



Junipero Serra

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FATHER JUNIPERO SERRA (Miguel Jose Serra) was one of the most important Spanish missionaries in the New World. Born in Majorca on November 24, 1713, he joined the Franciscan Order at the age of 16. He soon gained prominence as an eloquent preacher and eventually became a professor of theology. His dream was to become a missionary to America. He arrived in Mexico City in 1750 to begin this new life.

In 1769 he established a mission at the present site of San Diego, California, the first of a number that would include San Antonio, San Buenaventura, San Carlos, San Francisco de Assisi, San Gabriel, San Juan Capistrano, San Luis Obispo, and Santa Clara. This was a herculean task considering that Father Serra was already in his fifties and suffered from a chronic ulcerated condition in one leg. Serra was ascetic and uncompromising in his zeal to convert the Indians to Christianity and to make his missions self sufficient. Inhabitants built their own homes, spun wool for garments, and pursued careers as masons, carpenters, blacksmiths, and millers; thousands of barrels of grain were kept in reserve supply, and herds of cattle, sheep, horses, and swine were maintained.

The ulcerated condition of Serra's leg eventually spread to his chest. At the age of 71, aware of his deterioration, he made a final visit to his missions. The well-known and beloved missionary died in Monterey, California, on August 28, 1784; his missions continued to flourish for another 50 years.

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Bronze by Ettore Cadorin
Given in 1931; located in National Statuary Hall.

