



### GARCÉS PASSED BY HERE BY ROSENDO CAMPA MEDINA

In the year 1692, Jesuit Father Eusebio Francisco Kino visited a Rancheria (Indian village) called Bac near modern day Tucson, Arizona. At that time, the Village of Bac had a population of about eight hundred thirty Pima Indians. The Pimas appeared so eager for religious instructions that Father Kino named the village "San Francisco Xavier del Bac," after his patron saint. He hoped to make Bac his headquarters, but the request was not approved. On April 28, 1700, Father Kino returned to Bac on an official visit and stated all that was needed for Bac to become a full-fledged mission was a church. Kino began to lay the foundation that same day. To date the site of the original foundation is unknown. There is no further mention of the church until 1783 when Franciscan Father Juan Bautista Velderrain began the actual building of the church. Velderrain died about 1790 and was replaced by Franciscan Father Bautista Llorenz who completed the building of San Xavier del Bac before the turn of the century. The church still stands as one of the most beautiful and well preserved Spanish missions in North America. The beautiful "White Dove of the Desert," was the name Kino gave to his mission.

There was a common denominator for all those religious men who decided to dedicate themselves to God and live as priests in the New World. All had to be willing to sacrifice their lives for those who many times did not have the basic necessities of life, the Indians of the Americas. At that time, the Spanish mission system sought to bring the Indians into the Spanish culture by forming them into self-sufficient communities under the direction of missionaries. According to historical records, Indian-Spanish relations were determined by the Spaniards. This resulted in a Spanish colonization

program that was a unilaterally conceived plan for civilizing savage Indians who were regarded as not capable of participating in the formulation of any type of program that involved them. Father Garcés in turn believed that in order to civilize and save the indigenous peoples of the Americas it would be necessary to first elevate their social status and then undertake the process of a Christian education. The goal being that once the Indians were started on the road to Christianity and civilization they could be released from mission discipline. The mission could then be secularized, the Indians given their part of the mission property, and launched as full



**Father Francisco Garcés**

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fledged members of colonial society. Ten years was once designated as the proper duration for the secularization of the missions. Seldom was this schedule met.

Francisco Tomás Hermenegildo were the three saint names given Garcés when he was baptized. He was born on April 12, 1738 at Morata del Jalon in Aragon, Spain. He became a Franciscan priest at age twenty-five and at age twenty-eight was accepted by the “Colegio de la Santa Cruz” in Querétaro, Mexico to become a missionary in New Spain. Garcés arrived at the college in 1763 at a time when all newly assigned priests to New Spain underwent four years of additional training before being sent to the far North.

In his youth, Garcés had been inspired by the missionary work and explorations in New Spain of the Jesuit Priest, Eusebio Kino, who had advanced the theory that there was a land connection between Sonora, Mexico and Baja California. Garcés intended to follow up on Kino’s predictions. So as soon as he completed his four years of training at Querétaro, he petitioned the Prelate of the college for assignment to the missions of Sonora. His request was granted and in 1768 Garcés was assigned to Mission San Xavier del Bac in Arizona territory located the furthest north of all the frontier missions of New Spain.

In the seventeen hundreds, San Xavier del Bac was a hostile place to a person’s health. All who went there were subjected to an adverse climate where the water was alkaline and the air stifling. Many people suffered severe chills and fevers, of which many died. Those who survived were reduced to skeletons. Nevertheless, it was a place where the Indians would flee to for refuge and safety from the frequent attacks by the Apache Indians, whose ancestors had come into the area that is now northern Arizona and New Mexico about the year 1100 AD. Father Garcés found extreme poverty at Mission San Xavier del Bac. His spirits remained high though and right away he made a concerted effort to help care for the well being of the Indians under his assigned authority and the parishioners of the mission.

By 1768, the Indian population at San Xavier del Bac had dwindled to about four hundred souls. Garcés, undaunted by the desolation, plunged into his work of providing for the spiritual welfare of the people. Word of his affection and concern for the well being of the Indians was soon spread to the neighboring Papago and Pima Indian tribes. Soon after, principal Indian chiefs came to the mission to make his acquaintance. Father Garcés, of course, did all he could to make the visitors welcome and informed them of his desire to visit their lands and communicate with their people. This pleased the chiefs. They promised to make the arrangements and provided guides to conduct him to their villages. Within six months after being assigned to San Xavier del Bac, Father Garcés had already journeyed to most of the villages on both sides of the Gila River. He would later sometimes be referred to as the Father Kino of the Franciscans.

In August 1768, Father Garcés set out with four Indian guides on an exploration trip (entrada). His goal was twofold: harvest souls for the Lord and exploration. He first visited the Papago and Gila Indian villages, where he announced peace to all. He told them of the divine mysteries and attributes of the King our Lord, who wished to confer upon them the many benefits of becoming Christians. According to Elliott Coues in On the Trail of a Spanish Pioneer, (vol. 1, p. 26) “Garcés traveled about 80 leagues west, north, and southeast, among the Papago and Gila villages.” Basically, that was the extent of his first entrada. Nevertheless, reports of his entrada soon traveled throughout the villages of the Gila River. As a result, the Indians were attracted by what Spaniards called, “El Buen Olor de Dios,” (The Sweet Smell of God) whose faith and gospel Garcés had announced. His first entrada laid the groundwork for a mutual respect, which would be of prominence in his later development as a missionary and explorer.

In 1770, Father Garcés received word that a measles and diarrhea epidemic had broken out among the Pimas. It was reported that many children were dying. He was asked if he would go to the land of the Pimas and baptize the children before they died. There was no question in his mind and he immediately set out. He felt that now he would be able to help the Pima nation and gain a wonderful experience doing what the church wanted him to do, carry the word of the Lord to the indigent peoples of the New World. Upon arriving where the sick were, he immediately ministered to those who were suffering and baptized a large number of people. Because of his dedication in helping the Indian population and concern for the children’s welfare, the Indians developed a sincere trust for him. As a result, when he told them he had to return to his mission many of the elders tried to detain him. He had gone to the Gila nation on a journey of five days equipped only with charity and goodwill and before he realized it the five days became thirty. In that period of time, Father Garcés was able to learn the Pima language fluently. Most pleasing to him when he departed to return to San Xavier del

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Bac was that a large number of Papago Indians had decided to become members of his mission.

On his return journey to mission San Xavier del Bac, Garcés passed by the famed Casa Grande ruins, which at that time were referred to as the “Great House of Montezuma.” The Casa Grande ruins had been abandoned some 500 or 600 years before Garcés’ visit. He inspected it carefully wondering what an Indian village it must have been when thriving. He also traveled through the lands of the Maricopa and Opa Indian tribes of the Gila Valley. He found the Opa Indians to be somewhat rude, but amicable. He was prepared to love all Indians, and felt sorry for them as they were suffering from a number of illnesses. He wrote in his journal that it “nearly broke his heart,” and he prayed for them.

In his report to his superiors, he stated the Pimas were ready for mission life. He believed that missions were more important than conversion at this time because the western tribes would then be able to conduct trade with “New Mexico.” Garcés also felt a land route from California to New Mexico was extremely important because of political interests expressed by the Russians, English, and French regarding California. The response from his superiors was not very encouraging. All they answered was that they had confidence in his proposed plans and encouraged him to collect further information.

In August 1771, he packed his equipment for conducting mass and on horseback departed San Xavier del Bac Mission accompanied by a Papago guide. He set out to visit the Yumas on the Colorado River and search for a land route to the California missions. He had been authorized to search for suitable sites for new missions, locate water sources, and future safe crossing through the “Gran Desierto” (Great Desert). At the same time, he was to establish friendly relations with Indian tribes that he met for possible missionization. He followed Father Kino’s “Camino del Diablo Trail,” traveling westward towards Sonoita mission. A mission founded in the desert by Father Kino, but abandoned since 1654 AD. He continued westward until he could go no further for lack of water and then turned north towards the Gila River, which he reached on August 22, 1771. There he met a Yuma chieftain named Olleyquotequibe (The Wheezing One). The chief was given this nickname probably because he had asthma. Olleyquotequibe ruled the Yumas, and they controlled the ford across the Colorado River at Yuma near the junction with the Gila River. Olleyquotequibe was later baptized and took the name of Salvador Palma. He and Father Garcés became friends and later Palma played an important part in the life of Garcés and in the history of the Colorado River.

Father Garcés was anxious to find a land route from the Colorado River to the Pacific Ocean. He reached the Colorado River on September 17, 1771 and crossed into present day California near the mouth of the river. He ventured out over the desert and skirted the Cocopah Mountain range in a southerly direction to its terminus at Signal Mountain into what is today Mexico, perhaps south of Mexicali founded in 1903. Here, Garcés saw a rugged peak, which he named “Cerro Prieto,” a name which it still bears today. He then went as far as San Felipe Pass west of Calexico, California where he met a group of Indians who indicated to him how to reach Mission San Diego on the Pacific Coast. Garcés had discovered a feasible land route between Sonora and California. After re-crossing the desert on his return trip, Garcés learned that a state of war existed between the Yuma and Gila Indians and decided to return to San Xavier del Bac by way of Sonoita. He arrived at his home base on October 27, 1771 after having traveled about 780 miles. His exploration convinced Spanish authorities that a land route to the Pacific Coast was feasible.

Upon his return to Bac, Garcés was quick to share his discovery of the California route with Captain Juan Bautista de Anza, commander of Tubac. De Anza became convinced he could open a roadway from Sonora to Alta California and immediately requested from Viceroy Bucareli that he be allowed to lead an expedition there and that Father Garcés accompany him as guide and counselor.

It was felt by the Viceroy and staff that Alta California could not flourish unless a land route could be established from Sonora. Spanish ships supplying Alta California missions from La Paz, Baja California were not reliable because of severe problems with navigation and they could not safely transport colonists. Captain Juan Bautista de Anza’s request was approved and he was selected for the assignment of leading the expedition. He had the knowledge and was known as a proven Indian fighter whose father and grandfather before him had served the Kings of Spain as frontier captains at Pimería Alta, New Spain on the rim of civilization. Captain de Anza was issued orders to prepare for two assignments: one, lead an expedition to California that included a study of the route discovered by Father Garcés, and two, determine the feasibility of safely transporting colonists to California and ability of the expedition to take supplies, livestock, and

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settlers combined.

On Sunday, January 8, 1774, the first expedition departed from Tubac consisting of thirty-four men, cattle, and saddle animals. Father Garcés went as expedition guide and assisted Father Dias in providing spiritual guidance. Upon reaching the Colorado River near the present day Yuma, Garcés introduced his friend Salvador Palma (Olleyquotequibe), Chief of the Yumas, to Captain de Anza. It was important for Captain de Anza to meet and establish positive relations with Chief Palma because the Yumas controlled the ford across the Colorado River. Captain de Anza lingered awhile and was able to cultivate a positive friendship with Chief Palma.

On either February 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> of 1774, the expedition under the command of Captain de Anza crossed into California, at a place where the Gila River joined a small arm of the Colorado River where it formed an island large enough for the residence of Chief Palma and part of his tribe. The island later became known as "Isla de la Trinidad." The expedition traveled downriver for about three or four days and stopped at a place called "Laguna de Santa Olaya". From there, they headed west and plunged into the desert beyond only to be forced back to Santa Olaya on February 19, 1774 because of difficulties crossing the sand dunes near the Salton Sea west of the Colorado River. The expedition rested and on March 2, 1774 de Anza reduced his expedition and left most of the baggage, horses, and cattle in the care of Chief Palma. Then, with a small contingent of men de Anza departed towards the Monterey Mission in California. Father Garcés guided the other part of the expedition across the Colorado Desert of Baja California through the mountains of San Gabriel to Mission San Gabriel arriving there on March 22, 1774. This became the first Spanish overland expedition to reach the California coast from Sonora. Garcés then returned to the Yuma Crossing to await Captain de Anza, who returned to the Yuma Crossing on May 10, 1774. After regrouping to continue his expedition, Captain de Anza and Chief Palma said goodbye. In gratitude for a pledge of loyalty and fidelity to the king, de Anza presented Chief Palma his own bastion and some articles of clothing. The expedition then took an easterly heading from the Gila River to a Cocomaricopa Indian Rancheria called Upasoitac (present day Gila Bend, Arizona) where they arrived on May 21, 1774. Captain de Anza then proceeded with the expedition to Tubac. Garcés, who had been given specific instructions to search for another land route to California, this time from New Mexico, went north from Gila Bend with the purpose of exploring and to determine if he could send a letter to the priests in New Mexico by one of the northern Indian tribes.

Traveling north, Garcés met two Jalchedune Indians who lived on the Colorado River, below Bill Williams Fork, who promised him they would deliver the letter to New Mexico after the mesquite beans ripened. They also told Garcés the Moqui Indians (Hopi) were only five days to the east and the New Mexico priests seven days to the east. He was able to collect information on the Moqui Indians. After learning from the Jalchedune Indians that it would be impossible for him to continue because of Indian unrest, he left the letter for the New Mexico Franciscans for the Indians to deliver and decided to return to San Xavier del Bac where he arrived on June 10, 1774 after six months in the wilderness.

On October 4, 1775 by order of King Carlos III, Captain Juan Bautista de Anza was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel because of his success on the first expedition, and selected to lead the second expedition from Sonora to California. His second expedition being more important because this time de Anza was entrusted to take the first group of settlers to a place called San Francisco on the Alta California coast and found there a town, a presidio, and a mission. The expedition consisted of 240 persons, the majority being women and children, along with thirty soldiers of whom all but one had a wife with him. The colonists, recruited in the Mexican states of Sonora and Culiacan, also had their families with them. Father Garcés again had been assigned to travel with Lieutenant Colonel de Anza, even though this time his services as guide were not needed, his main function was to maintain friendly relations with the Indian nations they encountered, especially the Yumas, who on the Colorado River held the gateway to California.

Garcés felt joy when he departed San Xavier del Bac on October 21, 1775 to join de Anza at Tubac as part of the second expedition. This time, de Anza decided to take the Gila route to the Colorado because the colonists were too inexperienced. Thus, the expedition began its journey on October 23, 1775. Prior to departure Father Garcés had been instructed by his superiors to accompany the expedition only as far as the Colorado River where he would help his co-worker, Father Tomas Eixarch, set up camp so then Father Eixarch could minister to the religious needs of the Yuma tribe. After that Father Garcés was to explore the

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area from Yuma to the Gulf of California, return to Yuma, and then travel up-river to look for a more northern route from the Colorado River to Monterey, Alta California.

In late November, the Anza expedition reached the Colorado River and the Spaniards were able to renew their friendships with Chief Palma. Lieutenant Colonel de Anza felt embarrassed having to explain to Chief Palma that the colonists with the expedition were not the ones that had been promised to settle on the Colorado River. Chief Palma expressed disappointment, but nevertheless treated his guests cordially and provided them with a feast. The Indians were rewarded with gifts of beads and tobacco. De Anza was anxious to continue the journey and the next day, November 30, 1775, forded the Colorado River from the Arizona side to California and the expedition continued north en route to San Francisco. Father Garcés and Eixarch stayed behind.

During the month of December 1775, Garcés explored the lower Colorado River from Yuma to the Gulf of California, where he visited and preached to various tribes. He rejoined Father Eixarch on January 2, 1776. While happy to be back, and he felt comfortable with his Yuma friends, he remained at the Colorado until February 2, 1776, and then set out on what the author, Hubert E. Bolton, called “one of the most epic journeys of all North American History”.

Garcés, after collecting information from different Indian tribes regarding Northern Arizona, decided to follow his dream of finding a more northern route between the Colorado River and Monterey to mark out the direct route from Santa Fe, New Mexico to the California presidio. He went north from Yuma and before reaching Needles, California turned west across the Mojave Desert towards the San Gabriel Mountains following Indian trails that would become the route over which the Santa Fe Railroad would be constructed almost a century later. Reaching San Gabriel Mission on March 24, 1776, Garcés decided to stop at the mission because he and his guides had run short on supplies. Spanish Army Captain Xavier Fernando de Rivera, Governor of Alta California, refused his request stating that Garcés lacked the proper request form, which had to be authorized by the Viceroy. In addition, Captain Rivera felt that in traveling to the San Joaquin Valley, Garcés would only agitate the Indian population to the point where they would revolt. Father Garcés violently disagreed with the Captain, and answered him with, “If we preach to the heathen, a law of peace and charity, how can we think of sowing discord? Understand that some of the nations are justly provoked with Spanish soldiers because of abuse they have suffered, especially from deserters.” Garcés was not afraid to criticize the Spanish way of colonizing and conquering the Indian lands or keeping them ignorant. Garcés then departed Mission San Gabriel without the requested supplies.

Ardis M. Walker in his book, Francisco Garcés mentions that the record of Father Garcés’ wanderings in the Kern and Tulare counties began with his arrival at the approximate present site of the Tejon Indian settlement (p. 36). Garcés arrived there on April 26, 1776 on the eighty-first day of his journey. It has often been mentioned that Garcés was a man with limited inclination for putting his observations down in writing. It appears though that what he observed while exploring the southern reaches of the San Joaquin Valley elated him and he took special notice of the land features, which would later serve to identify the places of interest that he noted in his journal. Like all Spanish explorers, he would generally name a site in honor of the Catholic saint for that day of the year. After Tejon, Garcés stopped at a village he named Rancheria de San Pascual where he was received with great accolades. The Indians gave a feast in his honor and he was able to preach to them. This act by the Indians appears to have influenced his zeal to spread the Christian faith and go forth with his exploring.

On May 1, 1776, Garcés came upon a river he described as crystalline, bountiful, and palatable, which he named Rio de San Felipe known as present day Kern River. He intersected said river at an identifiable place where the water emerges from the mountains above present day Bakersfield. Garcés described the male Indians as being handsome and the female Indians neat and wearing dresses with their hair in buns. On May 2, 1776, he went four and one half leagues north and stopped at a Rancheria where he encountered some bearded Indians. I don’t know why, but no further mention was ever made of the bearded Indians.

On May 3, 1776, accompanied by an Indian guide, Garcés traveled two and one half leagues north and came upon a river he called Rio de la Santa Cruz (presently White River). Here again he was received with great acclamation. The difference being when the Indians saw him they commenced to shout, “Ba! Ba! Ba! Ba!” and then gave themselves smart slaps with the palms of their hands on their thighs. Here Father Garcés

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encountered a small Indian child who was dying. He requested permission from the parents to baptize their son. The parents consented and he baptized the child with solace. Father Garcés called the child “Muchachito.” Muchachito became the first known person to be baptized by a Catholic priest in the San Joaquin Valley. Father Garcés stayed with Muchachito until May 5, 1776. After exploring the local area and talking with the Indians, he came to the conclusion that the unbroken summit of the Sierra Nevada held no pass from Monterey to New Mexico. He also realized the San Joaquin River did not originate at the headwaters of the Colorado River. He departed Muchachito’s Rancheria on a route more easterly and higher from White River arriving again at the Kern River about one league above the place where he had first crossed. Here, Father Garcés became the first white man to set foot on the site that is today known as Bakersfield, California.

Garcés re-crossed the mountains on an easterly route by taking a pass between the Tehachapi and the Sierra Nevada. He then came upon the Mojave Desert opposite what is now the town of Mojave and continued on course until reaching the Mojave River.

When he arrived at the Mojave nation he received a letter left for him by Lieutenant Colonel de Anza urging him to return to the Yumas. In the meantime, the Mojave Indians had summoned neighboring tribes to their village in order that Father Garcés might speak to them about peace and celebrate with them. Father Garcés spoke to the different Indian tribes and they assured him that peace would be maintained. The next day, on May 31, 1776, Garcés was getting ready to depart when some Mojaves forgot their newly celebrated peace and expressed a desire to kill some visiting Jaguallapais Indians. Father Garcés interceded and as a safety measure assured the Jaguallapais that he would accompany them to their land. As a result, he was not able to proceed to the land of the Yumas. En route with the Jaguallapais, he was able to inquire about distances from Moqui (Hopi) to Santa Fe, New Mexico. After speaking with the Jaguallapais, Garcés felt he had collected enough information to proceed on his own. He disregarded the request of Lieutenant Colonel de Anza and set out to blaze a trail to Moqui country. He traveled on and off with Indian guides into unknown wildernesses. On June 26, 1776, Garcés became the first white man to approach the Grand Canyon from the west. On July 2, 1776, Garcés reached Oraibi (Hopi Nation) in the western most and oldest continuously inhabited town in the whole of the United States. It had been established about 1100 AD.

Father Garcés was not well received by the Hopi Indians. The natives were not at all receptive to him. He had with him a Yabipais Indian who accompanied him as a guide and interpreter who spoke to the Hopi Indians in favor of Garcés, but still met with rebuff. They did not invite him into their homes nor accept his gifts. They saw him as a spy and felt the Spaniards intended to conquer and humble them. Father Garcés probably failed to realize the Hopis had deep seated hatred for the Spaniards dating to the rebellion of the Pueblo Indians in 1680. The Hopis allowed Father Garcés to sleep outside on the corner of a street for two nights and at daybreak on July 4, 1776 Father Garcés heard singing and dancing in the streets of Oraibi, the sun having risen he saw a multitude of people walking towards him. Four Indians from the group stepped forward and the leader said, “Why have you come here? Leave now, go back to your land!” Being a good loser, Garcés praised the Hopi, put his belongings on his mule and departed. The good priest realized there was nothing he could do to win their favor. He returned to his home mission after being out in the wilderness nearly eleven months. His consolation was to depart safely from Oraibi with the knowledge that he had been able to prove that a land route from Santa Fe, New Mexico to Monterey, California existed and was feasible.

### References

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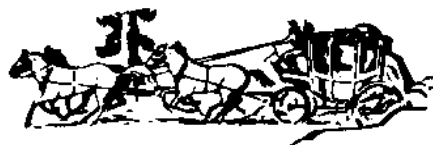
**Statue of Father Garcés on Chester Avenue,  
Circa 1940**



**Dedication on April 29, 1956 of Historical  
Marker for Garcés Baptism of  
Muchachito**

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