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H. E. SIR RICHARD JOSEPH MENN, G.C.St.G.G.

The Legacy and Works of a California Missions Master Craftsman



RUBÉN G. MENDOZA

Introduction

Diocesan Curator and Conservator H. E. Sir Richard Joseph Menn, G.C.St.G.G.¹ quietly coordinated some of the most ambitious and momentous Papal programs, historic preservation and conservation efforts, and historic discoveries identified with the California missions for the period extending from 1967 through 2005. In effect, this particularly humble and studied servant of the Lord brilliantly shepherded a 37-year program of conservation and historic preservation projects on the West Coast in his capacity as the Carmel-based Missions Curator for the Diocese of Monterey. To that end he was directly engaged in the historic preservation, conservation, restoration, and research and consultation identified with all seven Missions of the Diocese of Monterey.² In addition, over the years Sir Richard's donations of period art and furnishings, including hand-crafted and gilded altar tables, came to grace the sanctuaries at San Carlos Borromeo, San José, San Juan Bautista, Soledad, San Luis Obispo, San Francisco de Asís, San Fernando Rey de España, and San Diego de Alcalá.³ His devotion to advancing a long-term program of deliberative curatorial treatments identified with celebrated California mission icons of art, architecture, and cultural history ultimately prompted His Holiness Pope John Paul II and the Bishop of the Diocese of Monterey to confer various Knighthoods on Sir Richard Joseph Menn, including that of the exalted status of Knight of the Grand Cross of Saint Gregory the Great. According to Sir Richard,⁴

I received the St. Gregory Knighthood three times (with initial Investiture in 1991), upgrade to Knight Commander of the Great Star in 1996 (private conferral by the Bishop), and finally, the grand

About the Author

Rubén G. Mendoza is Professor and Chair of the School of Social, Behavioral & Global Studies at California State University, Monterey Bay. His archaeological studies include his role as principal investigator on four California missions and the Spanish Royal Presidio of Monterey, where excavations resulted in the discovery of the Serra Chapel of 1770-72. He is the co-editor with Richard Chacon of *North American Indigenous Warfare and Ritual Violence* (2007), *Latin American Indigenous Warfare and Ritual Violence* (2007), *The Ethics of Anthropology and Amerindian Research* (2012), and *Feast, Famine or Fighting? Multiple Pathways to Social Complexity* (2017). He has published some two-hundred articles, chapters, and journal contributions, and scores of images spanning a range of topics and media, including Amerindian and Spanish Colonial cultural histories, art and architecture, social conflict, and science, technology, and medicine. Recent publications include Rizzoli's *The California Missions* (2018) and Nazraeli's *Mission San Miguel Arcángel* (2019) with photographer Melba Levick. His forthcoming *The Spanish Style House: From Enchanted Andalusia to the California Dream* explores the Andalusian architectural heritage of California with Melba Levick. *The Santa Fe Style* is the subject of Mendoza's latest Rizzoli book project with Melba Levick, and is slated for spring 2022 release.



Investiture to the highest rank, that of Knight Grand Cross, First Class (Knight Grand Cross of the Papal Equestrian Order of Pope St. Gregory the Great of the Vatican State), which was publicly celebrated at the Carmel Basilica with Mass of Investiture convened on July 27th, 2000. Two other ecclesiastical Knighthoods were granted and conferred, including Knight (all 5 ranks up to Knight Grand Cross) of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulcher of Jerusalem, and secondly Knight of Magistral Grace of the Sovereign Military Order of St. John of Malta (Knights of Malta).

Sir Richard Menn's many contributions in that regard center on the clandestine Canonical Exhumation and reopening of the Serra crypt on 12 November 1987. Accordingly, Sir Richard was "Appointed by Bishop Thaddeus Shubsda to organize members to serve for the Canonical Exhumation of Junípero Serra as well as the actual opening and closing of the grave in the Basilica as required by Rome for the Canonization Process as well as the follow-up reports with the Bishop in the late 1980's."⁵ Sir Richard, however, is predominantly identified with an impressive corpus of conservation treatments and historic preservation efforts, including the faithful reproduction of liturgical furnishings and altar screens for the California missions.⁶ The latter include the wholesale fabrication, gilding, and installation of *reredos* or altar screens and related church furnishings, as well as meticulously researched and hand-painted frescoes at a host of California missions, including the sculpted and gilded master works of Missions San Fernando, San Juan Bautista, San José, and San Carlos Borromeo, among others. The latter, that of San Carlos, constitutes a long-term devotion forged under the tutelage of Sir Harry Downie, the longtime curator of the Carmel Mission (1930-1980) under whom



Figure 1. Sir Richard Joseph Menn (left) with cousin and retired Carabinieri police Chief Marshal Giuseppe Ferrara (right) at the Ponte Sant'angelo in Rome shortly after an audience with Pope Francis on November 19, 2014. Courtesy Sir Richard Joseph Menn Collection.

Sir Richard worked from the 1960s onward.⁷ This paper documents Sir Richard's inestimable and largely unacknowledged contributions to the conservation and historic preservation of a significant corpus of invaluable California missions' collections of Neoclassical, Gothic, Mudéjar, and Mexican Baroque traditions of early artisanship first introduced to California by San Junípero Serra, OFM.

The Diocesan Curator

The California missions constitute a network of historically significant sanctuaries that acknowledge to one extent or another the Catholic heritage of the region, the enduring role of the Hispanicized Indian communities of early California, and the art, architecture, and culture of its earliest Fernandino missionaries and Hispanic soldiers and settlers. Because such sites remain active centers for the promulgation of the Catholic faith, they also constitute living histories of that faith and its ongoing accommodation of a host of changing community values and mores. Such accommodations have had a direct bearing on priorities pertaining to conservation and historic preservation, and thereby, the inclusion or exclusion of period furnishings, art, and architecture. Sir Richard Joseph Menn, who retired from his post as Diocesan Curator for the Diocese of Monterey in 2005, has had a profound and significant curatorial impact on some of the most celebrated icons of art, architecture, and culture identified with the California Mission era and its living history.

Sir Richard Menn's many contributions include the creation, restoration, and installation of main altar *reredos* and church furnishings at a host of California missions, including the sculpted and gilded master works of Missions San Fernando, San Juan Bautista, San José, and San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo, among others. This paper reviews said contributions, and thereby serves as a chronicle of the master works of Sir Richard Joseph Menn. The ultimate objective of this paper is to pay tribute to Sir Richard Joseph Menn. His nearly 40 years of devoted service to faithful conservation and or restoration of authentic Mission era works, remains a hallmark of excellence in the California missions. Moreover, his mastery with the faithful reproduction of period-appropriate Neo-Classical and or Mexican Baroque liturgical traditions of early craftsmanship first brought to California by the Brothers of the Order of Friars Minor remains beyond reproach.

Given that Richard Joseph Menn served as an apprentice to the renowned Diocesan Curator Sir Henry John "Harry" Downie (1903-1980) in the period from 1968 through to the latter's death,

I will argue for the purposes of clarity that any genuine understanding of the works and many contributions of Sir Richard Menn are in part understood through the lens of his predecessor and longtime mentor, Sir Henry John Downie. Moreover, because of Sir Richard Menn's unwavering commitment to all that constitutes the art and culture of the California missions, I will refrain from delving into his personal life any more than is necessary to characterize the eminent Diocesan Curator and master craftsman.



Sir Harry and the Evolution of a Tradition

We are all, for the most part, familiar with the works and contributions of Sir Henry John “Harry” Downie whose nearly 50 years of service to the restoration of the Basilica of San Carlos Borromeo del Río Carmelo in particular (1931-1980), and a host of some of the most celebrated Spanish colonial missions of California, has become the stuff of legend (Engelhardt 1934; Smith 1921; Menn 1990; Ambrosio 2000). In 1931, the 28-year-old Henry John Downie, a San Francisco cabinetmaker, was commissioned by Monsignor Philip George Scher (1880-1953) of Monterey to restore historic *bultos* or liturgical statues at San Carlos Borromeo. That initial contribution led to other commissions specific to the conservation of Mission era artworks, and soon led to Downie's appointment as mission restorer, and ultimately, as Curator of the Carmel Mission. Downie quickly developed a reputation as a master craftsman and restorer of California mission art and culture. In addition to his many hand-sculpted and painted creations, and restorations, Sir Harry soon took to the excavation of the ruined mission quadrangle at Carmel. Neither a scholar, nor an archaeologist, Sir Harry nevertheless undertook the “archaeological” excavation of the Carmel Mission quadrangle. His prime objective in this latter regard centered on his efforts to recover the original

Figure 3 (below). Portrait of Sir Henry John “Harry” Downie (1903-1980) today located in the Downie Museum created by Sir Richard Menn on the Mission San Carlos Borromeo grounds. Photo © 2010 Rubén G. Mendoza.





Figure 2 (previous page, top). Mission San Carlos Borromeo underwent a herculean restoration and reconstruction effort largely directed by Sir Henry “Harry” Downie in the period from 1931-80. Sir Richard Menn undertook his long-term apprenticeship and collaboration Downie from 1968 through 1980, after which Sir Richard served as the long-time conservator and Diocesan Curator at Monterey until 2005. Photo © 2010 Rubén G. Mendoza.

Figure 4 (left). Sir Richard Menn took care to assemble mementos and materials used by his mentor Sir Henry John Downie in the design of the Downie Museum there at San Carlos Borromeo. Photo © 2010 Rubén G. Mendoza.

Mission era footprint of the quadrangle by virtue of excavating its mudstone, shale, and granite foundation footings. This he did, and in so doing saw through the near total reconstruction of the Carmel Mission quadrangle. Regarding his recreations of Mission era art and furnishings, Sir Harry prided himself in their reproduction as “authentic” facsimiles. Sir Harry’s penchant for a studied Spanish colonial authenticity in all that he created for the Carmel Mission ultimately led him to experiment with a variety of techniques that suitably weathered, aged, or “authenticated” those facsimiles produced for the California missions.

Digging for the Truth

Having undertaken archaeological work at both Mission San Carlos Borromeo and San Juan Bautista, I have had a firsthand opportunity to review the notes and writings of Sir Harry that have some bearing on the archaeology of each respective site. Sir Harry’s notes, which were clearly not intended to do anything more than provide a basis for replacing bricks and mortar, often prove confusing and incomplete.⁸ Sir Harry’s passion for the restoration of Carmel’s mission convent quadrangle often led him

Figure 5 (below). The author initiated archaeological investigations and historic preservation efforts in 1995 as part of the Alta California Mission Research Project of the California State University, Monterey Bay. Said efforts continued through 2013, and resulted in a host of archaeological discoveries, major grants, and an ongoing program of historic preservation efforts under the guise of the Mission Conservation Project supported by Trustee and benefactor Philip Hudner, Esq. Photo © 1996 Rubén G. Mendoza.





into conducting archaeological investigations without the attention to detail warranted for the archaeology concerned. This in turn occasioned the unintended “modernization” or other inaccurate modifications or removal of portions of the historic fabric of that early California mission architecture present at the site. Nevertheless, Sir Henry John Downie has become the central icon or patron saint for those of us who have devoted any significant amount of time to archaeology, conservation, historic preservation, restoration, or advocacy and fund raising in the California missions (McLaughlin and Mendoza 2009, 2012; Mendoza 2009, 2013, 2018, 2021; Mendoza and Lucido 2014).

Harry’s Mission – Richard’s Devotion

With respect to his work at San Carlos Borromeo, Sir Harry’s obsessions with Carmel perhaps best frames his practice-based philosophy and all-consuming passion for the conservation and restoration of the California missions. According to Sir Harry, “all the work I have done here has been with the idea of creating a fitting memorial to Junípero Serra, the Apostle of California” (McLaughlin 2004: 233). To that end, Sir Harry sought the “authentic” reproduction of Mission era artworks, and the conservation and or repatriation of

Figure 6. The 1975-76 restoration and reconstruction of the Old Mission Church of San Juan Bautista was spearheaded by Sir Henry John Downie in close collaboration with Sir Richard Menn who saw through the recreation of the painted interior elements based on fragmentary remains of the original historic fabric and period paint scheme. Photo © 2011 Rubén G. Mendoza.

original pieces from Carmel. Sir Harry's efforts at repatriation were in turn broad-based and effective, and clearly consumed a good deal of his time. On one such occasion, what started out as one collector's efforts to commission Sir Harry to restore an old *bulto* instead resulted in the repatriation of *La Conquistadora* or *Nuestra Señora de Belén*, the patronal saint of San Carlos Borromeo. In that instance, Sir Harry realized that the *bulto* in question was in effect the original patronal saint from the main altar *reredos* of Carmel, and the very one attributed to Fray Serra, and as such, Sir Harry promptly acted on the informal "repatriation" of the masterpiece in question. Sir Harry's mission, or should I dare say, obsession, with Carmel and Fray Serra, extended to virtually every dimension of his life. In conversations with Sir Harry's daughter Miriam Downie, and in turn, Sir Richard Menn, it is clear that Serra and the California missions dominated every waking moment of Sir Harry's life. To that end, Sir Harry maintained craft workshops at both the Carmel Mission and at his home in the community of Carmel. His obsessions clearly fueled his idiosyncrasies, and Sir Harry often secluded himself in his workshops where visitors rarely tread. During these and other times, Sir Harry often initiated impromptu visitor tours at Carmel while donning a Franciscan habit and belching cigar smoke from one of the many fine cigars that one might say he took to habit. Upon his death on 10 March 1980, Sir Harry was buried immediately adjacent to the Carmel Basilica church that he so lovingly restored over the course of several decades of work spanning the period from 1931 through 1980.

Passing the Torch

Sir Harry's lifelong devotion to both the Serra cause and the conservation and restoration of a Carmel Mission memorial to the Apostle of California has in turn fueled the passions and commitments of his apprentice, the master craftsman and artisan Richard Menn. Like Sir Harry, Sir Richard Joseph Menn is a man devoted to Fray Serra and the Serra cause, and thereby, the conservation and restoration of the California missions. Because of his devotion to the craft, Sir Richard was often characterized as reclusive in nature by those with whom I interacted before my initial meeting with



Figure 7. *La Conquistadora* was returned to its rightful place in the former Funerary Chapel of 1814 by Sir Henry John Downie in the early years of his tenure at Carmel. Photo © 2015 Rubén G. Mendoza.

this otherwise devoted master craftsman. Perhaps because of this perception, and his apparent avoidance of that modicum of limelight that otherwise characterized the tenure of Sir Harry at Carmel, Sir Richard remains largely unacknowledged and unheralded among California mission scholars and aficionados of the very art and architecture that Sir Richard has devoted his life to chronicling, conserving, and restoring. His dual devotion to both the life and works of the Apostle of California, Fray Junípero Serra, and the many artistic and architectural contributions of Sir Henry John “Harry” Downie’s legacy at Carmel, has nevertheless dominated his life and his passions for the preservation and restoration of the California missions of the Diocese of Monterey and beyond. According to Sir Richard in a communique to the author on 31 December 2019, “I started my association with Harry Downie in 1968, but did not actually start as an official Diocesan Employee until 1972, being more of a student...mentored by Downie the first years while I was a student with the Discalced Carmelite Fathers in San Jose” (Richard Menn, Personal Communication to Mendoza, 31 December 2019). Significantly, during the period extending from the late 1960s through to his death in 1980, Richard Joseph Menn worked tirelessly and selflessly to see through all conservation and restoration efforts that Sir Harry was physically unable to attend to in his capacity as Curator due to failing health.

In that same period, Sir Harry is said by some to have proven ever more challenging to work with in those final years. Despite that fact, Richard Menn continued to serve his ailing mentor and patron with unflagging devotion, a devotion and commitment to honoring his mentor that remains to this day. In fact, in the now eighteen years of my acquaintance with Sir Richard Menn, I have never known him to make a disparaging remark about Sir Harry. If anything, it was clear to me that he continues to hold Sir Harry in only the highest regard. Clearly, Sir Richard continues to acknowledge and honor all that he learned from his otherwise demanding, and at times cantankerous, mentor, Sir Henry John “Harry” Downie, and this by way of his work as the custodian of Sir Harry’s legacy.

Celebrating the Works of a Master Craftsman

Invariably, Sir Richard Menn exudes a particularly humble and self-effacing character when asked about his many artistic and cultural contributions to the preservation, conservation, and restoration of the California missions. I would nevertheless like to take this opportunity to revisit and review but a handful of those conservation efforts that I believe most conspicuously, albeit silently, define the significant impact had by this California Missions master craftsman.



Figure 8. The “Mission Workshop” used by both Downie and Menn once stood on the margins of the San Carlos Borromeo mission grounds. It was here that many of Sir Richard’s masterfully-crafted liturgical furnishings were created. The workshop was ultimately demolished in 2001. Courtesy Sir Richard Joseph Menn Collection.

While, like Downie before him, his primary venue as mission restorer and curator has been with San Carlos Borromeo, Sir Richard has had a direct hand in some of the most significant and challenging Mission conservation and restoration projects in the whole of California. Among those projects for which those who know of him continue to praise him and his works are to be included several that have stood the test of time; in particular, those identified with the California missions at Carmel, San José, San Fernando, and San Juan Bautista.

Revisiting Downie’s Workshop

The Reverend Dennis Gilbert, the former pastor of Old Mission San Juan Bautista, came to know both Sir Henry John Downie, and his apprentice Richard Menn, during his respective tenure at Carmel in 1971 and 1972. During that time, Father Dennis had many an occasion to interact with Sir Harry, and thereby recalls in vivid detail the old “red” barn or workshop in which the craftsmen secluded themselves for the fabrication of objets d’art, or conservation treatments.⁹ According to Fr. Dennis, Richard Menn remained extraordinarily attentive to the many conservation project undertakings of that time. Clearly, Sir Richard’s studied practice and determination spoke volumes to his commitment and unswerving diligence to the task, a quality often cited by those who had occasion to observe Sir Richard at work at Carmel and at other Mission era historic sites throughout California.

It was there in the old “barn” or workshop at Carmel that Richard Menn was first apprenticed to Sir Harry in circa 1968. Apparently, Sir Harry felt the calling to take the young apprentice under his

wing so that his work there at Carmel might be carried on long after his death. There in the English “colonial” styled workshop crowded with both authentic and reproduced liturgical furnishings, Colonial and Mexican era paintings, weathered lumber, paints and chemicals used for “weathering” wood and related objects, and both antique hand tools and electrically powered circular saws and drills, Richard Menn first learned the tools of the trade from Downie. Because of ailing health, after



1968 Sir Harry was scarcely able to handle or otherwise operate much of that equipment available there in the Mission workshop. And, so it was that Richard Menn came to take on virtually all of the craftsmanship necessary to see through Sir Harry’s principal project undertakings there at Carmel, as well as in other California missions where the preeminent curator had a hand in historic preservation, conservation, and restoration. It was in fact Richard Menn that operated all of the power tools, and it is in fact that task, as well as his many hands-on efforts on the many Carmel projects observed by the public, that visitors to the mission workshop recall from those days identified with the waning years of Sir Henry John Downie’s tenure

Figure 9. Much of that conservation work completed by both Downie and Menn for a host of California mission projects was completed in the “Mission Workshop” at Carmel. The creation and gilding of the main altar *reredos* of Mission San José is pictured here in the period just prior to completion in 1985. Courtesy Sir Richard Joseph Menn Collection.



Figure 10. The main altar *reredos* at Mission San Fernando Rey de España was designed and installed by Sir Richard Joseph Menn and dedicated on December 8, 1991. The altarpiece stands 32 feet tall and 30 feet across, and was assembled from 115 sections that required over a week to assemble. The hundreds of individual elements of the altar were culled from the disjointed remains of the Ezcaray altar originally destined for the Los Angeles Cathedral. Photo © 2004 Rubén G. Mendoza.

at Carmel. Ultimately, Sir Richard was often recalled as diligent, focused, and reserved, rarely saying a word when so focused on anything pertaining to his work at Carmel in particular, and a host of other related conservation efforts.

The Downie Archives

During his stay at Carmel in the early 1970s, the Reverend Dennis Gilbert had many occasions to observe Richard Menn at work on the construction of the Basilica Annex and Downie Archives Room situated at the southeast corner of the Santa Lucia Stone Church. During that effort, Richard Menn largely oversaw the construction of the building and the installation of interior furnishings and paint. Because the southeast corner of the Basilica once included an ornately carved doorway jamb, Sir Richard Menn saw through the relocation and reassembly of the elaborate mudstone *portada*, door jamb or gateway. That feature now stands immediately outside of the Annex building fronting the original Serra era fountain located adjacent to the southeast wall of the Church.¹⁰

Upon completion of the Annex building, Sir Richard went about painting wall murals and fabricating exhibition cases for an elaborate Nativity scene constructed from elements of the Ezcaray main altar *reredos* of 1687. The bulk of the altarpiece was reconstituted by Sir Richard for the main altar *reredos* at Mission San Fernando Rey de España, and subsequently, the Papal throne was assembled by Sir Richard Joseph Menn from elements of the Ezcaray altar in advance of the Pastoral Visit of Pope John Paul II to the Carmel Mission Basilica on September 17, 1987. The Pastoral Visit convened at Carmel

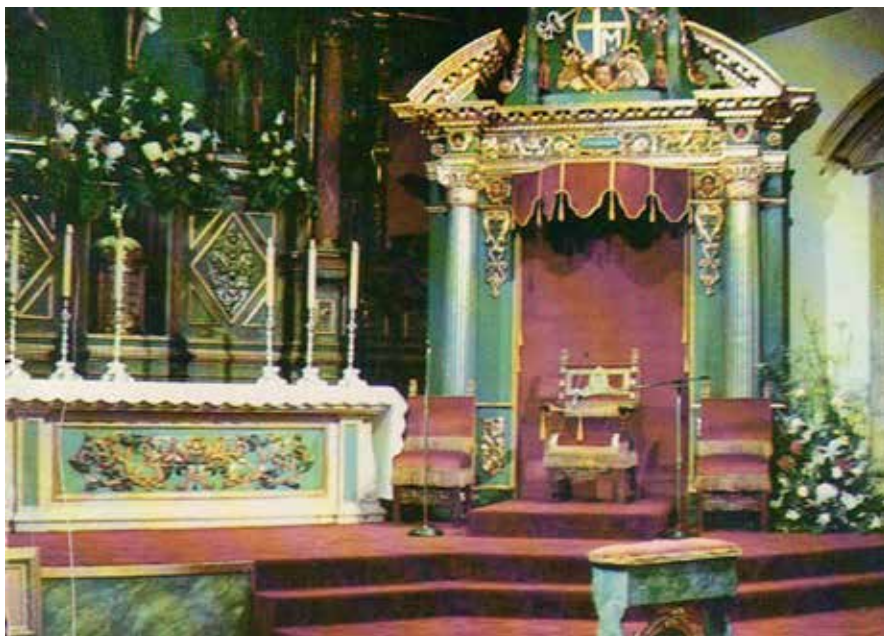


Figure 11. The Papal throne was assembled by Sir Richard Joseph Menn from elements of the Ezcaray altar of 1687, and in anticipation of the Pastoral Visit of Pope John Paul II to the Carmel Mission Basilica on September 17, 1987. The Pastoral Visit served as the prelude to the Beatification ceremony convened in Rome on September 25, 1988. A 16th century armchair was acquired and redesigned by Sir Richard Joseph Menn to serve as the Papal chair. The Whole of the ensemble, with the exception of the chairs, was subsequently reinstalled in the Guadalupe Chapel at Old Mission San Juan Bautista in 1997. Courtesy Sir Richard Joseph Menn Collection.

anticipated the formal Beatification of Fray Junípero Serra, OFM, in Rome on September 25, 1988.¹¹

The largest room within the Annex was in turn outfitted to hold the Downie Archives, which remained at that location until 2005. Because Sir Richard took seriously his role as the custodian of Sir Harry's legacy, the Archives Room was perhaps Sir Richard's most prized contribution to his many years of work there at the Carmel Mission. After all, he had a direct hand in seeing through the preservation and housing of his mentor's life's work. In 2005, the Carmel pastor at that time ordered workers to dismantle the Downie Archives Room and collection so as to make way for its new use as the Bridal Room. The workers followed through as directed, and as a result, Sir Harry's papers were haphazardly dumped into boxes that Sir Richard subsequently found stacked outside the doors of the former Archives Room. During the course of my tenure as the project archaeologist there at San Carlos Borromeo, I specifically recall that Sir Richard was most aggrieved by this action, but he nevertheless took to diligently reassembling and organizing what remained of the collection and saw through its transfer to the Diocesan Archives in Monterey.¹²

Related Diocesan Projects

In addition to his 1971-72 efforts to install the side-altar *reredos* in the Serra Cenotaph Room or *Sala* at Carmel, Sir Richard Menn undertook a host of projects that ranged from the creation of the Sir Henry John Downie Memorial exhibition housed in the former adobe house attributed to the first (Hispanic) physician on the Monterey Bay, through to the construction of the massive pipe organ that Sir Richard fabricated to fit the envelope of the choir loft of the Santa Lucia Stone Church or Basilica at Carmel. He was justly proud of that fact, and when in June of 2003 I produced the first-ever photographic evidence of the solstice illumination of the Church tabernacle (Mendoza 2003); Sir Richard related to me the hard fought battle with the pastor of that time to avoid closing off the *Mudéjar*, or Star of Bethlehem, window located there above the choir loft. With each new pastor who took up the administration of Carmel, Sir Richard found it necessary to accommodate new and differing demands for changes that from time to time seriously challenged the historical



Figure 12. Pope John Paul II's Beatification of Fray Junipero Serra, OFM, on September 25, 1988 was anticipated by two years of preparations largely directed and effected by H. E. Sir Richard Joseph Menn. The Pastoral Visit of Pope John Paul II to the Carmel Mission Basilica on September 17, 1987 was all the rage, as is clear by the exuberance of the crowds pictured. Courtesy Sir Richard Joseph Menn Collection.

integrity of the Carmel Mission and other sites under his curatorial purview.¹³

The Ezcaray Altar

During the course of several visits with Sir Richard Menn I came to learn of his work on the main altar *reredos* of Mission San Fernando Rey de España in San Fernando, California. In the throes of the Spanish Civil War, and just prior to the advent of World War II, the whole of an elaborate altarpiece from Spain was purchased by an American collector who had it disassembled and shipped to California.¹⁴ Prior to its shipment to the United States, paperwork pertaining to the original altar and its reassembly was lost in the confusion of the Great War. Eventually, the altar was shipped, albeit without the appropriate documentation, and it was this altar that both Sir Harry and Richard Menn used as the basis for the reconstruction and ornamentation of the main altar or side-altar *reredos* at several California missions. Elements from the altar in question, which incorporated *bultos* of the Holy Family, including the virgin mother Mary, her mother St. Anne, and Mary's child Jesus, were recycled into the construction of the main altar *reredos*

at San Fernando, San José, and other prominent side altars and liturgical furnishings at Carmel and San Juan Bautista. The original Ezcaray Altar stood 45 feet in height, and 47 feet in width. Moreover, the altarpiece installed by Sir Richard within the Guadalupe Chapel at San Juan Bautista bore the name of a Spanish artisan and the date of A.D. 1687. Although questions remain, the altarpiece in question appears to be of mid to late 17th century manufacture. It was, however, the Ezcaray altarpiece at San Fernando that retained the vast majority of the many individual elements recovered from the Spanish altar in question. Sir Richard took to preparing those designs necessary to see through the reassembly of the Mission San Fernando *retablo* borne of the repurposing of the dispersed remains of the original Ezcaray Altar of 1687. In each instance, Sir Richard took to meticulously cleaning and gilding each of the monumental pieces in question.

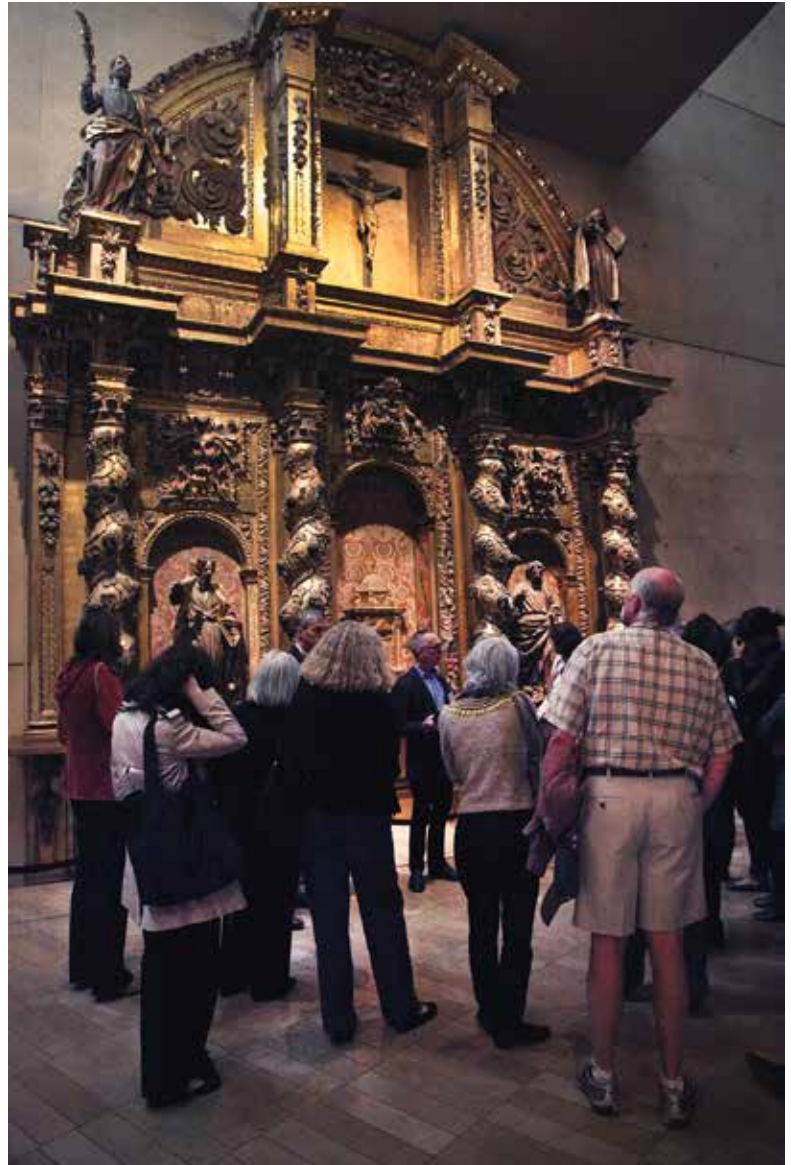


Figure 13. The Ezcaray side altar, as installed at the Los Angeles Cathedral. Photo © 2011 Rubén G. Mendoza.

Sir Richard's Crowning Achievement

Clearly, Sir Richard's crowning achievement, among many, centers on that work that he devoted to the reconstruction and restoration of Mission San José located in Fremont, California.¹⁵ During the course of one conversation with Sir Richard during my own tenure at San Carlos Borromeo, the esteemed Diocesan Curator went on to describe his work at Mission San José in a particularly straightforward manner, albeit with an air of pride and humility in the results.¹⁶ While I clearly discerned



a sense of accomplishment for what had been achieved in what became his magnum opus there at San José, Sir Richard nevertheless went on to acknowledge that he'd never take to doing another such "commuter" project. During the span of the 1980 through 1985 reconstruction efforts there at San José, the whole of the Mission Church was entirely rebuilt from the foundations to the summit of the *teja* tiled roof and tower. During that time Sir Richard served as consultant, principal investigator, and art restoration craftsman and conservator. According to Sir Richard,¹⁷

Mission San José was an ongoing project from the presentation of a model for the interior to Bishop Floyd Begin of the Oakland Diocese, onward through the research, planning, construction, and installation of the pieces up to the completion the week before the formal Dedication (Consecration of the Church) which took place on June 11, 1985. There had been plans to go further on the interior past that date, adding a replica of the Santa Clara Mission ceiling (Santa Clara interior decorated by the same artist during the Mission period). I think this was put aside in favor of adding the fountain, Mission Garden and fundraising to rebuild the baptistery, a missing section of the Padre's residence, and upgrades to the present Mission Museum structure.

In order to see through that project, Sir Richard found it necessary to commute weekly, and often daily, the three-hour round trip drive necessary to reach Fremont from his home in Carmel.¹⁸ His daily commutes proved exhausting to a man so invested in his work at San José. According to San José Mission Administrator, Dolores Ferenz, each day during which he worked to reconstruct the 1830s era wall

Figure 14. View of the recently completed and installed main altar *reredos* at Mission San José as of 1985. The *reredos*, including its design, build, and spectacular gilding, was the product of the studied and nuanced artistry and craftsmanship of Sir Richard Joseph Menn and his team. Sir Richard's inspiration for the recreation of the interior paint scheme were the Mission inventories and descriptions of the interiors prepared in the 1840s, which documented the role of Mexican era artist Augustin Davila's 1830s elaboration of what had originally proven an otherwise simple plan. Courtesy Sir Richard Joseph Menn Collection.

paintings of Mexican artisan Agustin Davila and the main altar *reredos*, “he asked to have the church doors bolted from the outside so that he would not be disturbed or distracted from his work by tourists and other visitors.”¹⁹ In his efforts to faithfully replicate what was known of the original sanctuary, Sir Richard conducted a thorough study of all available documentation. In addition, he sought out surviving elements of the original church and its furnishings. According to Sir Richard, “The surviving balusters were over painted many times, and surprisingly, the original colors were intact...[and]...provided the colors for the altars. Strong Lapis Lazuli blue, Malachite green, Naples yellow and Copper greens - a very bold palette.” Sir Richard advanced a summary of the wholesale restoration effort at San José in an August 10, 2010 communique:

The initial decoration of the interior was simple but underwent a major redecoration in 1830 employing the first professional artist to California, Agustín Dávila. A massive earthquake destroyed the church in 1868 and a wooden gothic style structure replaced it being constructed over the footings and tile floor of the original building. Early in the 1980's the wood church was moved off the site and the reconstruction of the original church began. The interior work was designed and executed by Sir Richard Menn with his assistant Huu Van Nguyen over a period of nine years at Richard's workshop in Carmel. Three major altarpieces were carved, painted and gilded, as well the light fixtures, railings, doorways, candlesticks etc. Shortly after the pieces were moved to Fremont and installed, the interior of the church was frescoed and other antique artifacts added. Of the building's original furnishings only two statues and a few balusters from the communion railing survived as well as nine canvas paintings. All the rest including the altarpieces were lost in the earthquake. Fortunately, the inventories of the church done in the 1840's enumerated and described most of the interior.

Figure 15. The 35-foot-tall main altar *reredos* is comprised of seventeen gilded and painted wood components pre-fabricated by Sir Richard Menn and his assistant “Huu Van Nguyen over a period of nine years” at the Carmel “Mission Workshop” in the period just prior to its installation at San José in 1985. Because of its height, the *reredos* was not assembled until its arrival at San José. Courtesy Sir Richard Joseph Menn Collection.





Figure 16. The elaborately-crafted crystal chandeliers at San José were pre-fabricated at the Carmel “Mission Workshop” by Sir Richard, using an armature that permitted its complex assembly. Courtesy Sir Richard Joseph Menn Collection.

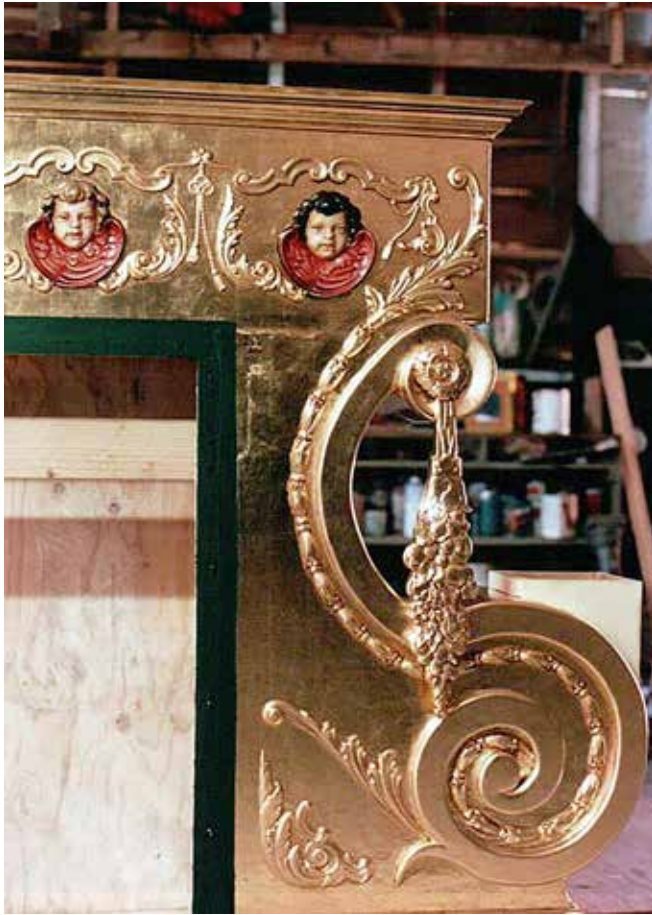
Today, San José Mission administrator Dolores Ferenz continues to characterize the life and work of Sir Richard in glowing terms...for his tireless and wondrous contributions to the wholesale restoration of the Mission church of San José, and for his lifelong contributions in his capacity as a California mission’s master craftsman.

In Light of His Legacy

Perhaps the greatest tribute to his life of service and great works remains with that work that he brought to fruition at the tandem gems of California missions art and culture found at San Carlos Borromeo and San José. Unlike his contributions at the Carmel Mission, which



Figure 17. The Mission San José side altar reredos of "Christ the Divine Prisoner" was wholly crafted and gilded in modular components in the Carmel Mission Workshop by Sir Richard Joseph Menn in circa 1984. The “small balcony on which the figure stands represents His presence on the balcony of Pontius Pilate when Christ was presented to the crowds below.” Courtesy Sir Richard Joseph Menn Collection.



owes much of its restoration and reconstruction to the life and works of Sir Henry John Downie, Mission San José's reconstruction owes the lion's share of its liturgically and historically accurate reconstruction to the contributions of H. E. Sir Richard Joseph Menn, G.C.St.G.G. And, it is for that reason that the author's late 2005 discovery of the solar geometry identified with the reconstructed main altar *reredos* and tabernacle at San José is pertinent to this tribute. As became patently clear at that time, the main altar *reredos* and tabernacle are situated such as to capture the sun's light on both the September 29th through October 4th patronal feast days of the Archangel Saint Michael and Saint Francis, respectively (Mendoza 2005, 2006, 2012). The equinoctial mirror date of March 10 through 19th, the week anticipating the patronal feast day of San José, proved a secondary finding. While Sir Richard Joseph Menn may have been unaware at the time of the restoration that the Mission church and its altarpiece were precisely oriented to capture the light of the setting sun on the feast day of Saint Francis and the Mission's patronal saint; the incredibly detailed and brilliant gold leaf decorations (of the main altar *reredos* and tabernacle) that Sir Richard meticulously and patiently applied to the gilded altar screen in the final year of the Mission's reconstruction was clearly done to spectacular effect. So

Figure 18 (left). The frontal of the main altar table was composited from a salvaged 17th century overdoor or restored *boiserie* or decorated wood panel elements salvaged from the Palace of Versailles, France. Sir Richard painstakingly restored the badly deteriorated elements, and subsequently gilded each for the altar tables at San José and San Carlos Borromeo. Courtesy Sir Richard Joseph Menn Collection.

Figure 19 (right). The San José *reredos* frieze and *resplendoradora*, or "rays behind God the Father", under construction at the Carmel workshop in circa 1985. Sir Richard indicated to the author that a host of antique elements were integrated into the assembly of the liturgical furnishings for San José, not the least of which was the appropriation of an earlier sculpted depiction of Moses for the *bulto* of San José. Courtesy Sir Richard Joseph Menn Collection.



brilliant was the illumination of the main altar tabernacle at San José on 29 September 2005 that Mission administrator Dolores Ferenz gazed into the illumination and turned away proclaiming “the light is so brilliant, I can’t look into it any longer!” On that day, and in the two days that followed, I documented the spectacular illumination of the main altar *reredos* and tabernacle and was profoundly struck by the artistry and mastery of that work completed at that site by H. E. Sir Richard Joseph Menn, G.C.St.G.G.

Figure 20. The October 3, 2005 equinoctial illumination of the main altar *reredos* and tabernacle at Mission San José served to validate the exactitude with which the reconstruction of the church proceeded under the direction of Sir Richard Joseph Menn. Photo © 2005 Rubén G. Mendoza.

Concluding Remarks

Ultimately, it is clear to me, based on my three and one half years of direct interactions and work with Sir Richard Joseph Menn during his tenure at Carmel, that the former Diocesan Curator embodies and embraces many of the finest qualities represented in both of the lives and long-term devotions of Sir Henry John “Harry” Downie and San Junípero Serra y Ferrer, OFM. In each of these three lives we can come to observe and appreciate a divinely-inspired plan borne of an inherent commitment to purpose, and an unflinching zeal, dynamism, and life of prayer and introspection. Each in turn sought



Figure 21. Sir Richard Joseph Menn has made many a visit to Vatican City, and has had more than one occasion to partake of a Papal audience. Sir Richard after an audience with Pope Francis convened on November 19, 2014. Courtesy Sir Richard Joseph Menn Collection.



Figure 22. A selection of the medals identified with Sir Richard’s multiple Knighthoods, including three identified with St. Gregory the Great, with initial Investiture in 1991. He was elevated to Knight Commander of the Great Star in 1996, and subsequently to that of Knight Grand Cross of the Papal Equestrian Order of Pope St. Gregory the Great of the Vatican State on July 27, 2000. Two other ecclesiastical Knighthoods were granted and conferred, including Knight Grand Cross of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulcher of Jerusalem, and Knight of Magistral Grace of the Sovereign Military Order of St. John of Malta, Knights of Malta. Courtesy Sir Richard Joseph Menn Collection.

to fulfill the faith and support the lifelong goals and aspirations of their respective predecessors. For Sir Harry, it was Fray Serra’s life and works, and for Sir Richard it remains both Fray Serra’s and Sir Harry’s lifelong commitments to preserving the apostolic foundations of the California mission’s community. As such, I argue that Sir Richard’s formidable long-term efforts, like those of Sir “Harry” Downie before him, on behalf of historic preservation and art restoration in the California missions, must not remain unheralded or unacknowledged by his fellows in the realm of California mission’s art and architectural restoration and historic preservation. As such, I would like to invite each of you who hold a stake in the historic preservation and study of



the California missions to join me in heralding and appreciating the many contributions of H. E. Sir Richard Joseph Menn, G.C.St.G.G.

Postscript

My initial meeting with Sir Richard Joseph Menn there at the Orchard House proved a veritable epiphany. As I left H. E. Sir Richard Menn's home on that August day in 2002, grateful for having had that singularly significant moment to partake of a glimpse into the life of an unheralded hero, and California missions master craftsman, my commitment to the historic preservation of these historic houses of worship was immeasurably bolstered. From that point forward I came to consider H. E. Sir Richard Joseph Menn more than merely a Papal Knight of the Grand Cross of Saint Gregory the Great, or the apprentice of Sir Henry John "Harry" Downie; I have come to consider him a genuine friend and one of the most generous, good natured, and self-effacing individuals one could ever imagine in the guise of a preeminent master craftsmen. I consider myself blessed to have known Sir Richard these many years in both a personal and professional capacity. My work there at the Carmel Mission, which

Figure 23. Among his many contributions, Sir Richard is renowned for generously giving of his time to treat visitors to both impromptu and scheduled tours of the art and architecture of Mission to San Carlos Borromeo. During the course of the author's archaeological investigations of San Carlos Borromeo, spanning 2003 through 2005, Sir Richard conducted multiple tours of the complex for the students of the CSU Monterey Bay Archaeology Program. Photo © 2003 Rubén G. Mendoza.



centered on the recovery of the so-called Serra Library and the Sixth or Provisional Church, was fully and selflessly supported by Sir Richard Menn, the Reverend Emil Robu, OFM, and long-time Carmel Mission parishioner Lynn Carr. Their respective efforts and moral support, including their genuine love for the old mission and community of San Carlos Borromeo, proved a major inspiration to my students and me. Sadly, the eminent Diocesan Curator vacated his post in the summer of 2005, and subsequently relocated to the Los Angeles Basin. His many contributions in his capacity as the Diocesan Curator through 2005, and his equally formidable efforts to serve the parish community, will not soon be forgotten. Sir Richard not only stepped down from a mere curatorial post, a post and mandate left to him by his mentor and teacher, Sir Henry John “Harry” Downie, but he did so with the grace and honor of only the noblest of spirits. His contributions to the many Mission era sites that he touched remains a palpable honorific and blessing to the many generations that will continue to enjoy and appreciate the artistry and dignity of this California missions master craftsman, and Knight of the Order of Saint Gregory the Great.

Figure 24 (above, left). The Orchard House, construed the earliest extant private adobe residential structure in California, is in part dated to 1772-74. The northwest wall of the adobe structure was originally erected to enclose the Mission Orchard, and this portion of the adobe wall was in turn integrated into the buildout of a lean-to in 1812 at San Carlos Borromeo, Carmel, California. Courtesy Sir Richard Joseph Menn Collection.

Figure 25 (above, right). Sir Richard’s kind and generous demeanor, and humbling enthusiasm, for the conservation and preservation of the California missions proved among the most memorable dimensions of my, and my students’ interactions with this California missions master craftsman. Sir Richard pictured with Anna Romana Santopaulo at the Monastery of San Francesco di Paola in Calabria, Italy. Courtesy Sir Richard Joseph Menn Collection.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to take this opportunity acknowledge and thank H. E. Sir Richard Joseph Menn, G.C.St.G.G. for his every kindness, particularly that demonstrated toward my students and myself during our tenure there at San Carlos Borromeo, and the many years since the 2002-2005 archaeological investigation at Carmel. I similarly thank Bishop Sylvester Ryan and the late Bishop Richard Garcia, Fr. Carl Faria, Fr. Emil Robu, OFM, Rev. Edward Fitz-Henry, Lynn Carr, and Philip Hudner, Esq., for their respective support during my many years of archaeological investigations and historic preservation efforts there at Carmel and in the Missions of the Diocese of Monterey. Furthermore, I thank Professor Jennifer A. Lucido for her comments and critiques on an earlier version of this manuscript, and for her many contributions to the scholarly gaze as regards current understandings of early California. Finally, I gratefully acknowledge the love and support of my dear wife Linda Marie, and my very patient daughters Natalie Mendoza-Schlegel and Maya Nicole Mendoza.

Endnotes

1. Papal Knight of the Grand Cross of Saint Gregory the Great bestowed on Richard Menn by Pope John Paul.
2. Sir Richard characterizes his work in the Diocese of Monterey as both consultative and hands-on art restoration, reproduction, and architectural conservation and restoration. Projects for the Diocese of Monterey include, among a host of others, consulting roles for seismic stabilization projects at San Antonio de Padua, San Miguel Arcángel, Santa Cruz, and the Mission Bell Project at San Luis Obispo. He in addition served as the designer for both the *campanario* or bell wall and interior church design and paint scheme at San Juan Bautista under the direction of Sir Henry “Harry” Downie during the 1975-76 reconstruction. His work at San Juan Bautista continued through to the restoration of the Guadalupe Chapel in preparation for the Mission Bicentennial of 1997. Personal Communication from Menn to Mendoza, 14 August 2020.
3. The altar tables at San Carlos Borromeo, San Juan Bautista (main sanctuary and Guadalupe Chapel), San Francisco (restored historic altar table), San Luis Obispo (altar table and furnishings), and those of San Fernando Rey de España (main sanctuary altar table, and altar table of the Serra daily mass chapel) all represent the craftsmanship of Sir Richard Menn. Moreover, the whole of the Ezcaray altar installation at Mission San Fernando, and the wholesale recreation of the main altar *reredos* at Mission San José represent Sir Richard’s craftsmanship.
4. Personal Communication from Menn to Mendoza, 16 September 2020.
5. Personal Communication from Menn to Mendoza, 14 August 2020.
6. While Sir Richard has acknowledged many of the challenges of working under the auspices of Sir Henry “Harry” Downie, he has also noted the often equally formidable challenges of attempting to navigate the often contentious and politicized landscapes of historic preservation, preservationists, pastoral priorities, and the often nominal to non-extant resources available to see through efforts with no clear guidelines of expectations on behalf of the Diocese of Monterey and other patrons and clients.
7. Sir Richard’s design, craftsmanship, and installation of the San Carlos Borromeo pipe organ, replete with that craftsmanship represented in that casework crafted for the install, were not without their own set of challenges regarding whether or not to retain the oculus or Mudéjar star window as a source of light. Sir Richard successfully fought to retain the open window, and in 2003, the author determined that the light of the midsummer solstice illuminates the main altar tabernacle every June 21st, and by virtue of the solstitial “mirror date,” on the feast of Corpus Christi.
8. The author’s very first encounter with Downie’s efforts to document in part what he had discerned from his “digs” in the Carmel Mission quadrangle centered on penciled renderings on the back of a brown paper bag that mapped the room block that now constitutes the day chapel fronting the Rio Road parking area. Said room block once consisted of three rooms comprising the *pozolera* or kitchen, and interior restroom features. In order to open the space for the creation of the day chapel, the two interior adobe walls were removed, and the latrine sealed.

9. Fr. Dennis to Mendoza, Personal Communication, February 15, 2006. Given the photographs shared with me by Sir Richard Menn, it would appear that Father Dennis may have confused the light olive green and ivory trim of the workshop “barn” with that of the later portion of the Orchard House painted in a firetruck red.
10. In correspondence from Sir Richard Menn to Mendoza dated to August 14, 2020, Sir Richard noted that “This was also the case for the two Bicentennial Celebrations of 1983 and 1984 for the Serra year, in which all California Bishops participated. At that time, I provided and built the Serra Garden at Carmel Mission and obtained from Keller & Scott [Antiques] the original Mission Fountain for re-installment at the Mission.” The shale fountain was recovered from the Carmel courtyard in the 19th century by an earlier occupant of the Orchard House, the earliest extant private adobe residential structure in California dated to 1772. The Orchard House long served as the private residence of antiques dealer Harry Lewis Scott who purchased the property from the Trevis family in 1976.
11. The so-called Papal “throne” now resides in the Guadalupe Chapel of Old Mission San Juan Bautista, where it was recommissioned by Sir Richard Menn and installed as the principal *reredos* of the day chapel restored in that location in 1997. The Guadalupe Chapel restoration, and Old Mission Bicentenary dedication of the newly installed altarpiece, was facilitated by Father Edward Fitz-Henry. The Guadalupe Chapel project included the author’s role as Project Archaeologist and Principal Investigator, and the students of the CSU Monterey Bay Archaeology Program, who dismantled the Old Mission Model built by Mr. Leonard Vercoutere in the 1950s, and installed therein prior to the restoration of the Guadalupe Chapel. As for the Papal “throne,” Sir Richard communicated to the author that “I was lucky to find a set of 16th century Italian chairs at Lewis Scott’s antique shop and the armchair of the set was used as the Papal chair.”
12. Shortly after Sir Richard deposited all archival materials that he had collated and re-organized with the Diocesan Archives in Monterey; I was present at the Orchard House when Sir Richard received a phone call from the Diocesan archivist at that time. The archivist, who was apparently unaware that the collection had been dismantled by the site administrator, expressed concerns that more had not been done to secure the collection that Sir Richard had so diligently reassembled after it was dismantled and pushed aside to make way for a bridal room.
13. Given my own long-term curatorial efforts at Old Mission San Juan Bautista (1995-2013), I can vouch for the fact that each new pastor or administrator ushers in new challenges to the historical integrity of the historic sites for reasons of liturgical or practical necessity.
14. Dated to 1687, the Ezcaray *retablo* or altar screen in question originated with the church of Saint Philip Neri, at Ezcaray, Spain. The whole of the altarpiece was acquired by an American collector and dismantled and shipped to the US where it was intended to go into the future Los Angeles Cathedral. After many years of languishing, the original plans for the reconstruction were lost, and portions were given over to Sir Richard Menn for the purposes of replacing the long-lost *reredos* of Mission San Fernando. Although a sizable portion of the *reredos* eventually made their way into the very modern Los Angeles Cathedral, other portions of the altar were given over to the recreation of the San Fernando church altar screen, as well as those at Mission San José, Carmel, and the Guadalupe Chapel of Old Mission San Juan Bautista.
15. Founding name of 1797: *Misión del Gloriosísimo Patriarca Señor San José* (The Mission of the Most Glorious Patriarch the Lord Saint Joseph). Cited from McLaughlin and Mendoza 2012: 48.
16. The author served as the Principal Investigator for the CSU Monterey Bay Archaeology Program undertaken at Mission San Carlos Borromeo between 2002 and 2005.
17. Personal communication from Menn to Mendoza, September 16, 2020. Bishop of Oakland from 1962 until his death in 1977, Floyd Lawrence Begin, reviewed the initial plans for the reconstruction and restoration of Mission San José.
18. The commute from the Orchard House in Carmel to Mission San José entailed a 3-hour, 180-mile round trip each and every waking day, and that over the course of the span of years represented to see through the completion of the adobe reconstruction, and completion of both the interior murals and fabrication of the main altar *reredos* and side altars.
19. Ferenz to Mendoza, Personal Communication, 29 September 2005. Where the main altar table is concerned, Sir Richard communicated to the author that “A rare 17th century carved overdoor from the Palace of Versailles was purchased and used as a frontal for the table of the altar. In 1870 a military museum for the French Republic was installed in one of the wings of Versailles (home of the Sun king- Louis XIV) and much of the “boiserie” (carved paneling) was re-

moved or destroyed. I purchased a pair of matching panels and one is used here and the other in the Altar of the Carmel Basilica. Badly damaged by dry rot, etc., they needed much restoration. They were purchased from Evans and Gherst Antiques, Los Angeles.”

20. Menn *Facebook* summary of August 5, 2010.

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