

“EL CAMINO REAL” MISSION BELL REMOVED

At this location, an “El Camino Real” mission bell marker previously stood. The bell marker was removed in August 2021 by the City of Santa Cruz at the request of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, descendants of the Indigenous peoples taken to the Santa Cruz and San Juan Bautista missions.

In November of 2020, the Santa Cruz City Council voted unanimously to remove all mission bell markers from public property, with broad community support.

These bell markers were erected in Santa Cruz starting in 1910 when the first one was placed on Soquel Avenue by the Saturday Afternoon Club. The newly manufactured bells were intended to promote automobile tourism and visitation of the missions, and to glorify and celebrate the legacy of the mission system in California.

The true history of the California mission system has long been obscured by this glorification of a mythical romantic Spanish past. In reality, the California missions were places of devastating loss, mortality, abuse and suffering

for the Indigenous people who were forced to remain at them and to labor without pay.

The clanging of the mission bells regimented day to day life, ringing when work was to begin. Indigenous people were subject to cruel and severe punishments for disobedience. Sexual abuse of women and children by priests and soldiers was widespread. Native peoples in the missions were forced to live in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions and diseases would spread quickly. 75% of the children born at Mission Santa Cruz did not survive to age five.

Many tribes in California, including the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band, are today confronting the false, white-washed history symbolized by the El Camino Real bell markers. These tribes are demanding that the true histories of their communities and the attempted genocide suffered by their ancestors during the Spanish, Mexican and American periods be openly and truthfully told.

The destructive impacts of colonization continue to be felt by California’s Indigenous communities today in the form of intergenerational trauma, dispossession from ancestral lands and widespread poverty. As the true history of California is brought forward, so are important conversations about what it can look like to move towards repair and healing in the 21st century.

This is a temporary sign. A permanent plaque to honor the Awaswas-speaking Uypi people on whose ancestral lands the City of Santa Cruz is built is currently being designed in collaboration with the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band.

To learn more and join the conversation, see the CA State Parks virtual exhibit that discusses the history and removal of the El Camino Real bells: →



Online Bell Exhibit

