

Context Statement Scope

An overview of the historic context's three main elements – overarching theme, geographical area, and chronological period – is described below. These elements are designed to allow for as broad of a scope as possible, while meeting National Register requirements.

Overarching Theme: Native Americans and the California Mission System

A mission's central headquarters – the casco – is what most people think of as a "Mission". It typically includes the church, convent (padre's quarters and reception rooms), unmarried women's dormitory, storage facilities, workshops, soldier's quarters, and Native American residences (both adobes and traditional dwellings). In the MPDF, "Mission" can be clarified as referring to the diverse and sprawling institutions that includes the central mission cascos as well as outlying ranchos, asistencias, grazing fields, vineyards, coastal ship landings, matanza sites, quarries, kilns, and aqueduct systems. The "Mission System" would include the physical missions and the religious and political organizations that governed them.

Geographical Area: Portion of California Directly Impacted by Missionization

The MPDF historic context geographical area was previously generally defined by OHP as the portion of California directly impacted by missionization, including all 21 missions and their extended zones of influence. The area of direct mission influence can be mapped using existing datasets (Milliken and Johnson databases, Harrington notes, mission records). However, the historic context will also acknowledge that the missions' zones of influence may extend beyond this area, for example for refuge sites.

Chronological Period: 1769-1848

While the historical reality varied considerably between the missions, and we acknowledge this regarding Native experiences and the timing of those experiences, mission communities did not simply dissolve with the Mexican secularization decree and ordinance of 1833/1834. In terms of immediate effects, secularization was implemented relatively slowly and differentially across the region. When considering the relationships between Native Americans and the California Mission System from the vantage point of Native Californians, those relationships continued well past secularization to today. In fact, the gradual abandonment of the missions after 1834 and the continued linkages between Native people, particular missions, and the surrounding landscapes is a natural extension of the themes addressed in the following historic context outline proposal. Further, there are property types for which these connections beyond secularization would contribute to their significance.

Many people continued to work for and live at "their" missions – land they claimed because their ancestors and families lived there and built them – and Native people from the missions Tribal/mission communities asked for and were granted mission land all the way to 1846. As examples:

- The populations of Missions San Miguel and San Luis Rey continued to grow after 1834.
- At Mission Santa Clara, glass beads have indicated 1840s occupation of neophyte dormitories and Native people being buried in the mission cemetery as late as 1848-1849.
- At Mission San Antonio de Padua freed residents established independent ranches on former mission land, with sites with adobes recorded at Ft. Hunter Liggett.

Native Americans lived in relationship to the missions and mission lands well through the 19th century despite the period of American genocide. Today, many Tribal communities trace their ancestry back to particular missions, including (as in the example of the Ohlone of the San Francisco Bay Area) through marriage and baptismal records that post-date the secularization decrees of 1833/1834. To adequately tell the story of Native people and Native land in relationship to the missions, the story should extend beyond mission secularization.

The chronological period for the MPDF is 1769 to 1848. This choice is based on the Mexican-American War ending with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, giving the Mexican province of California over to the United States (and resulting in statehood in 1850). Additionally, the start of the Gold Rush in 1849 resulted in a sudden influx of population and one of the most dramatic demographic shifts in North American history that clearly overwhelmed the prior socio-political landscape and forever changed the trajectory of Indigenous history.