



California Missions  
*Keeping the Past Present*

# California Stories

## The Good Pirate

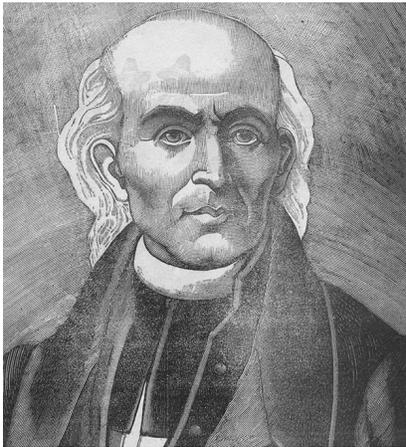


The California Stories are a collection of interesting and historical stories from early California and the California Missions written by David J. McLaughlin.



## The Good Pirate

This is the story of Joseph Chapman, the pirate who stayed and helped build Alta California's mills.



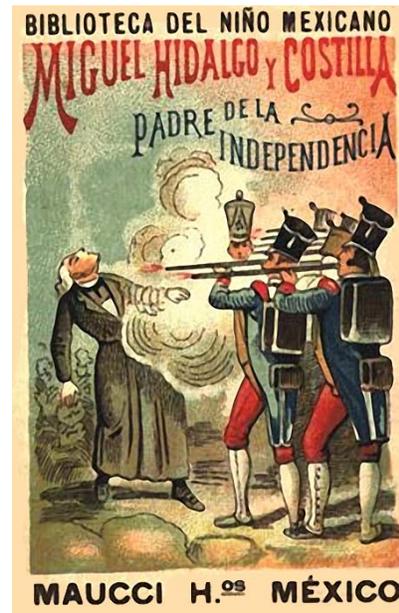
Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla  
(1753-1811)

Early in the 18th century, many of the countries in the Spanish empire in the Americas began a struggle for independence. Mexico, in 1810, Argentina later the same year, and Paraguay in 1811. Many Catholic priests like Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla (known as the Padre de la Independencia) supported the movement.

Hidalgo was captured in March 1811 and shot, but the struggle continued on. It took until 1821 before Mexico, the

headquarters of New Spain, won its independence.

During these years of struggle, Spanish resources were diverted, and the missions in Alta California had to become more self-sufficient to survive. More ominous, there was a real threat that California would be attacked. The ports of Callao, Peru, and Guayaquil, Ecuador were attacked in 1816. The most likely source of trouble were privateers flying the flag of a country that was fighting Spain. Privateers were privately-owned vessels armed and equipped at the owner's expense and authorized by a belligerent party to appropriate or destroy enemy property.





Just such a threat materialized along the California coast in 1818. In October of that year, an American ship, the *Clarion*, arrived in Santa Barbara from the Sandwich Islands (later known as Hawaii). The ship's captain was a friend of the Presidio Commandante, José de la Guerra y Noriega. He warned Don José that an Argentinean backed privateer, Hippolyte Bouchard, was planning an attack on California.



*Hippolyte Bouchard  
(1780-1837)*

The Spanish presidios, missions, and pueblos were put on high alert. The Governor ordered lookouts be posted at twenty-five strategic locations along the coast. (As always, the actual work fell to the Indians).

Hippolyte Bouchard, with two heavily-armed ships and 350 men, did attack in November 1818. The pirates landed in Monterey and torched many of the buildings (though the Royal Presidio chapel was spared). Several of the attacking force were captured during forays in the surrounding countryside.

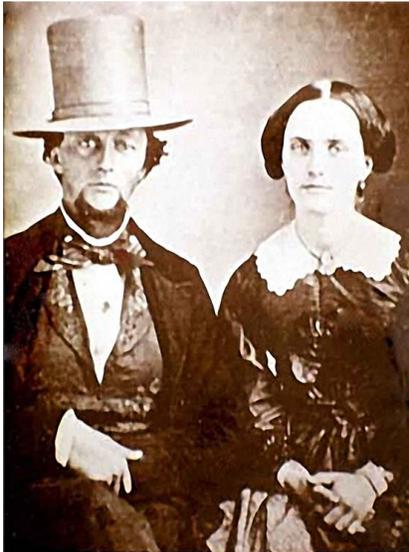


The Pirate Hippolyte Bouchard Attacking the California Coastline



The Spanish network along the coast mobilized for further attacks, although it was not clear where the pirates would strike next. Indians were recruited and trained as a militia at several missions. Coastal missions like [Santa Cruz](#) were evacuated. On December 14, Bouchard struck again, this time at [San Juan Capistrano](#), burning the king's storehouse, the soldier's barracks, and the governor's house. This proved to be the last attack. The pirate raid was over, but its aftermath was just beginning.

Several more men from the attacking force were captured or deserted in Monterey and San Juan Capistrano during the melee. One of those men, Joseph Chapman, would go on to make an unusual contribution to Alta California over the next thirty (30) years.



*Joseph Chapman and his wife, María Guadalupe Ortega y Sánchez*

Chapman (c. 1784-1848) was an American carpenter and blacksmith who hailed from Maine. He was impressed into service by Captain Bouchard in the Sandwich Islands. Chapman participated in the attack on California and was taken prisoner at Monterey. This “reluctant pirate” was imprisoned for a while and then freed to build a fulling mill (a process used to soften the woolen fiber) at [Mission Santa Inés](#), the ruins of which still stand.

Chapman was a clever fellow, gifted at anything mechanical. He oversaw the building of a grist mill for [Mission San Gabriel](#) (located in San Marino), and he prepared timbers for the construction of the first church in Los Angeles. The mill he built near San Gabriel is now a museum.

Chapman was baptized at [San Buenaventura](#) in 1822, and that same year, married Guadalupe Ortega of Santa Barbara with whom he had five children.



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In 1824, Chapman bought land in Los Angeles and developed a vineyard, but still continued to do odd jobs at the missions, being a jack-of-all-trades, who apparently could make or repair anything. Joseph Chapman was a great favorite of the friars. He became a naturalized citizen and grantee of the San Pedro Rancho. The historian Hugh Bancroft says of him “among all the earliest pioneers of California there was no more attractive character, no more popular and useful man, than Joseph Chapman the Yankee”.



*Ruins of the Grist Mill built by Joseph Chapman,  
photograph by David J. McLaughlin*



This “good pirate” died in 1848.

Hippolyte Bouchard had been dead for over a decade and his end was not as favorable.

After his raid on the California coast, Bouchard made his home in Peru, where he retired with the rank of Captain. In reward for his services, the Peruvian government gave Bouchard two ranches. On January 6, 1837, the local papers reported: “Navy Captain Hippolyte Bouchard, of more than 60 years of age, was suddenly killed by his own slaves two nights ago at seven, for which reason he did not express in his last will nor did he receive any sacraments.”