

Patronato San Xavier Docent Manual

October 2024





PATRONATO SAN XAVIER

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Mission Statement:

Patronato San Xavier funds and directs ethical conservation, conducts scientific research, and conveys the significance of Mission San Xavier del Bac, a National Historic Landmark in the community of Wa:k, part of the Tohono O’odham Nation.

Docent Program Essentials

How to use this Manual

This manual will cover essential information needed to effectively introduce docents and audiences to San Xavier del Bac and Patronato San Xavier. The Docent Manual should serve as your first resource for questions about the docent program, the church, and its communities. The five Core Concepts that summarize and guide docent tours at the mission are introduced and discussed under separate chapter headings in this Manual.

Information is presented in a variety of ways to aid different reading objectives. For example, body text in **bold** is considered especially important and a key take-away. There are citations throughout the text to support the ideas presented and to serve as recommended references in case you would like to learn more. Do check the Bibliography and Glossary at the end of the Manual for additional reading or a quick reference.

Summaries of sections and/or additional resources may be presented in a text box.

While the Manual is updated and revised on periodically, it is by no means a comprehensive source on all things San Xavier. Docents are encouraged to seek additional resources beyond this manual and its bibliography. When you encounter new information about the Mission and its history, please bring the information (along with verified sources) to the docent program leaders. Once formally verified, this will be included in future editions of the Manual.

Role & Responsibilities of the Docent

The Docent Program Mission Statement

By sharing Mission San Xavier del Bac's unique story with our visitors, Patronato Docents educate and inspire, in order to secure the future of this culturally significant, at-risk site.

Docents are an essential part of Patronato San Xavier's mission to convey the significance and history of San Xavier del Bac to the public. Additionally, docents provide vital fundraising support through tours and lectures. In 2019, Mission-related gifts generated by docent tours totaled \$15,000. Many recurring donors giving annual pledges, joined our community of support after visiting the mission and being inspired by a docent tour.

The **core responsibilities** of each docent are to:

- Accurately tell the story of the Mission without embellishment.
- Encourage people to support preservation and conservation work at the Mission financially.
- Assist with managing the competing interests of stakeholders, including visitors, parishioners, community members, and church staff.

San Xavier del Bac is a living church. Despite best intentions, some visitors may come to the Mission not fully appreciating this aspect, and so ignore the needs of worshippers. At times interests clash as people, attempting to practice their religion in peace, are overwhelmed by sightseers looking for a great photograph. It is for this reason that docents no longer present information inside the church. Docents should make this point clear when engaging visitors and encourage them to be respectful of the space and the stakeholder communities at San Xavier.

There are three main stakeholder communities located at the Mission:

- The Wa:k O’odham community, who have been protectors of the church for multiple generations, and who are re-establishing an identity distinct from the broader Tohono O’odham Nation
- The San Xavier Mission Roman Catholic Parish, part of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Tucson, whose members attend daily mass, holidays, baptisms, funerals, weddings, feast days, and other significant services at the church throughout the year.
- The Franciscan Order of Friars Minor, a Catholic religious order, founded in 1209 by Francis of Assisi, who took over the Mission from the Jesuits (Society of Jesus) in 1767 and who continue to staff the Mission Parish. Many live at the Mission Friary.

Over centuries, these stakeholder groups have forged a deep and spiritual relationship with San Xavier del Bac and are largely responsible for why and how the Mission exists today.

Docent Program Overview

PSX Staff Contact Information:

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Currently, the Docent Program is organized around central leadership provided by Patronato San Xavier’s Executive Director, Development Coordinator, and Scheduling Coordinator. They are assisted by a Docent Advisory Committee, a six-member committee comprising active docents who serve on this committee for three-year terms. The Scheduling Coordinator manages the monthly schedule and arranges special group tours (e.g. tour companies, schools, special interest groups, etc.) visiting the Mission and collects and reports monthly statistics on the number of visitors who take docent-led tours.

Docent Membership: Participation is open to anyone, regardless of faith or religious tradition. Being a member of the Catholic faith or San Xavier parish is not a requirement. However,

docents must become a “Friend of Patronato” when they apply to the program and maintain that status throughout their tenure. “Friends of Patronato” is a program that provides annual support to the preservation of the Mission. The minimum donation required to be a Friend is \$50 per fiscal year (July 1 - June 30). Learn more about benefits of becoming a Friend here; <https://patronatosanxavier.org/friend/>

Docents must complete full training and conduct a sample tour for staff and other docents that meets established criteria. New docent training occurs regularly.

Further educational opportunities are provided for active docents at four Docent meetings (held across the months of October, December, February and April) by guest speakers, field trips, and volunteers from the current Docent Program.

As volunteers operating on a church campus, Patronato has agreed that their docents follow the Diocese of Tucson's requirement for fingerprinting and background checks prior to giving a first tour. Adherence with this requirement involves no cost to the docent, but part of the requirement involves watching and responding to a 40-minute "safety" video, plus the time needed to visit a location where fingerprints are taken.

Dues: Docent dues are \$50 annually and cover the costs associated with the four quarterly meetings held during the winter season. Dues fall due on July 1st, the first day of PSX's fiscal year. Payment may be made online at the PSX website or by check. Members must be current at the time of the first quarterly meeting (typically October). The total financial commitment required to remain active as a docent is \$100 per fiscal year.

Quarterly Meetings: Quarterly meetings are held in October, December, February and April. These start promptly at 10 AM and conclude at 12 PM. When possible, a Zoom link is provided, and recorded. Aside from program updates, the meeting typically includes a featured educational speaker on topics relevant to Docent interests. Patronato hosts an annual luncheon for all docents after the February meeting. Recordings of past meetings and lectures can be found on the docent web portal (<https://patronatosanxavier.org/docent-web-portal/>).

Tour Schedule: When the program has a full complement of docents, tours take place from 9 am to 2 pm, Monday through Saturday, all year *except*:

- St. Francis of Assisi Feast Day (October 4th)
- St. Francis Xavier Feast Day (December 3rd)
- Thanksgiving
- Christmas Day (December 25)
- Good Friday
- Holy Saturday
- Quarterly docent meeting dates

Tour schedules are impacted by Mission church activities such as special masses, funerals, baptisms, *quinciñeras*, and other special events. **The church schedule takes priority over docent tours.** Sometimes, docents can accommodate by adjusting their presentation and taking guests to other parts of the Mission. While every effort is made to contact docents if church activities result in tours being cancelled, occasionally this is not possible.

All tours take place outside of the church. Many docents use an informational brochure developed by the Patronato to structure their tours. This brochure highlights important interior

features and serves as a good souvenir. Other visual aids can be used to educate visitors on unique features of the church.

How to Schedule a Tour: Tours and docent schedules are managed through WhenToHelp.com, a web-based program. The Scheduling Coordinator builds the monthly schedule. Detailed information and instruction on how to sign up and schedule availability for tours will be presented during and after formal training.

Brief History of the Docent Program

In 2010, the Senior Pastor at San Xavier del Bac and Patronato's Executive Director identified the need to convey Mission history accurately and effectively to visitors, and so built a docent team trained to tell the story of the Mission and provide regularly scheduled, free public tours. In February 2011, the first group of docent prospects were trained by Patronato staff and Board Members, as well as anthropologist Bernard Fontana and architect Bob Vint. The foundational text used by prospective docents was Dr. Fontana's, *San Xavier del Bac: Portrait of a Desert Church* (Fontana, McCain, & Carter, 2015)

By 2018 the program had grown to a point where 70 docents were providing 2,000 tours to 34,000 Mission visitors annually. Tours addressed aspects of Mission history, aligning information with several State educational standards. Docents also helped build a Speakers' Bureau to provide community outreach to service clubs and organizations.

During this period, leadership of the Patronato Docent Organization was volunteer driven, with team members stepping up to take on key management positions. In 2019, Patronato staff assumed responsibility for managing the monthly tour schedule. A steering committee was created to formalize management of the Docent Program, which was ultimately assumed by the Patronato Executive Team.

Compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, there were health and safety concerns for bringing large groups inside the church. The Docent Program ultimately went on a 3-year hiatus beginning in 2020. Following the pandemic, church leaders requested that docents no longer bring tour groups inside the church as this was disruptive to worshipers. Visitors were still welcomed into the church to explore the interior on their own. This edict resulted in many long-time docents quitting the program.

Since 2023, the Docent Program has been recruiting to rebuild numbers to allow a return to a full schedule of tours to accommodate the thousands of visitors who come to the Mission.

Docent Values

- Respect for the culture and religious traditions of the Mission.
- Respect for the culture and spiritual traditions of the community of Wa:k.
- Appreciation of the story, art, and architecture of the Mission.
- Accuracy of information and interpretation.
- Flexibility and being willing to change an approach particularly if required by Patronato
- Commitment to, and understanding of, preservation efforts.
- Personal learning and growth.
- Docent fellowship.

Introduction: San Xavier del Bac in Context

An icon of Tucson and the Southwest, San Xavier del Bac is immediately recognizable by its unique architecture and striking whitewash exterior, an unexpected sight in the middle of the Sonoran Desert. Many things make San Xavier special to many groups of people. The church sits on 14 acres of land owned by the . The land is an island within the San Xavier District of the Tohono O’odham Nation. Placing San Xavier in its historical, cultural, and geographical context is key to conveying why it is so unique beyond its aesthetic beauty and framing as the “White Dove of the Desert.”



“Mission San Xavier del Bac, Tucson, Arizona.”
Ansel Adams, 1968. Adams allegedly coined the
nickname, “White Dove of the Desert.”

San Xavier is part of a series of missions established by Father Eusebio Francisco Kino through what are now the states of Sonora, Baja California, and Arizona. In fact, San Xavier is part of a pilgrimage chain across the US-Mexico border, connecting people of faith across the Kino Missions. Despite intensification of border controls, followers from both sides still take part in walking pilgrimages to celebrate saint days at respective missions.

Unlike its closest “sister” mission, Tumacácori near Tubac, San Xavier is an active church with a parish community. Services are held daily

either in the 18th century church or in the smaller Juan Diego Chapel. There is a parish school next door catering to grades K through 2nd grade. A Franciscan friary sits behind the church with space for up to 10 friars from the Franciscan Order who staff the Mission, work at the Diocese of Tucson or who have retired from active ministry.

San Xavier del Bac represents a spiritual space of immense importance to many, but especially the community of Wa:k and the broader O’odham community. The ancestors of many people still

living in Wa:k built and maintained the church. When the Mission was abandoned between 1821 and 1859, members of the community took some of the statuary and artifacts into their homes to protect from looters. Feast day celebrations at the Mission bring in people of Catholic faith and the broader O’odham community, continuing a long history of joint celebrations at the Mission.

Telling the Story of San Xavier del Bac

Bringing together the history, art, architecture, and communities at San Xavier can be challenging to convey, especially in the span of a 30-minute tour. It is advisable to cover the essential, **core concepts** salient to the church:

- 1) The O’odham and the community of Wa:k
- 2) Father Kino and the history of San Xavier del Bac
- 3) The construction and architecture of the Mission church and the ancillary buildings
- 4) The highly stylized and symbolic artwork in and on the church
- 5) Contemporary preservation efforts led by Patronato San Xavier

There are many stories that circulate about the Mission, it’s history, and the people associated with it, including father Kino, in the Wa:k community. It may be enticing to embellish facts and romanticize about a building that already looks very romantic, but to do so would be contradictory to Patronato San Xavier’s mission. Telling an inaccurate story, even if it’s a good story, ultimately does a disservice to the people who live work and worship at this church.

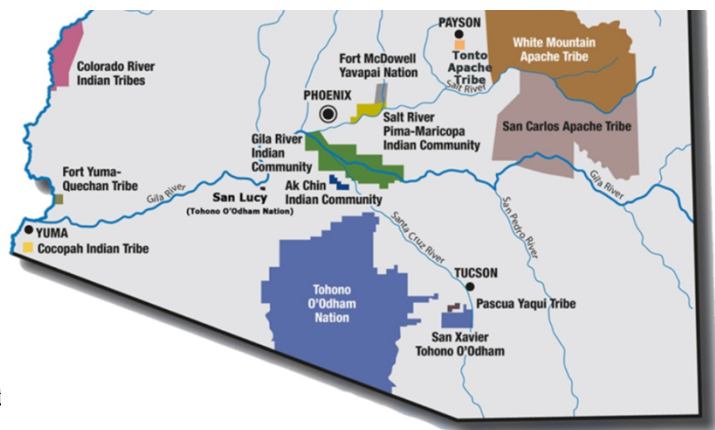
This is why we ask that docents verify new information about the church and bring it to PSX staff before repeating it as part of a tour. This manual is frequently edited and revised to include the most accurate, up-to-date information available about the Mission, so any input from docents is welcome. Use critical thinking and good judgment when pulling information together for your own tour of the Mission.

1. The O’odham and the Community of Wa:k

Millenia of Continued Habitation

Tucson and the surrounding areas have been populated by the O’odham (pronounced, “Aw-thum” and meaning, “people”) and their ancestors for thousands of years. The O’odham are descended from the Huhugam, a term which refers to all ancestors and can include the Hohokam archaeological culture. From around 300 to 1500 CE, this region was inhabited by Hohokam farmer. Artifacts from the Clovis period, one of the earliest archaeological cultures in North America, have been identified at nearby Murray Springs, close to Sierra Vista, indicating at least 13,000 years of continued occupation by the O’odham, Hohokam, and their ancestors.

Prior to the arrival of Kino and the



Spanish to what they called Pimería Alta, a number of culturally distinct O’odham groups inhabited the Sonoran Desert. The Akimel O’odham (“river people”) traditionally lived along the Gila, the Salt, and San Pedro rivers. The Sobaipuri (“being like the enemy”) O’odham, an group related to the Akimel O’odham, lived at communities along the San Pedro and Santa Cruz Rivers, including at Wa:k, where many of their descendents still reside. Being on the river afforded water year round allowing the Sobaipuri O’odham to grow and harvest crops except in the coldest months. The Sobaipuri were also recognized as being fierce warriors, which is where their name likely originated.

The Tohono O’odham (“desert people”) were seasonally nomadic. During the summer months they would venture to villages close to rivers and arroyos while in winter they would retreat to settlements in the foothills where hunting supplemented their food supply. Unlike the Akimel O’odham, the Tohono O’odham relied on cultivating drought tolerant plants in addition to hunting and gathering wild resources.

The Hia-Ced O’odham (pronounced “Hee-ya Chood Aw-thum,” and meaning “sand people”) were desert dwellers who favored a mostly nomadic, forager lifestyle, across the Sonoran Desert, Colorado River, and the Gulf of California,. Today, they maintain their own language and cultural identity within the broader Tohono O’odham Nation.

Since the arrival of the Europeans, the various O’odham groups comingled as access to their ancestral lands was restricted and taken away. The creation of the Tohono O’odham Nation unified these groups, but had the impact of creating from these diverse cultures the erroneous notion of a singular identity. Many residents of Wa:k still acknowledge their Sobaipuri heritage as distinct from the Tohono O’odham and other groups. The community of Wa:k is in the process of reestablishing their sense of unique cultural identity.

The Tohono O’odham Nation is the second largest reservation in United States in terms of land base. It covers 2.8 million acres, slightly smaller than the State of Connecticut. Tribal registration nears 28,000 members (not all living on the reservation). There are four non-contiguous sections to the Nation divided into 11 local Districts. The largest part of the Nation, centered on Sells, extends 74 miles along the US-Mexico border. The traditional O’odham homeland reaches into Sonora, Mexico, and until the intensification of border controls within the last twenty years, members of the tribal family would move freely across the border.

San Xavier District is the second largest landbase within the Tohono O’odham Nation. This section was once its own reservation, first recognized in 1874. Then called the “San Xavier Indian Reservation,” it was the one of the first reservations, established by the Dawes Act, in the nation

The Santa Cruz River and the Community of Wa:k

When ranchers and farming expanded through Arizona in the late 19th and early 20th century, they diverted riverways and contributed to mass drought and famine in the region. Today, with

Tucson’s sprawling population, decades of ranching and mining, and other contributing factors, the water table across the valley has dropped considerably. As a consequence, the Santa Cruz and other rivers in the area run above ground for only a brief period during the rainy season.

But prior to the arrival of Europeans, rivers in the desert flowed for much of the year. Portions of the Santa Cruz River flowed above ground approximately 10 months of the year. Underlying basalt rock brought the water flow to the surface. But, just north of the current community of Wa:k, the basalt disappears, allowing the water to descend into the ground and the river to maintain a subterranean flow. It was this natural phenomenon of the water appearing to go into the ground that gave the village of Wa:k its name. In the O’odham language, “Wa:k” means “go in” or “enter”.

At the end of the 17th century, around 6,000 O’odham lived in the permanent agricultural communities reliant on the San Pedro and Santa Cruz rivers. Of these communities, Wa:k was the largest. Proximity to the Santa Cruz River facilitated the growth of a large agricultural village of Sobaipuri O’odham. When Kino visited in 1692, Wa:k was a thriving community of more than 800, large enough that people lived in separate neighborhoods.

Households consisted of two structures, one for general use and the other for sleeping and storage, and were quite sturdy. Known as “ki,” houses were made of bent branches that formed a barrel-shaped dome which was then covered with mats and mud, helping to maintain a pleasant temperature. Wooden ramadas were not common housing structures among the Sobaipuri

O’odham as they were with the Tohono O’odham.

The Sobaipuri developed a complex system of irrigation canals to sustain their crops and towns. (Some homes had irrigation running through for cooling) Their primary crops were corn, beans and squash, referred to commonly as “the three sisters.” These crops could not survive frost, so cultivation lasted from March to November. The Sobaipuri also harvested desert plants such as saguaro fruit, agave heart and leaves, mesquite tree pods, cholla buds, and mesquite sap. Saguaro fruit was fermented into wine for use at special ceremonies.



Today, many traditional native plants are grown and sold at the San Xavier Co-op Farm in Wa:k located just east of the Mission. Photo Credit: Ajo Farmer’s Market.

O’odham Culture & Language

O’odham is still spoken today in multiple different dialects that characterize different subgroups and areas of the O’odham world. Like many indigenous groups, the O’odham maintain a strong tradition of oral history, storytelling, and songs. Storytellers are greatly respected as the keepers of history and cultural memory. O’odham language dialects remain largely oral, though written

orthography was developed in the 1960s and 1970s. Tohono O’odham poet, Dr. Ofelia Zepeda, published the first pedagogical book on O’odham grammar in the 1980s.

The O’odham also keep calendar sticks, which individual calendar makers use to recount events important to their lifetime. Calendar sticks were traditionally buried with their makers, meaning their specific history died with the maker. The most important events were incorporated into oral histories and passed on through the generations.

The O’odham are famous for their basket weaving. Originally these baskets held food, trinkets and household items. All baskets were made from split willow twigs, bear grass, and devils claw and were technically very skillfully made. By the 1870s as the railroads were established through the area, the O’odham began making baskets to sell. These baskets did not have to be as sturdy or finely made so yucca leaves were introduced since they were easier to find and work with. Designs and shapes were altered somewhat to please potential customers.

Spiritually, the O’odham trace their origin to I’ittoi, the Elder Brother and Creator of the O’odham, known by different names, depending on the dialectal variant or region. According to oral history, I’ittoi brought their ancestors, the Huhugam, up from the lower earth. I’ittoi is responsible for the gift of the himdag, which guides people to remain in balance with the world and interact with it as intended.

I’ittoi taught the Huhugam how to survive in the desert by showing them which foods were good to eat, which were poisonous, and which had medicinal properties. He taught them how to build reed shelters with mud and mesquite branches, and how to build structures for shade. When I’ittoi



was satisfied the people could survive in the harsh landscape, he removed himself to a cave high up on Waw Giwulk, or Baboquivari Peak, located near Sells on the main reservation. For generations, and still today, many O’odham climb up to this cave to leave behind small offerings to I’ittoi.

A symbol closely associated with the O’odham is **the Man in the Maze**. The meaning of the maze is consistent throughout the O’odham world, but interpretations of the “man” is varied. For some he is I’ittoi, for others the “man” can

represent any human being. Early versions of this symbol consist of the maze without the man. These earliest versions were not circular but oblong with the opening to the maze at the bottom. In all cases the maze depicts a person’s journey and their himdag or “way of life”. The zig-zagging path may represent the many tragedies and triumphs one faces at each turn. As death (in some cases, at the maze’s center) comes closer, one last turn at the end offers a chance to look back on one’s trail, one’s himdag.



VIDEO RESOURCES:

- [History of Land and Water in San Xavier](#) – Jacelle Ramon-Sauberan
- [T-A:ga \(Our Story\): An Introduction to the Culture and History of the Tohono O’odham](#) – Bernard G. Siquieros
- [Who are the Sobaipuri O’odham?](#) – Deni J. Seymour

Going through the sanctuary of San Xavier, it is possible to spot several representations of I'itoi and depictions of the Man in the Maze.

When Jesuit priests arrived with the intention of converting the O'odham to Christianity, many traditional O'odham stories happened to align with the bible. A Creator; I'itoi, heaven, earth, and the first people. A great flood and a period when I'itoi went into the world to make things right again. These similarities may have made the O'odham more open to the missionaries teachings and facilitating widespread assimilation and conversion of many O'odham to Christianity. The Jesuits even incorporated I'itoi into church ceremonies and iconography.

2.

Father Kino and San Xavier del Bac

This section will provide an overview of what brought Father Kino to the area and how the church was founded. While a full summary of the Jesuits and Spanish colonial history in the Americas is outside the scope of this manual, numerous resources exist on the subject, including those cited in the bibliography. Some might be highlighted in text boxes throughout the handbook for being especially relevant or information rich.

The Jesuit order of priests (the Society of Jesus) was founded in 1534 by St. Ignatius Loyola, St. Francisco Xavier, and others as a reform movement within the Catholic Church. They recognized problems within the existing Church yet maintained loyalty to the Pope in Rome. The Jesuits soon became the most important intellectual influence in the Counter-Reformation in Europe. When Europe and Christianity launched global colonization campaigns, many Jesuits took distant missionary post as part of their service.

Motivated by the dedication to the Jesuit order and to spreading Christianity, Jesuit priests often committed themselves to learning the language of their missionary region in order to write, preach, and instruct indigenous peoples on Christianity and European culture. They frequently retained or adapted, local, cultural traits that did not violate Catholic traditions. Through their efforts, many Jesuits were able to protect indigenous parishes from the exploitation and abuse of colonizing forces.

Missionary goals, often clashed with the colonial priorities of Europe. Sometimes local officials accused Jesuit missionaries of interfering with “proper” colonial enterprises, focused on exploiting land, wealth, and people. In 1767, King Carlos third of Spain called for the Jesuits to be expelled from its territories around the world, including new Spain.

Father Eusebio Francisco Kino

Kino was born Eusebio Chini (pronounced “Kini”) into a noble family in the village of Segno, in the Holy Roman Empire (now Northern Italy). The exact date of his birth is unknown, but he was baptized on 10 August 1645. He was educated in Innsbruck, Austria. In 1665, as part of a vow fulfillment after recuperating from a near fatal illness, he joined the Society of Jesus and adopted Francesco as his second name as devotion to St. Francis Xavier. After completing a final stage of training in Ingolstadt, he became a Jesuit priest in 1677.

Although Kino (“Kino” was the version of his name used in the Spanish-speaking domains) wanted to follow the legacy of his patron saint, Francisco Xavier to serve the order in East Asia, he was sent instead to New Spain. Arriving in 1681, he was initially sent to establish missions in the Baja Peninsula. The absence of reliable water sources saw this venture fail.

He returned to Mexico City. In 1687 he began his travels in Pimería Alta where he established some 24 missions and visitas extending from the present-day states of Sonora (Mexico) northeast for 150 miles (240 km), into present-day Arizona (USA). This included nineteen

rancherías (villages) which supplied cattle to new settlements. These provided an unusual amount of wealth for his vocation, which he used primarily to fund his missionary activities. During this time, Kino authored books on religion, astronomy, and cartography. He drew some of the earliest surviving maps of Pimería Alta, the Gulf of California, and Baja California all with remarkable accuracy.

News of Kino's presence reached Tumacacori and Wa:k in 1691. According to Kino's memoirs, Wa:k village couriers journeyed south to a point 10 miles west of present-day Nogales to meet with him and to invite him to visit their communities.

Kino arrived at Tumacacori that year, and visited Wa:k in August 1692. Kino was a uniquely charismatic and kind individual who made an effort to understand his hosts before telling them about his own religion and culture. He is described this way in the historic record, and he is remembered this way by many. Writing in his journal five years after this first visit, Kino describes a warm reception at Wa:k. He was impressed by the agricultural village and saw potential in the thriving area along the Santa Cruz as "a gateway to the Gila". Given permission to establish a mission, he named it "San Xavier del Bac" adding the name of his patron Saint to a mispronunciation of the name of the village; "Wa:k"

Talking about an incomplete historical record

There is a lot we don't know about San Xavier. Much of historical knowledge comes from journal entries, correspondence and inventories, which may be incomplete or inaccurate. Is a journal entry written years after the fact reliable? Did the writers have specific motivations for portraying certain events one way or another. These questions are frequently debated. In the case of the church, the records almost exclusively are from European sources.

For these reasons, using phrases like

- "We speculate..."
- "It is possible..."
- "Experts believe..."

And other qualifying language is recommended to best represent the incomplete historical record. Citing the source of information is also good practice!

The founding of a mission in New Spain did not equate to constructing a building but rather beginning the process of establishing a community of worshipers. It is likely the mission community was initially located northeast of its current position, where the village of Wa:k was then located. Historic records support the existence of a simple ramada-like structure that served as the worship space.

Because priests were often responsible for more than one mission location, a rule was established that no new Mission could be started if it was more than a day's ride by horse or a three-day walk from the next Mission. A Mission had to be self-supporting, have good water, wood, building materials, and fields for grazing and for crops. The Mission at Wa:k was initially established as a *visita*, a visiting place.

In 1700, during a subsequent visit to San Xavier, Kino recorded in his diary that a foundation was laid for a church building during time he spent at Wa:k. Several archeologists theorize where that foundation may have been but there is disagreement as to the exact location. There is conjecture that a simple church was begun at the site of the original village. Kino visited the mission at Wa:k a few additional times. In March, 1711 while in Magdalena de Kino in Sonora he succumbed to a fever and died. An elaborate tomb in the plaza next to the Church in Magdalena contain the remains of Kino. For his missionary work in this area, Kino, within the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church, is in the process of being elevated to Sainthood.

In 1756 the Jesuit, Fr Espinoza built the first church building in the current location. It is not clear why the decision was made to move the village from the former location. North of the Mortuary Chapel is the foundation artifact of the original Mission structure built by Father Espinosa that changed the site from a Visita to a Mission.

Espinosa was Jesuit, not Franciscan, and his building techniques were simple and pragmatic. The use of adobe bricks limited the ability to construct a larger building so the buildings dimensions were 110 feet long and 22 feet wide as measured at the exterior. The walls were barely a foot thick, constructed of sun-dried adobe mortared with mud. The roof was made of mesquite beams lathed with saguaro ribs laid perpendicular to the beams, (as depicted in the photo to the right). Father Espinosa's church served the area for nearly four decades until the current Velderrain Church was completed. Some of the older statuary in the current church were initially purchased for the Espinoza chapel along with the baptismal font in the bapistry.

Over the years, little was done to maintain the adobe brick, and poor drainage eventually led to its demise. It was sacked several times by Apache raids. Foundations of this simple rectangular building were discovered during excavations carried out in the 1950's.

The Jesuit era at San Xavier ended in June 1767 when secret orders from King Carlos of Spain, sent to all provincial viceroys and district military commanders, called for the expulsion of "all members of the Society of Jesus" (the Jesuits) from Carlos' Spanish domains and for the confiscation of all their goods. Almost overnight, in the mission towns of the Pimeria Alta, the "black robes" (Jesuits) disappeared and within the year the "gray robes" (Franciscans) replaced them.

The Espinoza Chapel

For many years it was thought that adobe brick and beams in the current "convento" wing were repurposed from the Espinosa church.

However recent dendrochronology study of timber in the Convento wing provide dates that are too recent for the beams to have come from that source.

A perfect example how information and stories change across time.

The Franciscan era

Fr Velderrain (also spelled Belderrain) the second of the Franciscan Priests to put their mark on San Xavier arrived in 1776, fresh from building a new church at Suaqui (near current day Hermosillo, Mexico). Already it appears the Espinoza chapel was suffering from degradation of the foundations as buttress walls of stone had been placed around the church, in an attempt to strengthen the walls. One can imagine Velderrain hatching plans for a much grander church in keeping with the splendid setting to replace the humble chapel Espinoza had built.

By 1783 it seems he had finalized plans and, having initially borrowed some 7,000 pesos from a wealthy Sonoran rancher to launch the project, he set about the task of building the current San Xavier. Velderrain offered the rancher, as security against the loan, the mission's wheat crop across several years. The original architect of San Xavier del Bac is unclear. Oral tradition states that master mason Ygnacio Gaona, credited with building a similarly styled mission in Caborca, Mexico, was the original designer of San Xavier. But aside from a census record taken an 1801 that lists Ignacio and his family as residents in Wa:k, no written records exist to verify this claim.

Similarly, no written records exist describing how the labor to build San Xavier del Bac was supplied. An account by Father Velderrain, written when he supervised construction of the church at Suaqui, indicates that O’odham laborers there were paid with food, sugar and tobacco. It has been speculated that San Xavier was also built by O’odham laborers working for food and supplies. Also, given that the building was begun almost 100 years after Kino’s first visit to the area, by 1783 there would have been a third generation being raised within the Catholic faith. So while current research provides no evidence that the O’odham were forced to involuntarily engage in hard labor, this is an area of contention, based on what was known to have occurred in other Mission communities beyond the Kino chain.

We do know that Fr. Velderrain succumbed to an illness and died in 1790, leaving the overall structure complete but with detailing and other work far from finished. It fell to his colleague Fr Llorens to complete the building. In 1792, Mission income fell as changes in colonial policy meant missionaries could no longer depend on the income from mission lands to fund building projects. Five years on, in 1797, inflation in Europe diminished funding arriving from Spain to fund construction projects such as the church at Wa:k.

Artisans brought from Mexico to work on the project demanded hazard pay because of the uncertainty caused by raids on the Mission compound. This effectively doubled their wages. By 1797 the cost of construction had sky-rocketed to \$40,000 pesos. **With no clear path to pay for labor, that year construction stopped, and the artisans left, leaving the East Tower unplastered from the first level, and without an upper dome and lantern. On the interior, art in the choir loft was still under design, while the Baptistry contains just a fragment of the planned images.**

For the next 20 years, the church remained in use and building of ancillary structures occurred with more modest adobe structures constructed to the east of the church, creating a protective corral; fortification against the frequent raids from apache tribes.

Following Mexico’s independence from Spain in 1821, the requirement for priests to be born in Mexico, meant it was difficult to continue to staff these remote locations. When the Franciscans left the church that year it remained shuttered for thirty years until the Gadsden purchase in 1853.

During this period of “abandonment” community members of Wa:k continued to protect the church and artifacts, bringing the wooden statues into their homes and keeping the keys to the building. Historic accounts state that occasionally visitors were granted access to the interior. Reports from visitors of pottery figures on the alters and statues as well as a “well preserved Spanish bible” indicate that it may still have been a place of worship during this time.

After 1883 and with the church now lying within the United States, San Xavier came under the the jurisdiction of the Diocese of Santa Fe. Restoration and maintenance projects were initiated though there were other challenges during this period including a 7.2 earthquake in 1887, along with looting and vandalism from the growing community of Tucson just ten miles away.

3. Architecture & Construction

Architectural Style -

Several different terms are used to describe the architecture at San Xavier: The church is best described as “Ultra Baroque,” or “Churrigueresque,” referring to its ornate decoration, symmetry and sense of high drama, typical of the Baroque style.

Perhaps the best descriptive phrase is “Folk Baroque,” a term reflecting a style that is highly decorative with naive aspects as well as less technical refinement. Folk Baroque (referred to as Mestizo Baroque in Mexico) is best illustrated in churches in the Sierra Gorda Valley outside Querétaro, Mexico. (These five remaining churches initiated by Father Junipero Serra are UNESCO heritage sites).

During the 18th century, **Querétaro, Mexico, was the Franciscan center for artistic and architectural thought in New Spain.** The Franciscan College of Santa Cruz de Querétaro was founded in the later 1670’s and was the first seminary in the new world to train missionaries. Many of the missionaries left to found missions in Texas as well as those who would travel to the northern Pimeria Alta to build missions. **It’s believed that many San Xavier del Bac artisans were recruited from this area.**

Many influences are integrated on the exterior: Moorish, Spanish, Catholic and Indigenous Symbols –

The Iberian Peninsula, which consists of most of modern-day Spain and Portugal, was conquered and controlled by the Moors (Berber and Arab people of North Africa) from 711 – 1492. During this period (nearly 800 years), the Moors greatly influenced architectural and design styles on the Iberian Peninsula. Following the Reconquista (reconquest or recapture) of the Iberian Peninsula by Roman Catholic Kingdoms both Spain and Portugal began exploration and colonization in the New World. This led to Iberian architectural and design styles being transferred to New World colonies beginning in the early 1500s.



Hagia Sofia Ceiling, Main Dome

San Xavier reflects some of this Moorish influence, known as Mudejar, meaning “those who remained”, the name was given to Moors or

Muslims of Al-Andalus, who stayed in Christian territory after the Reconquista.

It also denotes a style of Iberian architecture and decoration found in Aragon and Castile (northern Spain) from the 12th to 16th centuries. At San Xavier, this style is evident in the octagonal towers, the finials around the roof perimeter and fences, and the simple curved downspouts that lead from the vaulted roofline. The church’s cupola is also a product of Byzantine and Persian mastery of the pendentive, or angled support on which the dome rests. (The most noteworthy example

This engineering feature later became known as a squinch. The size, shape and dimensions of the dome evolved to its current design through Moorish influence. The use of domes instead of flat or barrel-vaulted roofs is a more advanced form of construction and is also an example of the lengths to which the builders went to create this unique and impressive structure.

of this style is found at Hagia Sofia in Istanbul)

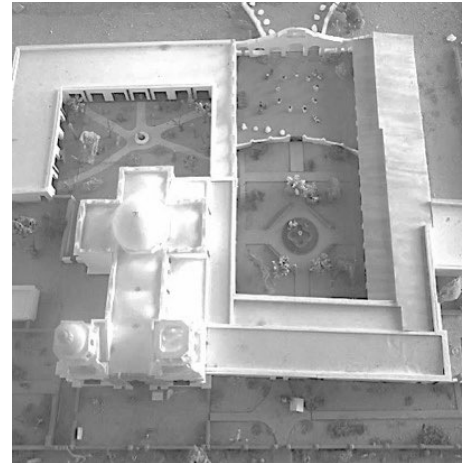
An aerial view of San Xavier Mission shows a combination of several architectural features. The church is laid out in the form of a Latin cross, with the bottom of the cross at the south end flanked by east and west towers. This signifies Christ's body and the body of the church.

The south facing orientation is distinct from most early Christian churches which traditionally face east. It is thought that this church faces south to welcome worshipers who would have been traveling north from Sonora along the Kino Mission chain.

Mission Construction:

To our knowledge there were no plans drawn up for San Xavier. Only Father Velderrain and Ygnacio Gaona, a master mason who may have assisted, knew the concept of the glorious structure they were about to build. The church is built from local materials, water, sand, clay, lime and volcanic rock. Mesquite wood was gathered from nearby mesquite bosques along the Santa Cruz and Yellow and Apache pine that grew in the Santa Rita and Santa Catalina mountains.

A major factor in the size and grandeur of San Xavier Mission, as well as the ability of the church to withstand the elements of nature over the past two centuries, was the use of fired bricks bonded with lime plaster mortar, not mud adobe. Firing bricks was an expensive and therefore an uncommon technology in the Pimeria Alta, but this technique allowed for the engineering and construction of buildings up to five stories.



Model View in Arcade

Important Note: The historical records are unclear on whether native laborers were paid for their labor— Velderrain brought with him history of paying in food and supplies for work at a previous site. Also, the building started almost a century after Kino established the Mission at San Xavier (meaning almost three generations had been raised in the shadow of the Mission) So while there is no evidence that the O'odham were forced to engage in the hard labor involved in building San Xavier, there is also no evidence that speaks to the contrary.

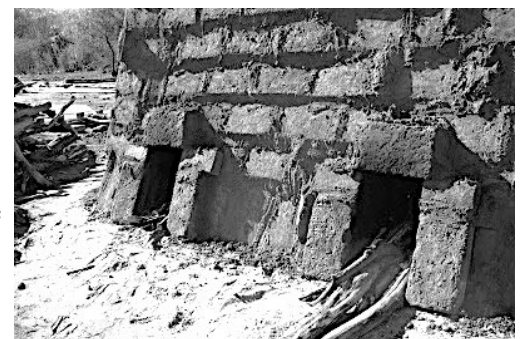


Mixing Adobe for bricks

The technique of firing bricks was brought to this area by Father Velderrain. (Franciscan priests were trained in Roman architecture and construction techniques.) As noted earlier, he had used fired brick to construct the church at Suaqui.

The brick used for the foundation and walls was fired at a nearby kiln created with 3,000 sun-dried adobe bricks stacked in a special way. This allowed for mesquite fires to be built in the interior. The heat from the fire hardened the brick.

The quality of the fired brick was very uneven and depended on proximity to the heat source.



Adobe Kiln

It is these weaker bricks that were particularly vulnerable to the water trapped under the Portland cement-based plasters applied to the building during repairs carried out in the mid 20th century.

Bricks further from the heat were rendered weaker and a different

color than the fire-hardened bricks nearer to the heat source.

Laborers dug down to bedrock to establish a firm footing for the five-story church. Volcanic rock from nearby Black Mountain, covered with lime plaster, became the foundation. Next, the O’odham mined the lime and clay for the bricks, slaked and shaped them and mixed the lime mortar that bound the bricks. Lime was obtained from local limestone deposits found approximately one-half mile away.



Note: The replacement bricks required for preservation work are purchased in Querobabi, Sonora, Mexico. These kiln-fired bricks are produced in the same traditional way as when the church was built.

The lower wall system was built of two courses of brick using a lime mortar with fine-grain sand. When the two sides were 6 feet high, the center section would be filled with volcanic stone and covered with lime mortar. Then the brick on each side could be extended another 6 feet higher and so on until the wall taper began.

The walls of the church building are 6 feet thick at the foundation. As they rise in height, the sidewalls narrow to 3 feet in thickness. The vaulted roof is 3 feet thick. It is unclear if scaffolding of some type was used, or how exactly the walls were raised, and the roof constructed. Records, if there were any, have been lost.

The original plaster renders used at the mission were all lime-based with the addition of the prickly pear mucilage as a natural agent to slow curing. This lime plaster mix – not paint - gives the church its iconic white color.

Pulp from the prickly pear cactus was added to the lime mortar and serves to slow the curing of the exterior coatings and to act as a binder. This slowing down of the curing process creates a semi-permeable membrane across the surfaces of the building that allows any water that enters the structure via cracks in the plaster, to be evaporated out.



Volcanic Rock Foundation

It also aids the shaping of the plaster. Like the fired brick, the limestone had to be fired to become useful in the various mortar mixes. The remains of a limestone kiln in the area to the west of the Mission was located by Bernard “Bunny” Fontana.

Note: Some of the rock work and buttresses were added in the later 1880’s and 1890’s when there was concern that the church foundation was at risk.

As noted earlier, the Santa Cruz River ran with water most of the year. At the time the mission was built the riverbanks were lined with native cottonwood trees and flourishing mesquite bosques. European peach trees introduced by Kino almost a hundred years before construction began grew in orchards along with other crops. Peach pits have been found in the mortar mix used during original construction.



Rock Buttress West Wall

Why is the East Tower unfinished?

The asymmetry created by San Xavier’s unfinished tower has not just created the icon, but it has fueled many myths as to the reason why the tower is incomplete. But the correct story is that the builders of the church simply ran out of money necessary to complete the project. Observing contemporary preservation ethics, there are no intentions to complete the unfinished tower.

Other Mission Buildings

The Mortuary Chapel - To the west of the main church is the Mortuary Chapel built in the same time-period that the main church was built. This chapel is typically where the body of the deceased would rest prior to moving into the church for the funeral mass. In the courtyard in front is the original Cemetery dating from 1797. The Chapel fell into disuse before the 1887 earthquake. That event collapsed all the east / west oriented walls surrounding the cemetery. The



Mortuary Chapel

chapel is now an important repository for items brought to the Mission by the faithful.

During reconstruction of the walls in the first part of the 20th century, the original entrance to the mortuary chapel was moved from the north wall to its current location in the east facing wall creating the current linear path rather than the L-shaped path that was the original configuration.

Around this same time, the cemetery was abandoned and relocated to the west side of the community. (Note: the new cemetery is not open to the public and photography is forbidden)

From 1800 other buildings and additions have been added to the mission campus to support its inhabitants. Early photographs show extensive adobe structures surrounding the current plaza and car parks at the front of the church as well. (All of these have since been demolished).

What remains are the much-amended Convento, the Granjon administrative wing, the autopark anchored by the Granjon Gate, and the Friary. West of the Church is the current convent and Mission school.

Convento Wing - In the early 1800's, after work on the main church was halted, construction began on a series of buildings to the east of the church. Early photographs reveal this wing was originally a collection of separate adobe buildings. Though these buildings may have had multiple purposes through the years, it is likely that a primary function of some areas was to provide the “convento”; living and working quarters for the friars who staffed the mission.



Convento View Looking East

(At the time the term “convento” referred to both men or women’s living quarters). These functions continued through the 1990’s until the modern friary was built and this area was repurposed as the current Juan Diego Chapel, the video room, the candle lobby and rooms used for part of the Museum.

A major restoration of this section in the 1950's considerably altered the look. The current "Spanish Colonial" style was created by increasing the height of the façade and altering the window treatments. Today the Convento Wing serves as the entrance to the Museum and the patio, and other meeting spaces.



Arcade Ceiling: Mesquite Beams and Saguaro Ribs

The Sacristy Arcade - The Sacristy Arcade is best described as the overhanging roof that surrounds the interior perimeter of the patio courtyard. Over the years it has been extended, but the first sections date from the 1800's. Roof beams are original and use pine and mesquite.

Saguaro ribs serve as lath for a mud and manure overlay. In certain areas several layers of roofing have been added over time.

Tucson's 2nd Bishop Henri Granjon. Granjon was born in France and ordained in 1887. In 1890, he joined the Missions in Arizona.

Appointed Bishop of Tucson in 1900, he took a personal interest in restoring San Xavier, using money from his families trust to fund the work.

It was Granjon who ordered finishing plasters added to upper sections of the east tower that, for the prior hundred years, had been exposed fired brick. Hailing from Leon in France, Granjon also added bronze lions' heads to the roof finials of the church. Some of these can still be seen on the west side of the courtyard roof.

It was Granjon's restoration that integrated the building and created the iconic look that led to the moniker, "White Dove of the Desert"

A major restoration of the sacristy arcade (the west section) was completed between 2010 and 2015. The section outside the museum and video room along the north side of the convent wing was rebuilt during the 1990's. A major restoration of the east arcade is needed to reinforce the ceiling

The East Additions – The long building on the east side of the church across from Grotto Hill is known as the Granjon Administration Wing. It was constructed between 1899 and 1913 and functions today as Mission administrative offices, classrooms, maintenance shop and (towards the south) the Mission's gift shop. A small apartment can be used by family members visiting the friars. Originally designed in the style of barrio row houses, this section is a priority for preservation.



East Additions from Roof Top

Bishop Granjon's Gate - Visible from the center courtyard, Granjon's Gate was added in 1906 part of the restoration efforts carried out by Bishop Granjon. The Granjon Gate

Note: Today, this use of an architectural style inconsistent with the historic church building would not align with current preservation ethics and guidelines. Despite this, the gate has developed its own era of historic significance and has been frequently featured by photographers including a famous series by Ansel Adams.

served as an entrance to a parking space and beyond it, the mission patio or courtyard. Granjon's "auto-court" with space for 12 cars, was a thoughtful vision to the future. The style of the gate could best be described as "California Mission Revival". The statue at the apex of the gate is St. Frances of Assisi.



Granjon's Gate

The Courtyard (or patio) enclosed by the Granjon Gate was once the original mission corral. The courtyard fountain was added in the mid-20th century as were the olive trees, meant to evoke the aesthetic of Californian missions particular the one in Santa Barbara.

The Friary - To the northwest of the Mission is the modern Friary constructed from 1991 with its adjoining courtyard.



Entrance to Friary

The friary provides housing for up to 10 friars; the priests who staff the Mission and others from the Franciscan order, some who hold positions at the Diocese office and others who are on sabbatical or retired from active ministry.

This is a private area, not available to the public.

The Mission School - To the East of the Mission lies the current convent and the Mission School. A school has been part of the Mission complex since the 1860's. A school building to the west of the church built in the early 1900's was partially destroyed by a tornado in 1964. The school was rebuilt and was active through 2020 when the pandemic saw it close. It reopened in 2024 with a more limited scope serving students K through 2nd grade. The plan is to slowly rebuild it across the coming years.

Art and Symbolism at the Church

The Baroque architectural style extends to the San Xavier’s interior and exterior artistic design, characterized by whimsical, symmetrical, over abundant decoration intended to convey a message to the viewer and elicit an emotional response. Even those who spend a lot of time in and around the church remark how frequently they see a new feature that they have never noticed before. Such is the density of design at San Xavier.

Within the interior of the church, there are numerous symbols that trace the history of the Catholic church; from Moses and the exodus of the Jews from Egypt in 1400 BC to the Jesuit missionaries of the Counter-Reformation in the late 1500’s. For example, the border that wraps the interior of the church (the entablature) represents the hem of the robe Moses’s older brother, Aaron, wore when he performed his priestly duties, the Franciscan rope belt and the vine of Christ.

This manual will attempt to cover the most basic elements and features, though a more comprehensive overview of the art at San Xavier is provided by the additional resources at the end of this section.

The Façade and exterior.



Estipite columns

The façade, sometimes called the “Retablo Façade” (“retablo” meaning “behind the table” or “altarpiece”) is the ornate entrance to the church. The façade is made of molded brick and sculpted lime plaster. It mirrors the design of the Retablo Mayor within the church. (Conservators believe the same sculptor may have been responsible for creating both) There are eight, non-weight bearing columns, (los estípites) which divides the façade into nine areas or zones. These pyramid-shaped inverted columns were originally constructed from soft molded brick, stacked around a wooden core. The brick was coated with plaster which was carved while wet.

The geometry of the church’s façade quickly states its message to the viewer. The façade’s appearance today is muted in color largely due to years of weathering by the element and results of a previous restoration campaign. However, when first built,

the façade would have been highly colored. Chemical analysis has identified four primary colors originally used to paint the façade: a deep red, yellow ochre, white, and black. Though most of the original paint has been lost or obscured, there are areas where the original colors and intricate patterns can still be seen: On St. Barbara, located in the top left niche, in the central cockle shell, and

Note: By the mid-20th century, all but two of these estipite columns had fallen with the remaining two at risk. Using those remaining damaged columns, preservationists in the 1950’s, crafted replicas from cast stone, (a cement-based mixture) and these were reattached to the façade using rebar and steel straps, creating somewhat of a lightning hazard. That same project reinforced much of the lower façade with chicken wire lath and cement-based coatings to consolidate the fragile plaster. Though done with the best of intentions, these materials are now considered inappropriate and harmful to the integrity of the original fabric. Preservation work will begin in 2024 to address this prior work.

below that, the painted chevron pattern. The rainbow over the wooden doors was likely colorfully painted.

Elements of the façade

The façade contains an impressive number of symbols meant to attract worshipers and tell them about the space they are about to enter.



Façade Volutes

Near the top, to the left and right are **two medallions**: On the left “IHS” (for Jesus Christ) and on the right “MAR” (for the Virgin Mary).

These flank the **Franciscan coat of arms** (the naked arm of Jesus intertwined with the clothed arm of Saint Francis of Assisi).

The two **lions** on either side of the façade represent the Spanish royals.

The inward-curving plaster scrolls or “**volutes**” have creatures said to be representations of a cat and a mouse.

O’odham legend states if the cat ever catches the mouse, the world will end.

In the four niches on each side of the façade are representations of four martyred **female saints**: St Barbara (upper left), St Catherine (lower left), St Cecilia (upper right), and St Lucy (lower right).

At the very top of the façade, the seemingly out of place cement cone (which now serves to hold a cross or flag on holidays and feast days) is a **statue of St Francis** (though debate as to whether it was a representation of St Francis of Assisi or St Francis Xavier is yet to be officially resolved) To preserve what remained of the statue, it was coated with cement plaster in the 1970’s.

Note: This prominence of female saints, along with numerous images of Mary tending to the infant Jesus throughout the interior, have led some to call San Xavier a “Marion shrine” (a site of strong devotion to the Virgin Mary). due to this emphasis on Mary

The motif of the **cockle shell** features prominently on the façade and throughout the church. The shell is a symbol associated with St James the Greater who brought Catholicism to Spain, and subsequently was adopted as the patron saint of Spain. It is also symbolic of baptism and of pilgrimage (particular on the Camino de Santiago) where a cockle shell is used as both a water vessel and to scoop food.



Façade Balcony

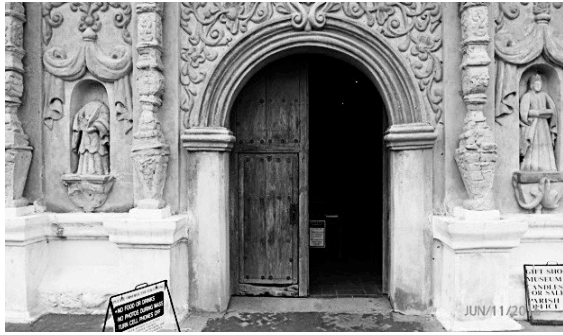
On the façade and both towers are wooden **Balconies**.

The balconies at San Xavier are unusual for New Spain. The lath-turned spindles on the lower windows of each tower and the 20th century shutters were much more common. (Both Fr. Velderrain and Ignacio Gaona were from Spain’s Basque region where church balconies were common which might explain these elements).

Note: The balcony wood has been replaced two times since the late 19th century, once as part of the Granjon restoration and again in the 1950’s. Balcony replacement with more accurate replicas based on earliest photographs is part of current preservation planning.

Likely painted originally in multiple colors to create a rainbow effect, the **Portal Archway** is above the main entrance to the nave. The traces of color today are those applied to the archway during preservation efforts in the 1950's.

The front entry doors (**El Portal**) are crafted from pine (likely harvested from the Catalina mountains). Inset in each main



door is a smaller door designed for access when the main doors are closed. Doorways in their role as literal portals between the world and the kingdom of heaven, were given great detail and attention. Over the years, only the

Note: Catholicism makes use of the rainbow symbol to convey various meanings. These include God's sign of the Covenant with Noah that the earth would never again be destroyed with a flood. At San Xavier, the seven colors of the rainbow are a reminder of the seven sacraments. By the 1700's, the rainbow also symbolized the fulfillment of the promise of the resurrection, while the arch symbolized the triumphant entry into Heaven or victory over death. The O'odham people use the rainbow in summer rain ceremonies and the use of the rainbow may be another example of teaching the Christian faith with symbols from native culture.

metal Portal & Archway door hardware has failed. Woodwork within the church displays a very high degree of skill and craftsmanship, showing that the finest quality European techniques were in use in the area. Further study is needed to determine if the woodwork was performed in Tucson, on site, or elsewhere. Study of the altar rails likewise shows a high level of skilled craftsmanship.

Note: Today's decorative handles were done by Tucson blacksmith Raul Vasquez in the 1950's. Woodwork within the church is undergoing extensive conservation due to both brown rot and insect damage.

Diamond-shaped ornamentation called "**Finials**" can be seen along the top trim of the church, on the estípite columns and on the entablature inside the church. They resemble finials found on Middle Eastern mosques and structures. Bishop Granjon during his restoration project added pairs of lions to the roof perimeter finials. They deteriorated and were replaced by the current design crafted from lightweight material to ensure building safety during earthquakes.



Original Finials



The Interior

The inside of the church, including the nave, transepts, and sanctuary, is ornately decorated with imported pigments (like orpiment, vermilion and Prussian blue).

Perhaps the most prominent feature in the church is the **retablo mayor** or main altarpiece, directly behind the sanctuary where the priests lead mass and other services. All retablos in the church including those in the east and west transept are made of sculpted brick covered with sand and lime plaster. The columns are also sculpted brick around wooden rods covered with plaster. Gesso, a white plaster-like substance, was often applied to the plaster to make it easier to paint.

The paintings are **murals** painted on the final *dried* coat of plaster or gesso. Unlike frescoes (where paint is applied to wet plaster allowing the pigment to be absorbed into the plaster) this technique results in a more fragile decoration. The paint used was likely some form of oil paints, prepared with animal protein binders to prolong the life of the color and to strengthen the adhesion to the plaster. That said, the painted surface is constantly experiencing loss through plaster delaminating, or paint fragments being lost due to efflorescence, a white, powdery, or fluffy deposit of salts that forms on the surface of porous materials like brick, or stone masonry, that lifts fragments of the paint.

The Retablo Mayor: A Vision of Heaven - Stepping over the threshold of the portal doors into the church one moves from the world, the profane, to a heavenly space, the sacred. Directly ahead, the main altarpiece is a joyous revelation of God's presence. Angels are holding candlesticks for the illumination of niches and wall decorations, trumpeting horns and playing stringed instruments. "Welcome" is their message: "Welcome to the patronage of San Francisco Xavier, to the Immaculate Conception and to God!" Other angels, lift back corded plaster drapes revealing niches that display statues of saints, the Inmaculada (a statue of the Virgin Mary representing the immaculate conception) and Saint Francis Xavier.

Key elements on the Retablo

The retablo mayor is crowned at its apex by a sculptured, gilded and painted image of the upper half of **God the Father**. God is portrayed with a head of red hair, a red beard and mustache. God's right hand is lifted in benediction, his left hand rests on top of an orb of the world from which a cross (now absent) formerly projected through his open fist.

Note: There has been some alteration over the years to artwork on the lower walls of the nave. The geometric patterns on the dado in the nave were repainted in the 1950's. A decision was made to change out the original muted colors (of which little remained) to the current, brighter, colors, thought to reflect the colors of contemporary Mexico. (The original dado colors can be seen in the Sacristy and, to a lesser extent, in the Baptistry; neither section of the church is open to the public).

A Tucson artist, Henry Milan, was commissioned to restore the four major murals in the nave and lower transepts: The paintings of the Last Supper (west side nave) the Pentecost (east side nave) our Lady of the Pillar (west transept) and our Lady of the Rosary (east transept). This work was not done according to current conservation ethic. The artist used incompatible oil-based paints and took many liberties, embellishing the original images with his own ideas. A future conservation project will attempt to remove of these "new" layers, to explore the condition of the original image. The goal will be to create a more accurate representation of the original works.

Note: The statues throughout the church have changed positions and even identities over the years. Though some have names written at their feet, others can be identified by their clothes, hair or defining features. Franciscan saints have brown or gray vestments tied with a rope belt (cincture) and wear where the top of the head is bald (a tonsure)

Prominent in the center of the retablo is the **Inmaculada**. She stands centered on the altarpiece beneath God the Father in a prayerful pose. She is Immaculate Mary, the person destined to become the Mother of the Son of God. Mary, the Immaculate Conception is not a reference to the virginity of Mary in her conception of Christ. The Virgin Mary and the Immaculate Conception are separate and distinct aspects of the mystical presence of Mary. Mary is believed to have been without sin from the moment of her own conception through a unique grace and privilege of God in anticipation of her becoming the mother of the redeemer of humanity.

The clothed statue in the central niche on the bottom register of the Retablo Mayor is that of the church's patron, **Saint Francis Xavier**, possibly the oldest statue in the church. It was ordered by Jesuit missionary Father Espinosa from a guild workshop in Mexico City in 1759 and was probably originally displayed in the Espinoza church.

This gessoed and painted processional statue features carved head, hands and torso with the portion of the body beneath

Note: This statue plays a key role during the annual feast day of San Xavier when the San Xavier Feast Committee supervises the removal of the statue from the altar. The statue is dressed in a white stole and surplice (a sleeved white tunic reaching the knees) over a black cassock (an ankle length robe) and a black biretta (a square cap with three projections, and he is paraded around the plaza followed by the faithful.

the waist sitting on four roughly carved wooden "legs" which reduce the weight so it can be easily carried during processions. The arms are articulated, and the exposed wrists, hands and head specially treated to impart a life-like appearance. The eyes have a glass iris and the teeth are either bone or shell.

Standing in front of the retablo mayor and turning left, one faces the **west transept** and retablo which features statues of Saint Francis of Assisi, the Man of Sorrows and a second representation of St Xavier, the **reclining St Francis Xavier** wrapped in a blanket. Churchgoers and pilgrims often come to visit this statue specifically and place Milagros and other votive offerings on or in the glass case.

Note: Mary as The Immaculate Conception is believed to be part of the original decorative plan of the church and is an excellent example of **estofado**, the multi-step process of using gesso, bole, gold and silver leaf, and tempera pigments to give statues the appearance of textile garments. This life size statue, like that of St Francis of Assisi in the west transept, is hollow and carved entirely of wood. This construction is referred to as "carved plank" method with verticle planks joined to make a hollow form that can then be carved to give the appearance of a dressed figure. After the figure has been fully shaped by the carver, and the glass eyes have been added, the painter and guildler take over to add flesh tones to the areas of skin and the appearance of fabric to the clothed areas. Gesso is added and painted over with red bole, a type of clay. Gold leaf is pressed onto the bole and the entire sculpture painted. The final step in creating the estofado garment consists of carefully removing paint that had been applied over the gold leaf, allowing the gold to show through in full splendor. The finishing touches included the use of tooling on the gold with a small metal instrument to give the appearance of decorative embroidery. *The Inmaculada received its first-ever comprehensive conservation treatment in 2016.*

Note: This reclining San Xavier may have had other uses in the past and might have originally been among the inventory of the statuary at Tumacacori. Based on wear marks and paint on the body, limbs, and head, at one time it may have been a representation of Jesus after the crucifixion.

The **artwork** throughout the church were used as teaching tools. They portray scenes from the life of the infant Christ with his mother, and important biblical scenes. These provided opportunities for the priests to share information with their converts who lacked access to a written language.

On the opposite side of the sanctuary is the **east transept** notable for the large crucifixion scene that once also held a statue of the crucified Christ. Beneath the crucifixion is a wooden statue of

Our Lady of Sorrows another recipient of much devotion in the church. Often, she is dressed in colorful vestments with a depiction of the Man in the Maze. Both east and west transepts have candle racks for votive offerings.

There are numerous elements throughout the sanctuary that referenced the O'odham and the Sonoran Desert. For example, the saints in the upper registers of both transepts have brown skin. In the west transept, above the niche with the Man of Sorrows there is a green and black pattern that reminded more than one conservator of sahuaro spines. There are also mice, shells, snails, and other small creatures painted into the faux marble design that skirt the retablo, indicating that Spanish and Mexican artists weren't the only ones decorating the church.

As you enter the church, in the southwest corner of the nave behind the locked metal grill, is **the Baptistry**. While the paintings inside are incomplete, they are relatively well-preserved and unchanged, compared to other paintings on the walls of the nave. The baptismal font is made of hammered copper and sits on a pedestal made of carved brick and lime plaster. The cover contains the monogram of the Jesuit order and was likely used in the earlier Espinoza chapel as it matches the font listed in an inventory from 1767 of items in the original Jesuit church. This would make the font one of the oldest items in the church.

The Sacristy where priests robe and prepare for Mass is located to the east of the Sanctuary. Its walls and ceilings are decorated with paintings of different saints and, on the north wall is a large depiction of the crucifixion. An elaborately decorated piscina (a wash basin formally used for disposal of water used during liturgical ritual) occupies the southeast corner.

The sacristy is still a highly functional space and is used daily. It houses modern infrastructure including enormous pieces of furniture for storage, along with the electric breakers, wiring and components of the sound system used in the church.

During recent preservation work, lower sections of the walls were covered by perspex at the behest of the conservators to allow visual access to the artwork while at the same time protecting it from damage. It represents an example of the balance needed to ensure responsible management of this still active, historic, 18th century church.

Historic Preservation and the Role of Patronato San Xavier

San Xavier del Bac stands as a tribute to the strength of the building and its community. Along with its placement in an area with extreme climate variation, the church has experienced abandonment (for more than 30 years after Mexican independence) a major earthquake, a lightning strike, vandalism and other potentially destructive forces.

As well, there have been a host of man-made interventions to the structure. Many projects throughout San Xavier's history have taken liberties with its appearance, not always referencing historic documentation of the church but making design choices based on aesthetic appeal. Over the years, standards in historic preservation have changed. Historical accuracy and community input are central to the current preservation plans at San Xavier

But first, some definitions:

Within the world of historic preservation, there is some key terminology with specific meanings. The use of these terms is not interchangeable.

- **Preservation:** The most common treatment, **preservation** focuses on maintaining the structure's physical condition and historical materials.
- **Rehabilitation:** Allows for a new use for the building while retaining its character-defining features.

Work on the buildings at San Xavier are a mix of Preservation and Rehabilitation standards

- **Restoration:** Returns the building to a specific period of significance.
- **Reconstruction:** Rebuilding to recreate a likeness of the original.
- **Conservation:** Refers more to **preservation of objects** rather than structures. (In the San Xavier context, this term is used to define work done to the statuary and artwork) Key concepts are minimal intervention, reversibility and authenticity

When the Gadsden Purchase from Mexico in 1854 brought the Mission and the surrounding land into the United States, the Mission was initially under the care of the Diocese of Santa Fe. The first priests arriving in 1859 and immediately coordinated repairs to the buildings.

The first major **restoration** campaign was coordinated by Bishop Henri Granjon, who took a personal interest in the Mission church and invested considerable sums from his own inheritance in a campaign that spanned 1905 through 1912. The Granjon restoration included rebuilding the atrium and cemetery walls (both of which had fallen during the earthquake) adding the new administrative wing on the far east side of the Mission footprint (including an apartment for his own use) building the auto court demarcated by Granjon gate and giving the entire complex a fresh coat of bright white lime wash; the first time the church and its ancillary buildings appeared

as uniformly white as they do today. Granjon is also remembered for adding statues of lions around the mission campus, a reference to his home region of Leon, France.

Though no cement or concrete was used in the original construction, the advent of Portland cement in the mid-19th century led many to prefer this newer, more versatile, material over traditional lime-based plasters.

Portland cement-based plasters were introduced across the Mission in the mid 20th century. The use of this new modern material was thought to supersede the more traditional lime-based plasters being more durable and water repellent. Various campaigns saw cementitious plaster added to the domes and walls and more cement layers were added to the floors in the choir loft and the towers, into the gaps between stair treads and ever more areas of the interior floors.

Note: These cement-based repairs were also a major part of the restoration work across the Façade carried out by Fr Celestine Chinn, one of the Franciscan friars who took an especial interest in the historic building. He worked alongside his friend and mentor, the Tucson city architect, E.D Herreras who, bringing his Mexican heritage to bear, provided advice and assistance.

Recent research determined that traditional lime-based plasters have special characteristics when it comes to handling water penetration. They form a semi-permeable membrane, a protective envelope that allows water entering the building via hairline cracking to be expelled by being absorbed through the plaster back into the environment without building up within the adobe brick. Cement plasters do not perform this way. Once the water enters, it cannot escape and as it accumulates, begins to work through the adobe brick and mortar, using gravity to seek the lowest sections of the building. In the case of the domes and ceilings, water leaked through to the interior plasters, carrying both salt and moisture which damaged the delicate artwork.

Note: Portland cement is not as porous as lime plaster. Water vapor that enters the wall system beneath the cement whether through rainfall, humidity or other sources, ends up trapped under the cement and has nowhere to escape other than by gravity to the lowest sections. Water soluble salts that enter with the water can wreak havoc on the soft brick masonry and delicate wall paintings when the water evaporates, and the salts crystallize.

Identifying areas where Portland cement was used at the church and assessing whether or when it needs to be replaced by traditional lime plaster is a continual priority.

Patronato San Xavier

Patronato began as a collaboration between the two resident priests at the Mission and a group of philanthropic lay people from Tucson. Prior to incorporation, this group had already funded several smaller preservation projects at the mission. Two precipitating events saw this informal group incorporate into a not-for-profit corporation.

The first was driven by the friar's receiving a sizable legacy specifically for preservation purposes. Without a firewall to protect this money and despite the donor's intent, the priests knew that the general needs of the Parish would quickly deplete the funds. Second, was the fear of encroachment on the Mission as the city of Tucson spread south and west. Development could well spoil the view of the Mission's iconic towers rising from the surrounding plains as it had done for two hundred years.

A solution was to form a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) corporation that could assume responsibility for the preservation of the Mission and to manage donations to the Parish, and from other sources, that were designated for preservation purposes. Being a separate entity from the Church, the organization would be eligible to pursue more diverse funding sources (including from federal and State agencies). Patronato San Xavier was incorporated in 1978.

The goals as expressed in the organizations first mission statement was “sole responsibility” for the restoring and preserving the historic buildings and, so doing, relieving the parish of that responsibility. One of the first tasks was to deal with the encroachment issue. This was accomplished by establishing an ordinance effectively restricting the height of any building within a mile radius of the Mission. Today, this height restriction remains in force.

The first decade of the life of the Patronato was consumed with planning. A management plan was crafted with several large goals and a budget that included building a gift shop and working to restore every building on the campus.

Their first planned priority was a campaign to clean and conserve the interior art. However, when shards of plaster fell from the interior of the west transept, the Patronato determined that to save the art (and ultimately the building) the priority needed to be removal of all cement-based plasters; first from the domed roof of the church and later the exterior walls, and return to the use of traditional lime-based plasters containing the juice of the Nopal cactus.

Note: In preparation for Patronato’s first major campaign, cleaning and conservation of the interior, local art conservator Gloria Gifford worked with Mexican art historian, Miguel Celosio, to map conditions of all the art within the church. However, when, in the late 1980’s, sections of the interior plaster began to fall from the Mission ceilings, it was clear that the building envelope was not managing water penetration the way it should and removing cement-based plasters from the domes became the major priority.

To date the Patronato has raised \$17 million dollars and has carried out a range of projects:

- Removing harmful Portland cement-based plasters. 1989 through 2023
- Repairing and stabilizing damaged kiln-fired adobe beneath the plaster
- Seismic stabilization
- Cleaning and conserving the delicate artwork throughout the church: 1993 - 1997
- Conserving wooden elements from the impact of 225 years of infestation and dry rot: Doors, altar railings, and statuary
- Conserving the many bronze and metal bells located across the campus
- Maintaining the Mission’s Museum. Conserving the exhibits including the extensive collection of Native American baskets.
- Conservation and preservation maintenance. (Once areas have undergone major treatments, the work needs to be maintained. Patronato is developing maintenance protocols which includes a permanent staff member on site, to ensure on-going monitoring of various conditions across the site, and pro-active management of maintenance.
- Management of the Docents Program

Patronato’s annual operating budget is currently around \$1.25 million dollars.

The Future: A further \$6 million is needed to complete ongoing deferred maintenance projects and return the site to a state where preventive preservation maintenance will keep the current work intact. Patronato is building an endowment that will provide funding, in perpetuity for the preventative maintenance.

Patronato's Docents' work is very consequential. The Docent Program is an essential part of conveying Mission history and importance, as well as engaging visitors to San Xavier del Bac. Since most of the current support comes to Patronato through individual donors, not the Catholic Church or government funding structures, Docent tours frequently serve as the first point of contact for future donors and supporters. Tours prove a very effective vehicle for introducing people to the Patronato's preservation work. Since 2016 tour information has been tracked telling us that the Docent Program has raised almost \$90K towards our projects. Further, 3% of donor records with multiple gifts show the first connect was a "Docent tour".

Glossary

Adobe – Building material made of clay, water, and straw. Typical of the southwest, but not used to build the 18th century church at San Xavier.

Akimel O’odham – “River people.” Traditionally lived and farmed along the Gila River in present-day Arizona.

Baptistry – Designated room or area for baptisms at the church.

Calendar stick – Traditional record keeping method of the O’odham. Makers would record significant events in their lives and be buried with their individual calendar stick.

Cast Stone – A cement-based material used to reconstruct the estítepes on the façade at San Xavier.

Churrigueresque – Sometimes called Ultra Baroque, highly decorative architectural style named for José Benito de Churriguera. Originated in Spain and popular in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Convento / Convento Wing – Living quarters of the nuns and/or friars. Located northeast of the main church, just off the patio, at San Xavier del Bac.

Courtyard – The large open-air space encircled by the Convento, friary, and administration wing of the mission. Fountain and olive trees were added in the 1960s.

Cupola – Design element at the top of a building or structure, often dome-like.

Espinosa, Father Alonso Ignacio – Jesuit priest who succeeded Kino at San Xavier del Bac.

Estítepes – Non-weightbearing columns featured on the retablos of the church.

Estofado – Multi-step process that involves applying paint over gold leaf, then etching it away in certain areas to give the appearance of textile garments.

Façade – Large decorative face of the Mission made of carved brick and lime plaster.

Finial – Decorative design element at the end of a post or object. Commonly seen on bedposts, curtain rods, and staircase banisters.

Folk Baroque – Ornate architectural style typical of rural churches in Europe and Mexico built in the colonial period.

Fresco – Painting technique where paints are applied directly to wet plaster. An extremely durable and popular technique throughout history, especially during the European Renaissance.

Friary – Current living quarters of the Franciscan friars at San Xavier. The building was constructed in 1990s and is closed to the public.

Gesso – white paint mixture used to coat surface like wood or plaster to make them easier to paint.

Goana brothers – Mexican foremen/architects who, according to oral tradition, designed the mission at San Xavier del Bac.

Granjon, Bishop Henri – second bishop of Tucson who led the first comprehensive restoration project at the Mission.

Granjon's Gate – Tall, arched gate at the northern end of the courtyard that borders the autopark for church staff.

Grotto Hill – Small hill to the east of San Xavier del Bac, immediately identified by the a lion statue and white cross. The shrine to the Virgin Mary on the north side of the hill is frequently visited by worshippers. Grotto Hill is not church property.

Hia-Ced O'odham – “Sand people.” Nomadic desert dwellers with a broad seasonal range over the Sonoran Desert to the Colorado River and Gulf of California.

Himdag – “Way of life.” What guides people to remain in balance with the world and interact with it as intended. Often represented by the Man in the Maze.

Hohokam – Archaeological culture from around 300 – 1500 CE. Famous for agricultural advancement.

Huhugam – O'odham word that refers to all past ancestors. The name, Hohokam, is said to be derived from Huhugam, but does not necessarily refer to the same group of people.

I'toi – Elder Brother and Creator of the O'odham. I'toi brought the Huhugam up from the lower earth and is responsible for the gift of the himdag.

Jesuit Order – Founded in 1534 by Ignatius Loyola, Francisco Xavier, and five others as a reform movement within the Catholic Church. Eventually became an important intellectual influence in the Counter-Reformation in Europe.

Ki – Traditional housing structure at Wa:k made of bent branches and covered with mats and mud.

Kino, Father Eusebio (~1645 – 1711) – Italian-born Jesuit missionary who built over 20 missions in contemporary Arizona, Sonora, and Baja California, including San Xavier del Bac.

Llorens, Father Juan Bautista – Franciscan Father who oversaw the final stages of construction at San Xavier del Bac after Father Velderrain’s death.

Man in the Maze – Symbol closely associated with the O’odham. Depicts a person’s journey through life.

Milagro – “Miracle.” Small religious charms offered to saints for guidance, help, or protection.
Mortuary chapel - Traditionally where the body of the deceased would rest prior to being moved into the church for the funeral. Located to the west of the main church at San Xavier del Bac.

Mudéjar – Islamic architecture and art style evident in dome and arch ways. Means “those who remained,” referring to Muslims who stayed in Iberia after the Christian reconquest.

Nave – The long central part of the interior of a church where most of the congregation sits.

O’odham – Means “people.” Inhabitants of the Sonoran Desert for thousands of years.

Pendentive – Triangular segment in the upper portion of a room that supports a domed ceiling.

Pimería Alta – Spanish colonial term that refers to the area of land broadly covering the Sonoran Desert. “Pima” is an outdated term for the Akimel O’odham.

Portland cement – Most common type of cement, named for its resemblance to portland stone. Developed in England in the 19th century.

Retablo – “behind the table / altarpiece.” Decorative panels on the back wall of the north nave and east and west transepts.

Sacristy – Room or area of a church where the priest prepares for mass.

Sacristy arcade – Overhanging roof of the convento surrounding the interior perimeter of the patio and the friary at San Xavier del Bac.

Santa Cruz River – Tributary of the Gila River in Arizona and Sonora.

Sobaipuri O’odham – “Like the Enemy.” Named for their reputation of being fierce warriors., another O’odham subgroup along the Santa Cruz River thought to be ancestors of the current inhabitants of Wa:k and caretakers of San Xavier del Bac for countless generations.

Tempera – Paint made of pigment mixed with an organic protein binder.

Tohono O’odham – “Desert people.” Traditionally, a seasonally nomadic group in the Sonoran Desert with homelands extending as far as the Gulf of California.

Tohono O’odham Nation – Second largest reservation in the United States, located in southern Arizona along the border with Mexico, and divided into 11 districts. Many O’odham people today are associated with the Tohono O’odham Nation even if they are descended from a different outgroup.

Transepts – In a cross-shaped church, the “arms” coming off the nave.

Tumacácori – “Sister” mission to San Xavier del Bac located near Tubac, AZ. Before the mission existed, it was also the historic location where Wa:k delegates met with Kino. Today, it is considered a stabilized ruin, not a working church.

Velderrain, Father Juan Bautista – Franciscan priest who oversaw initial stages of construction of the current church building at Wa:k. Died 1790.

Volutes – Spiral-shaped decorative feature seen on the outside of the church, on the roof, and on the façade.

Wa:k – Original Sobaipuri O’odham village on the Santa Cruz River and current community at San Xavier del Bac. The word means “go in” or “enter” in O’odham.

Waw kiwalik – Also known as Baboquivari Peak. Where I’itoi removed himself after completing his work with the Huhugam. Many O’odham still bring small offerings to I’itoi here.

Xavier, Saint Francis (1506-1552) – One of five founders of the Jesuit Order. One patron saint of San Xavier del Bac.

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