

# News

from the

## Inn-Spector



### *Railings, Initials, and Tiles in the Rotunda Internacional, Mission Inn, Riverside, CA*

**The Rotunda was completed in 1931 It was designed by G. Stanley Wilson. The designer of the metal work is not known. The initials and tiles represent some of the California Missions, the Presidents of the Missions, countries, individuals, and historical symbols.**



*Padre Junipero Serra*

It happens often. We are leading a tour through the Rotunda and a guest asks about the meaning of the lettering in the railings. Most of us give a brief answer and move on because we don't know much more about them. We typically point to "PJS" not only because it is in sight when exiting the Ho O Kan, but is easy to identify as it highlights the founder of the first nine of the California Missions. It is of course **Padre Junipero Serra**. But as docents we need to know more. How many are aware that besides the Missions and their leaders, there are initials honoring Spanish Explorers? Also, how many know how the metal work was created and the materials used? The Innspector wants to help us. However, that is a big job and cannot be totally accomplished with this handout. What is attempted here is an overview of the topic with just enough information to help us docents at this time. Later in the year more information will follow.

### **Some of the characteristics of the initials in the Rotunda.**



*Father Fermin  
Francisco de Lasuen*

There are five Spanish explorers identified including Balboa, Cabrillo, Vizaino, de Portola seen here on the right, and de Anza.

All 14 presidents of the California Missions are represented including Padre Junipero Serra, and Father de Lasuen on the left. Father Lasuen also founded nine Missions



*Gaspar de Portola*

Of the 21 Missions in California only eleven have their initials in the railings. It is interesting to note that the first missions to be established are not represented. Thus, none of the Missions founded by Father Serra are displayed. Although there is adequate room on the 4th floor to show the missing Mission's initials, for some reason they are not there.

## Is it or is not wrought iron?

It is common when discussing any railings to refer to them as wrought iron. However, rarely are they. Wrought iron was first used in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. It is a labor intensive and very expensive product to make and typically well beyond the means of most people and likely Frank Miller. The more common technique is call “mild steel” and is made to resemble wrought iron. Metal artist Mike Suri from Portland, Oregon made the following observation during a recent visit to the Mission Inn. He writes:



*Mike Suri*  
[www.suriiron.com](http://www.suriiron.com)

*“Wrought iron is an iron alloy with very low carbon content, in comparison to steel, and has fibrous inclusions, known as slag. This is what gives it a grain resembling wood, which is visible when it is etched or bent to the point of failure. Wrought iron is tough, malleable, ductile and easily welded.*

*Before the development of effective methods of steelmaking and the availability of large quantities of steel, wrought iron was the most common form of malleable iron. A modest amount of wrought iron was used as a raw material for manufacturing of steel, which was mainly to produce swords, cutlery and other blades. Demand for wrought iron reached its peak in the 1860s with the adaptation of ironclad warships and railways, but then declined as mild steel became more available.*

*Wrought iron is no longer produced on a commercial scale. Many products described as wrought iron, such as guard rails, garden furniture and gates, are made of mild steel. They retain that description because they were formerly made of wrought iron or have the appearance of wrought iron. True wrought iron is required for the authentic conservation of historic structures.*

*Mild steel is the most common form of steel because its price is relatively low while it provides material properties that are acceptable for many applications.”*

## National Tiles and Wood Shields

Most of the tiles and shields represent nations from around the world such as Spain, Mexico, Italy, United States, Japan, Great Britain, and Canada to mention a few of the nearly 40 displayed. The tile represented on the right is from the Dominican Republic. Other tiles commemorate famous individuals, coats of arms, buildings, and unique recognitions such as The Order of the Rising Sun, Eagle of Charles V of Spain, and the French Legion of Honor as examples.



*Dominican Republic*

## What's next?

A comprehensive treatment will be made available through the Mission Inn Foundation and will include extensive photos and descriptions of the lettering, tiles, and wood shields. Be watching for it.