

## Cultural and Historic Resource Acquisitions



Mission San Agustín ca. 1810. Illustration by Paul Mirocha based on digital reconstruction by Doug Gann

# Mission Gardens at Mission San Agustín del Tucson

**Site:** 4.7 acres  
**Cost:** \$261,465  
**Acquired:** March 29, 2002  
**Fund:** 1997 Bond Funds

## Background

The Piman village of “stjukshon” or “chukshon” - Tucson’s namesake, is considered the “Birthplace of Tucson.” Located at the base of today’s Sentinel Peak, it was here in 1692 that the Jesuit missionary Fr. Eusebio Kino first encountered the Tucson Sobaipuri village naming it, “San Cosmé del Tucson” and establishing it as a small “visita” of Mission San Xavier del Bac. Nearly 100 years later, the visita was named Mission San Agustín and expanded to include a chapel, Convento building, cemeteries and outbuildings including a large granary, the walled Mission Gardens, and an extensive system of agricultural fields irrigated by acequias from the Santa Cruz River. The mission community became the religious and agricultural center of Tucson that served the native O’odham community, the Spanish military Presidio of Tucson and settlement on the east bank of the river where downtown Tucson is today.

Through time, Mission San Agustín fell into disrepair and ruin, and its parcels split and sold. The Convento site and fields south of Mission Lane became a City landfill in 1953 and eventually surrounded the Mission Gardens. This parcel remained in private ownership and was threatened by development until purchased by Pima County in 2002.

With growing citizen interest in commemorating and restoring the Birthplace of Tucson, the City of Tucson established a Task Force in the 1980s that recommended the Convento site and Mission Gardens be obtained for inclusion

in a future City park. In 1997, Pima County included funding in its historic preservation bond fund to purchase the Mission Gardens, which was achieved in 2002. In 1999 City of Tucson voters approved the creation of the Rio Nuevo tax increment district in 1999 and the development of Tucson Origins Heritage Park.

## Historical and Cultural Resources

For millennia the Santa Cruz River was a permanent stream in the Tucson valley fed by springs at the base of Sentinel Peak and elsewhere along its course. Because of the reliability of water here, Tucson was virtually an oasis where water and arable lands were able to support year-round agricultural settlements. Consequently nearly 4,000 years of continuous agricultural history and settlement have been revealed at the Mission Gardens. Because this area was not impacted by the City landfill, much of the area retains its archaeological integrity, and numerous archaeological features and artifacts have been found throughout the Mission Gardens from various time periods. These features include early pit houses, historic foundations of houses and the walled garden itself, domestic features such as cooking and trash pits, a well, canals and ditches, and burials. Because re-creation of the Mission Gardens will not further impact these archaeological features, most were retained and preserved in place.

## Management

At present, the City of Tucson, Pima County, and other partners are cooperating in the development of the Tucson Origins Heritage Park and re-creation of the Spanish Colonial Mission Gardens at the Mission San Agustín site. Plans call for planting of “Kino Heritage Fruit Trees” and grape vines derived from Old World plant stocks first introduced to southern Arizona by Fr. Kino and later missionaries during the 17th and 18th centuries. The Kino Heritage Fruit Trees project has



Quince (Membrillo) - Photo by Jesús M. García of The Kino Heritage Fruit Trees Project.

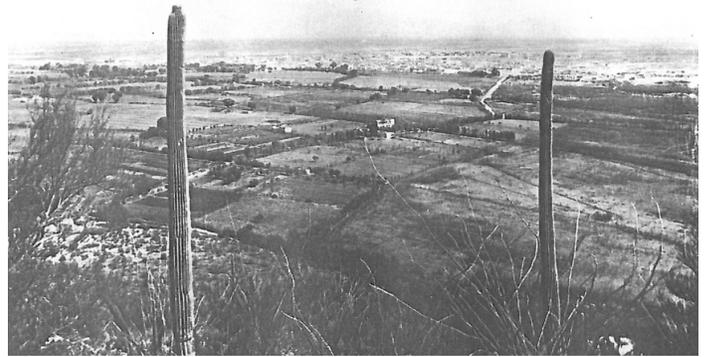
successfully located the oldest surviving heirloom fruit trees in southern Arizona and northern Sonora, and is reproducing them from cuttings for planting in our region to ensure the continued viability of these genetic varieties. The first phase of the Mission Gardens project includes planting of 100 Kino fruit trees in honor of the Arizona Centennial. Heirloom trees to be planted include apple, peach, olive, pear, fig, plum, quince, lime, pomegranate, and others.

### Recreation

The Mission Gardens will be a reconstruction of the Spanish Colonial walled garden that was part of Tucson’s historic Mission San Agustín. It was rebuilt essentially on its original site and will become an important educational element of the Tucson Origins Heritage Park, where visitors can see and experience heirloom plants and gardens interpreting 4,000 years of Tucson history and agriculture.

### Ongoing Property Activities

To date, the City has reconstructed the garden wall and prepared the planting beds in preparation for bringing water into the site and planting crops.



Mission San Agustín ca. 1886.



Early Mission Gardens Concept Plan - Courtesy City of Tucson