

Festival of the Bells

Mission San Diego De Alcalá

*California's First Mission
Established July 16, 1769*

“The chiming bells, like the very wind itself, hovers and soars over country sides, cities and dwellings; it penetrates everywhere and reaches the very important depths of soul”

The **Origin of the Bells** is shrouded in mystery. Civilizations throughout the world have used bells since before documented history. In church history, monks were the first to use the “signum” (first name for the bells) for rising in the morning and regulating their life of prayer throughout the day. The first time churches used bells to summon the faithful to ceremonies was 313 A.D. when the church was liberated by the edict of Constantine. During the reign of Charlemagne, the use of bells spread throughout Europe.

Mission Bells marked the way of El Camino Real (the King’s Highway) which began at Mission San Diego and ended in Sonoma at the most northern mission, San Francisco Solano. The bells played an integral role in the everyday life of the mission by guiding travelers and serving as a major communication tool. A sequence of tones was used to announce times for Mass, work, meals and siestas. The bells signaled danger, rang solemnly to honor the dead and pealed joyously to celebrate feast days, weddings, and fiestas.

Five Bells are silhouetted in the arches of Mission San Diego de Alcalá’s Campanario. One of the bells, an original crown-topped bell, is inscribed “San Juan Nepomuceno, Ave Maria Purisima 1802” and bears a cross in the design of the face of the bell and full crown of five canons. The bell, which hangs next to it, is inscribed “Mater Dolorosa” and was recast from remnants of six original bells. The three remaining bells are smaller versions of crown bells.

