- E. Ubach's funeral, 1907. (Smythe, p. 539)
- F. View of Adobe Chapel, from west, Sept. 18, 1988 (Author's xeroxed photo)
- G. Entry door to Adobe Chapel after monument and plaque were in place, Sept. 18, 1988 (Author's xeroxed photo)
- H. Very instructive photo from S. D. Historical Society. Look closely at it, read credits, and the explanatory notes. It settles arguments!
- I. Monument Erector, Scott Robertson, at work on the monument. The level was used almost more than his trowel. (Author's xeroxed photo)
- J. The mounted plaque. (Author's xeroxed photo)

The photo on the "title page" is of the Adobe Chapel on Sept. 18, 1988. (Author's xeroxed photo). The Sept. 18th photos were taken with a Polaroid Spectra camera, and are colored. Reproduction in black and white from such pictures does not give excellent results, but "time was running out!"

