

CALABAZAS MISSION

The mission at Calabazas was named San Cayetano de Calabazas. The name San Cayetano refers to Saint Cajetan, a fifteenth century Italian philosopher and theologian who became a Cardinal in 1517. Father Eusebio Francisco Kino first used the name San Cayetano in January 1691 to identify the proposed mission at Tumacacori. The Tumacacori Mission was identified by the name San Cayetano for 60 years. After the Pima uprising of 1751, the Tumacacori mission and village were moved from the east to the west side of the Santa Cruz River and the Mission was renamed “San Jose”. That left the San Cayetano name to be used for a new mission.



Ruins of the Main Structure

The reason behind the Calabazas portion of the name is unknown. Normally, new missions took the name of the native village from which the mission sprang (as in Guevavi, Tumacacori and Bac). Calabazas however is of Spanish origin meaning “gourds” or “squash”. It is possible that a new name was selected because it was a new settlement and the people populating it came from several surrounding villages including Piticai, Obtuvavo,



Interior of Main Structure

Pipiac, Seug Baagand and Toacuquita. Another unusual circumstance was that unlike other missions in the area, it was not located near a spring or permanent source of water. It is on a dry, rocky ridge above the intermittent Santa Cruz River. Although Calabazas was not located near a ready source of water, it had two desirable characteristics. It was located in a prominent position above the valley floor where the natives could look up to it from their fields and it held a commanding view of the surrounding area, a vital fact in trying to protect it from the Apaches.

The Calabazas Mission was established sometime after the Pima uprising of 1751 but the exact time is unknown. The first reference to the mission was in a baptismal record dated 2 June 1756. Records also indicate that Father Pauer of the Guevavi Mission relocated about 80 people from the village of Toacuquita to Calabazas on 1 November 1756. Calabazas had a difficult time making it as a mission. The church was half completed by 1761 and was finally functional by 1773. In 1772, there were only about 64 people living in the village. The Apaches set fire to the church, granary and other buildings during a raid in 1777. Most of the natives had relocated to Tumacacori by the mid 1780s because of pressure from the Apaches and Calabazas was turned into a stock ranch for the Tumacacori Mission. The church was used as a chapel for the ranch.

A number of vaqueros, or cowboys lived at Calabazas with their families into the 1800s and looked after the livestock. After Mexico gained its independence from Spain in 1821, the Mexican Government was unable to control the incursions by the Apaches and shortly after 1828, Calabazas was abandoned. In 1844, the property was sold to Manuel Gandara for \$500. In 1853, Gandara leased the ranch to a German Corporation who ran about 6000 head of stock (primarily sheep and goats) on the property. They built a bunkhouse, repaired existing buildings and converted the church into a ranch house.



Ruins of Out Buildings

After the Gadsden Purchase, Calabazas became part of the United States and underwent a variety of uses. The US Treasury Department set up a port of entry and used the old church as the first customs house in the area. The US Army also made use of Calabazas. Camp Moore was established there in 1856 but soon abandoned. Fort Mason was established there in 1864 but was abandoned when 300 of the 400 men assigned there became sick from malaria. Squatters and homesteaders also occupied the site at various times and the various occupants changed frequently. By 1878, Calabazas was totally abandoned and the buildings soon turned into ruins.

Summarized September 2004 by T. Johnson from a Southwest Parks and Monuments Association pamphlet written by Donald T. Garate. Photographs by T. Johnson.

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