

Improved Citation Methods for California Mission Registers

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January 5, 2010

“Effective source citation is an *art*, not a *science*. No formula can cover all situations that researchers encounter. If you understand the *reasoning* that underlies the suggested formats, **you can devise sound citations of your own as circumstances require.**”¹ [Emphasis added.]

Citing California Mission records has become a challenge for the genealogist, especially when dealing with federal agency report styles and current anthropological references. Some genealogists may never have to decipher an awkward legal-style citation as penned by the Office of Federal Acknowledgment [OFA] staff.² Yet, if working with California Mission records, a genealogist likely will end up looking at an anthropologist’s paper with ambiguous citations, leaving her/him unclear as to how to locate the same record or even if the anthropologist looked at the record at all.³

Some have deemed the current professional genealogical style distracting because of seemingly endless explanations and verbose descriptions. All three specialists – anthropologists, historians (specifically OFA staff), and genealogists – could benefit from a concise, consistent style of reference to this particular collection, which would promote more collaborative working environments. Therefore, it is this writer’s intent to present an improved citation method that may be adopted by all who use these records.

Properly citing a record enables the reader to both verify and evaluate the source. However, the California Mission registers are an anomaly among most genealogical records. They bear certain characteristics which make it nearly impossible to cite them in conformity with any published citation standardization. Aside from the erratic handwriting, variant spellings and pages full of bleeding ink, dates were mixed up, surnames were not always used (or were later added), entry numbers were confused and sometimes omitted, records were amended at a later date, and page numbers were inconsistent and rarely legible. But, despite these quirks, a certain consistency is present and is very useful in researching this collection, particularly in microfilmed sources.

The Recording Style for California Mission Registers

The Catholic Church established 21 missions in California. Each mission had four basic registers – baptisms, confirmations, marriages and burials. In actual manuscript form, each group contains a number of volumes. But, when they were microfilmed and labeled, attention was given to the years covered for each group and not volume numbers. This

¹ Elizabeth Shown Mills, *EVIDENCE! Citation & Analysis for the Family Historian* (Baltimore, Maryland: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 1997), 14.

² By “legal-style,” the definition here is a citation placed within the text of a narrative rather than in a footnote or an endnote. These federal reports also lean on the bibliography to explain what mission record source was used but they do not specify the medium of the sources they used or where these sources can be found.

³ I once interviewed Rob Edwards, PhD. Anthropology, at Santa Cruz University, about how he “documented” the genealogy of Indians. His response was, “He told it to me and I wrote it down.”

left the volume irrelevant for research purposes. In using the microfilmed collection, a genealogist does well to first seek the specific mission, the applicable group and the time frame. S/he then reads the margins which contain two essential elements – the entry number and the name.

Knowing how these two elements – together with the date – appear, disappear or change is the key to success in locating any record in the mission registers. A discussion of these various elements and record-keeping characteristics follow:

The Elements

Although not every detail appears in every single record, the elements of a California mission register record (baptism, confirmation, marriage and burial) follow a specific pattern:

In the margin:

- 1) Entry number
- 2) Name of egos
- 3) Origin/Race
- 4) Occasional notes about the ego

In the text of the entry:

- 1) Date the event was recorded and, if different, date the event was performed
- 2) Full name of ego
- 3) Names of parents, spouse, or relatives, and their baptism numbers
- 4) Names of godparents, their occupations, and spouses/relatives and their baptism numbers
- 5) Where the ritual was performed
- 6) Details about the ritual (marriage banns and location of marriages, nature of death, last rites, or baptism location, whether performed in danger of dying, and if performed by a non-clergy)
- 7) Name of priest or friar who entered the record
- 8) Name of priest/friar who conducted ritual (if different than recorder)

Every register is set up the same way. Although there is consistency, the idiosyncrasies of this recording system warrant discussion:

Entry Numbering System

In the early mission records, the margins bear entry numbers for baptisms, marriages, and burials. (Confirmation records were numbered but far less frequently.) The baptism entry number assigned to each individual is the most significant since it followed him/her throughout their life at the missions. In many of the subsequent records (marriages and burials), the baptism numbers were entered as part of the record but were not always accurate because many of these numbers were frequently confused and sometimes corrected after original record was created.

In all registers, these numbers are the primary element for each entry, but as time and history attest, this system suffered imperfections. The recording style evidently intended to keep a chronological order but suffered failure as several blocks of numbers were often omitted (due to misreading of the handwriting, no doubt). When new books were started, the numbering system was reinitiated (from the number 1). In the late 1800's, many of the missions opted to omit the entry number system leaving only a name as a research reference. In the early 1900's, modernized record books standardized the numbering system yet again.

The Dates

As useful as the entry numbers may be, they are not always present. And, although the numbering system was not perfect, they are quite useful as long as there is an associated date. But even the date system suffered when various missions fell into disrepair and were not regularly served by priests. During the 1840's to 1850's, the registers of Mission San Juan Capistrano appear as if the priests were entering data according to a recollection rather than an event that took place that same day.

In the baptism register for Mission San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo, it appears a few pages fell out, were replaced out-of-order and neglected until the FHL crew showed up to microfilm them. Great care was taken to shoot each page just as it was – mixed up pages, notes, and all – in whatever order they were found.

But for the most part the dates are fairly reliable. Even so, they are often imbedded in the text of the entry (or in the first of an entire list of events performed the same day) and are not always easy to find or discern (occasionally the year will be written on the top of a page).

Names and Amendments in the Original Records

In the baptism record of a child born of a mixed marriage between Indians and non-Indians, he/she was assigned the surname associated with the non-Indian. But, in the early period (1776 to late 1800's), no full-blooded Indian had a surname per se. Although there were exceptions where his/her aboriginal name was actually used as a surname, it was rare. During the late 1800's, many Indians adopted surnames without having inherited them in the same way as a child born to a non-Indian. Sometimes those adopted names were included but not consistently.⁴

The use of the margin for names also suffered from an inconsistency in style. Most priests/friars recorded a surname in the margin and in the record text. But, in others, the surname was omitted in the margin, which made it difficult for modern clerks to locate a given record. As a result, various clerks amended these books and recorded surnames in the margins where none were originally written. Occasionally, the godparent's (or in-law's) surname appeared in the margin instead of the father's surname.

⁴ Before concluding a specific surname was adopted, a family reconstruction process should be performed which will include the evidentiary evaluation for all records and relatives through time. This is not a conclusion to be made lightly.

If a person, in a baptism book, was known to have married in subsequent years, the clerk might have added that information to the baptism record. Lastly, if the identity of biological father of an illegitimate child was learned, that, too, was added to the original record.

Not all microfilmed records of the mission records are the same. Although all of the early California Mission registers have been microfilmed by one entity or another,⁵ there is another microfilmed collection worth mentioning – the Brother Henry collection. While he did film quite a few, he did not microfilm all of the mission records. But, a comparison of his films to the other films (made by various agencies), reveals that his work took place before many amendments were made in the original books. (Of course, when using this particular source, a separate descriptive citation is imperative.)

Page Numbers and Indices

Some clerks tried to keep page numbers for the early records in indices. But it is often a fairly futile effort to use them as a reference due to legibility problems.⁶ Further, each new book started with new page numbers. As long as the date, name, and entry number is present in a citation, the page number is more superfluous than useful unless it is used in conjunction with an index.

Often an index will follow a group of records but only a few have been useful. While the only consistency was to enter all like names on a page for each letter of the alphabet, there is no true alphabetic listing. And the references may be for a baptism number, without a date, or a page number which may or may not exist or match.

The Improved Method

In particular, this method addresses two specific areas addressed by published genealogical citation guidelines: 1) Statements of common knowledge, and 2) Full and subsequent citations.

The Family History Library refers to the Catholic Church as the author of the actual registers. But for anyone who works with these records, it is common knowledge the California mission records were created by the Catholic Church;⁷ thus this authorship is rarely acknowledged in the body of working anthropological papers or federal reports,

⁵ The Genealogical Society of Utah microfilmed most of the Catholic records, which are available for rental through the Family History Library and Family History Centers, but other were done by the Bancroft Library (UC Berkeley, CA), and independent agencies and are only available through various Catholic diocesan archives, the Bancroft Library, and the University of Santa Clara, CA.

⁶ There are some pages that are clear and useful, but not many.

⁷ As well, other mission records in the United States and Mexico were generated by the Catholic Church.

and is only sometimes indicated in a bibliography.⁸ But, not all who read these papers share this common knowledge. But, most importantly, this authorship is a critical element for evidentiary evaluation because of its objective value.

While it may not be particularly necessary to include this authorship in every citation for that source, it should certainly be used in the first reference to that source, unless the report is preceded by an acronymic list or table. But, there is no reason the subsequent citation of the same source should be so detailed when an acronymic method will suffice and is easily recognizable.

For the past couple of decades, two anthropologists computerized the data from the California Mission registers (1769-1850) thus creating a system of codes which identify each mission, church or presidio. During the development of these codes, there was no pre-set standard for acronyms, and the styles varied from anthropologist to anthropologist. But, with the culmination of the Early California Population Project, coordinated by Dr. John Johnson, Curator, Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, and Dr. Randall Milliken, in 2006, a final acronymic list was created.⁹

Alta California Missions

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|-----|--|
| LPC | La Purisima Concepcion |
| SAP | San Antonio de Padua |
| SB | Santa Barbara |
| SBV | San Buenaventura |
| SC | San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo |
| SD | San Diego de Alcalá |
| SCL | Santa Clara |
| SCZ | Santa Cruz |
| SFD | San Francisco de Asis Mission and Presidio |
| SFR | San Fernando |
| SFS | San Francisco Solano |
| SG | San Gabriel Arcangel |
| SI | Santa Ynes |
| SJB | San Juan Bautista |
| SJC | San Juan Capistrano |
| SJS | San Jose de Guadalupe |
| SLD | Nuestra Señora de la Soledad |
| SLO | San Luis Obispo |
| SLR | San Luis Rey |
| SMA | San Miguel Arcangel |
| SRA | San Rafael |

⁸ Proposed findings and final determination reports issued by the Office of Federal Acknowledgment are written in response to groups petitioning for federal acknowledgment through 25 Code of Federal Regulations – Part 83.

⁹ The Huntington Library, Early California Population Project Database, 2006.

<http://www.huntington.org/Information/ECPPmain.htm>; names of missions augmented by author.

Other

BP Santa Barbara Presidio
LA La Plaza Church (AKA) Our Lady Queen of Angeles (in Los Angeles)

Rather than create a new list, it makes sense to use this one since it is currently used by every researcher utilizing that database. More concise acronyms might be devised, but as a standard, these acronyms are as good as any. Taking the use of acronyms one step further creates additional brevity in citing the mission records, to wit:

- baptisms (B);
- confirmations (C);
- marriages (M); and,
- burials (D, for death).

When these abbreviations are used in tandem with the other three critical elements – entry number, date, and name – the short citation remains brief, concise and easily recognizable. For example, the long citation, or first reference to a mission record citation for a couple of Indians without surnames looks as follows:¹⁰

Catholic Church, Mission San Juan Capistrano (San Juan Capistrano, CA);
marriages 1777-1938; FHL microfilm 1290447; entry 1178 (4 Jul 1837),
Eustaquio & Juana de Dios.

For a couple of Spaniards with surnames:

Catholic Church, Mission San Gabriel (San Gabriel, CA); marriages 1774-1855;
FHL microfilm 2642; entry 59 (20 Jul 1776), Pedro Antonio Lisalda & Maria
Thomasa Lopez.

The elements of this citation style include:

- 1) The author (Catholic Church);
- 2) The source (the specific mission or church);
- 3) The location of source (the town and state where the mission or church was);
- 4) The type of records (baptism, marriage, etc.);
- 5) The years covered for that particular section (for that particular microfilm);
- 6) The microfilm number (FHL numbers are regularly published on www.FamilySearch.org, or if it is another agency, cite it fully as well as the publisher);
- 7) The entry number (if it exists, include any marked our or corrected numbers);
- 8) The date the record can be found in the register; and,

¹⁰ This citation method also follows a combination of a book, church record, and FHL microfilm citation styles as published in *Evidence! Citation & Analysis for the Family Historian*, Mills, 1997.

- 9) The names of the persons named in the record margin (if there are no names in the margin, enter the names from the record text).

The subsequent or short citation for the same citations as above looks as follows:
For the Indian couple's marriagee:

SJC-M 1178 (4 Jul 1837), Eustaquio & Juana de Dios.

And, for the Spanish couple:

SG-M 59 (20 Jul 1776), Pedro Antonio Lisalda & Maria Thomasa Lopez.

If the entry number is missing, it looks like this:

SJC-M (4 Jul 1837), Eustaquio & Juana de Dios

SG-M (20 Jul 1776), Pedro Antonio Lisalda & Maria Thomasa Lopez.

I acknowledge that the use of the full name, where surnames are available, may seem a little burdensome in a short citation. But considering the clerical errors where the bride's name was substituted with her mother's name (or someone else all together) in the margin, I find it extremely useful to refer to the entire names of both parties. In that case, the long citation can carry the explanation of why the names do not appear correctly, but in the short citation, I will still know exactly which marriage is being referenced.

Of course, any additional details should be added to the first reference. For example, if the record was produced by an electronically scanned copy of the microfilm, the owner of that scan should be acknowledged as having produced it according to published genealogical citation standards. But as long as the original source is acknowledged in the first reference, the value of the record is readily apparent.

Conclusion

With the above discussed citation system, all critical elements are in place and no confusion exists as to the source. And, there is no need to write in "[hereinafter referred to as ...]" in the first reference for the church and the four different registers. Of course, a key in the beginning of the manuscript or publication is necessary, but this method effectively eliminates conflicting citation styles for this collection and enables any reader to both verify and evaluate each source.