

The Bells of El Camino Real



Introduction

- The Inspiration for this program was provided by Virginia Watson's donation of the 2005 Huell Howser DVD on the Bells of El Camino Real, and the donation of a Desk Bell by Joan Seligmann. Joan and her sister Marylou Connet were known as the "Haworth Girls" as they grew up.
- Joan's grandmother, Mrs. A. H. Haworth, was the president of the Chatsworth Women's Club from 1923-24. During that time desk bells were presented to those organizations that contributed to the effort of sponsoring landmark bells along the El Camino Real.



California Timeline

- Spanish Discovery – 1542 – Juan Cabrillo discovers San Diego Bay
- Mission Period – 1769-1833 – Spanish Colonization establishes 4 presidios and 21 missions. The Indians are assimilated into European culture and the Catholic religion.
- Mexico declares independence from Spain - 1821
- Rancho Period – 1834-1849 (Mexican government takes mission lands away from the church 1834-36).
- California Statehood – 1850 (gold discovered at Sutter's mill in 1848)
- 1892 – A number of California women's clubs create a movement to save the most historic road of the Californias, the **El Camino Real**.
- 1906 – A bell is designed to create a marker on the **El Camino Real**, and is installed at the Plaza Church in downtown Los Angeles.

Colonizing Alta California

- The Spanish Crown, anxious about reports of foreign ships in the eastern Pacific Ocean, made the conquest of lands north of Baja California their highest priority.
- After the founding of San Diego de Alcalá, the first mission of Alta California, in 1769, the Spaniards wasted no time in commencing their next undertaking, the exploration of a land route north to Monterey, which would become the site of a presidio (a fort) and signal that Spain was ready to defend its territory.
- Portola is credited with blazing the trail that would eventually become Alta California's first road, **the El Camino Real**, in 1769. The expedition included Father Junipero Serra, the founder of the mission chain in California.

Colonizing Alta California

- During the first ten years, presidios were established at San Diego, Monterey, and San Francisco. Monterey became the first capital. Eight missions were also established, including San Juan Capistrano, San Gabriel, and San Luis Obispo.
- During the second ten years, a fourth presidio was established in Santa Barbara, and three missions were founded, including San Buenaventura and Santa Barbara.
- During the third ten years, seven more missions were founded, including San Fernando, Santa Cruz, and San Jose.
- The Missions of Alta California were completed in 1823. During that 54 year span, four presidios and 21 missions were established, stretching along the California Coast from San Diego to Sonoma.

Saving the El Camino Real

- 1892 Ann Pitcher of the Pasadena Museum was concerned that the original roads leading to California's most priceless art and history (the California Missions) would be lost. For the next ten years she contacted many organizations to generate interest in a project to preserve the El Camino Real



Saving the El Camino Real

- 1895 Bureau of Highways was created
- 1900 California State Automobile Club and the Southern Calif. Automobile Club were created
- At this point if you were lucky, directions to various locations were published in a newspaper or magazine giving landmarks to look for and directions to turn. Travel was said to be either an adventure or a nightmare. Gas stations were hard to find and roads washed out regularly.



The El Camino Real 5-point plan

In 1902 The General Federation of Women's Clubs accepted Miss Pitcher's 5-point proposal to save the El Camino Real.

1. Trace the original Government Road of Spanish California.
2. Prove adaptability of the route for the purpose of a California State Highway, with the 21 missions as both stations and landmarks upon it.
3. Petition County Supervisors to assist the movement.
4. Ask the State of California to put milestones upon it which shall record its history.
5. Spark interest in making this road a Memorial Highway, preserving its Spanish name.



The El Camino Real Association is formed

After approval of the 5-point plan, Mrs. A.C.S. Forbes, at the request of an ailing Miss Pitcher, accepted the challenge and received support from:

Native Daughters of the Golden West
Southern California Historical Society
Good Roads Clubs
Automobile Clubs

In 1904 the Santa Barbara Convention of various organizations met and from this the El Camino Real Association of California was formed.



1904 The project begins

STEP 1: Fundraising was accomplished by letter writing campaigns

STEP 2: Investigate the roads. A committee was appointed to study the old roads and trace El Camino Real.

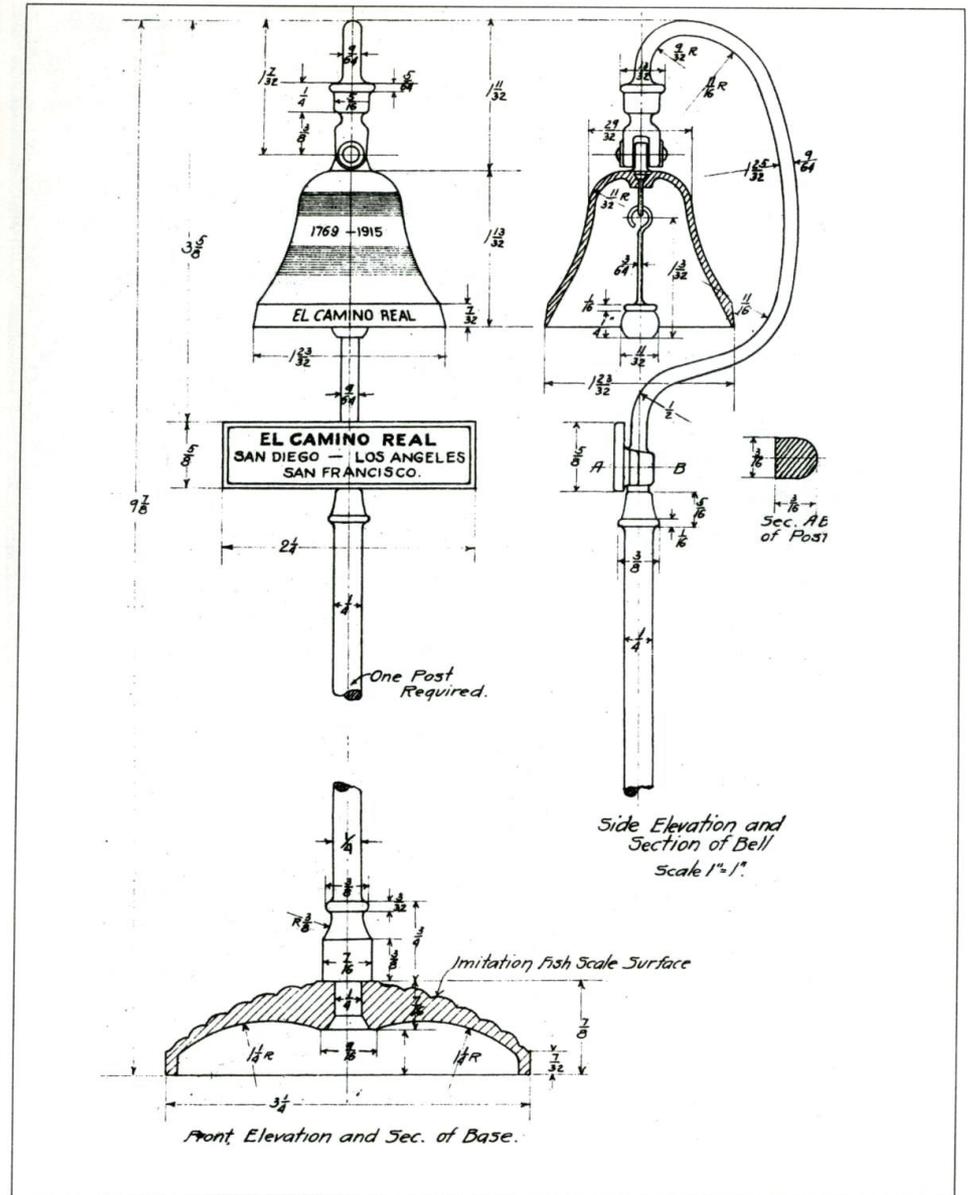
1904-05 The route from San Diego to Los Angeles was investigated with the assistance of the title companies.

1905-06 The route from Los Angeles to Sonoma was verified using a variety of sources including church records, land grants of rancheros, and invaluable information provided by old Spanish families and pioneers.

Design the Bells

STEP 3: Design and produce a marker

Mrs. Forbes presented this design which is represented by a bell rung by the padres signifying work to be done, on a simple staff with a sign giving direction and information to the next mission.



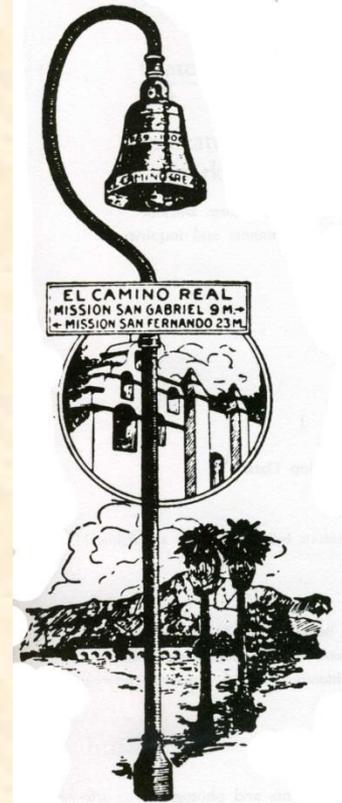
1906 Installation

1906 the first bell was installed at the Plaza Church in downtown Los Angeles. By 1940 over 400 bells could be found along the El Camino Real.

Bells were first hung along the roads as purchased or sponsored by either the local county supervisors offices, Women's Clubs or local Sons and Daughters of Pioneer Organizations.

Bells decreased in 1960 due to vandalism and disrepair to only 80.

Today, Caltrans has an ongoing program to maintain the bells along the **El Camino Real**.



Chatsworth on the El Camino Real

The 1906 study by the El Camino Real Association identified the route from Los Angeles to Ventura as what is now the 101 freeway.

The San Gabriel Mission was the 4th mission built, and the Ventura mission was the 9th. The San Fernando mission was the 17th mission built, 15 years after the Ventura Mission.

So for a period of 15 years, the 101 was the route from San Gabriel to Ventura. However, after the San Fernando Mission was built in 1797, a new route was established, San Gabriel to San Fernando to Rancho Simi to Ventura.

The following two historic Spanish maps identify this route that went through the Santa Susana Pass. A likely route from the San Fernando Mission was along San Fernando Road to Rinaldi past Stoney Point and through the pass.

1844 Duflot de Mofras Exploration Map

The red line on this map identifies the El Camino Real, with each Mission marked with a cross. Rancho Simi is identified as a stop between Mission San Fernando and Mission San Buenaventura



1842 Diseno del Rancho Simi

In 1795, two years before the San Fernando Mission, El Rancho Simi was given as a Spanish colonial land grant to the Pico family.

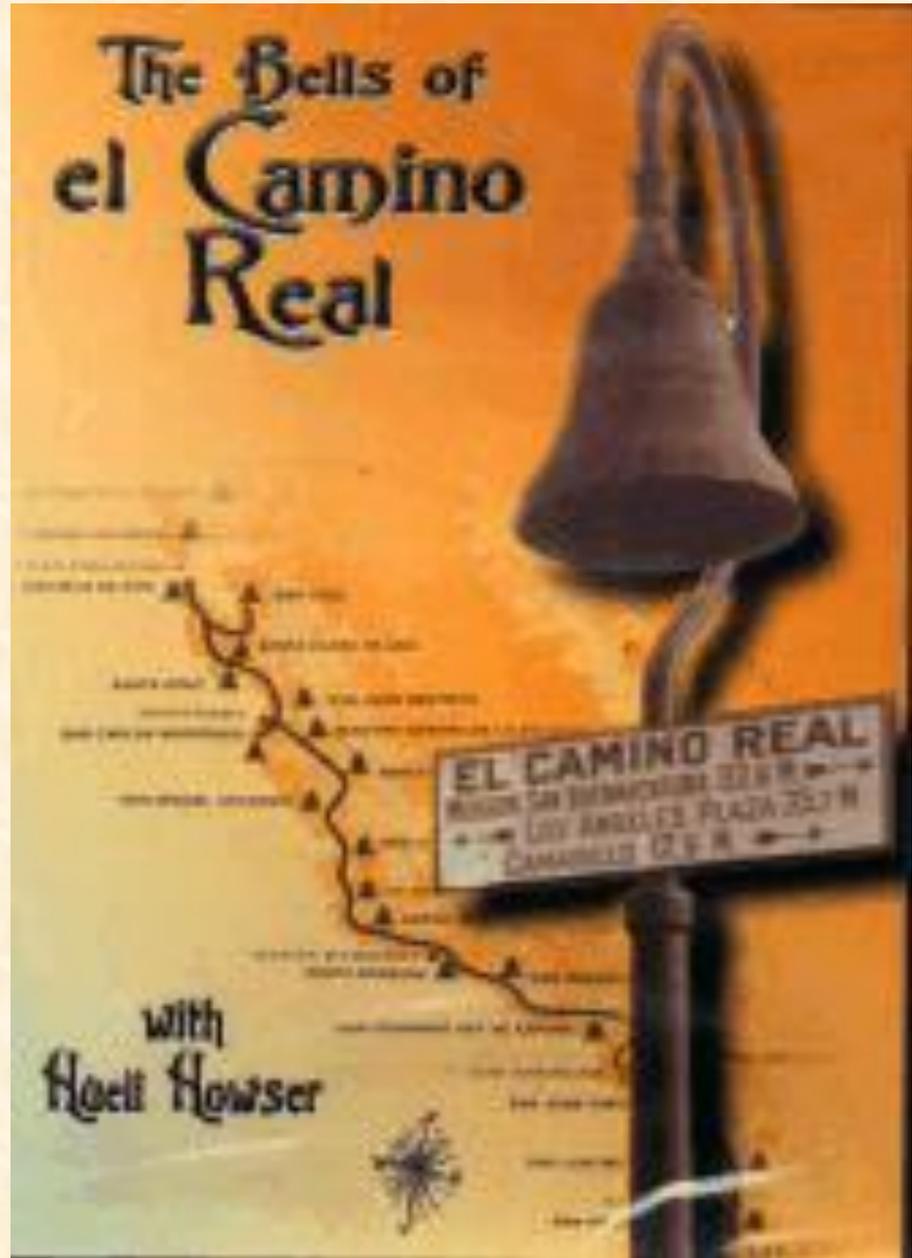
Notice the identification of "Camino Real" on the map below.

The Simi Valley Historical Society states that the Simi adobe was a stopover place between the San Fernando and Ventura Missions.



Story of the Bells of the El Camino Real

- The Bells of the El Camino Real – DVD - Huell Howser, 2005
- Available on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HE0IIYZY3rQ>
- The following video is a 30 minute segment of the above video, best described as “The Making of the Bells”





Sources / Acknowledgements

- The Bells of the El Camino Real – DVD - Huell Howser, 2005
- California's El Camino Real and its Historic Bells, by Max Kurillo and Erlene Tuttle Published 2000 – Sunbelt Publications in cooperation with the Automobile Club of Southern California
- California Missions and Landmarks by Mrs. A.S.C. Forbes 1915
- www.david.rumsey.com - Duflot de Mofras, Eugene Carte De La Cote De L'Amérique ... 1844 Exploration Book
- www.calisphere.universityofcalifornia.edu – Diseno del Rancho Simi
- Prepared by Ann and Ray Vincent, Chatsworth Historical Society, January 2012, revised Oct 2016

