

Mission San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo

By John Sykes & B.T. Pouncy

This engraving of the Spanish mission San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo — present-day Carmel in Monterey Bay, California — was based on a sketch by British midshipman John Sykes. It was one of several illustrations included in George Vancouver's travel narrative, *A Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean and Round the World, 1791-1795*. Published in 1798 to wide public acclaim, Vancouver's narrative greatly increased the European public's knowledge about the Pacific Coast.

Following the Nootka Sound Controversy of 1789, in which Spanish Commander Esteban Jose Martinez seized British ships on the west coast of present-day Vancouver Island, the British government sent Captain George Vancouver on an expedition to retrieve British property in the sound. Vancouver was also charged with preparing a detailed survey of the Pacific Northwest Coast, and with continuing the search for the mythical Northwest Passage, which Europeans believed would reduce the sailing time between Europe and Asia. By the early 1790s, tensions between Great Britain and Spain had eased somewhat and Vancouver focused his attentions on exploring the North Pacific.

Throughout his four-year exploratory voyage to Alaska and the Pacific Northwest, Vancouver was mindful of the competition between European maritime powers in the region. However, thousands of miles from Britain and from British colonies in Australia, Vancouver was forced to lay anchor in Spanish California, since there were no permanent European settlements in the Pacific Northwest south of Russian Alaska. During the summer of 1792, Vancouver's ship visited Spanish California, including the Spanish missions at San Francisco, Monterey, and Carmel.

Further Reading: Gough, Barry. *The Northwest Coast: British Navigation, Trade, and Discoveries to 1812*. Vancouver, B. C., Canada, 1992.

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