

Historic Chapman's Millrace unveiled at new home at San Gabriel Mission

By [Lauren Gold](#), Pasadena Star-News

September 25, 2013



Community leaders and elected officials gather to dedicate the restoration and relocation of the sole remaining section of a masonry millrace completed in 1825 for Chapman's Mill, a cornerstone of the thriving agricultural community centered on the San Gabriel Mission. The 20-foot, 15-ton section of waterway was relocated to Plaza Park where it has been installed as an educational exhibit. Sept. 24, 2013. (Staff photo by Leo Jarzomb/Pasadena Star-News)

SAN GABRIEL>> Gabrieleno-Tongva tribal members posed for a picture alongside the Chapman family Tuesday morning, just a few feet in front of the historic millrace their ancestors worked together to build nearly 200 years ago.

The historic millrace, designed by ex-pirate Joseph Chapman and built in 1820 by Gabrielenos living at the San Gabriel Mission, carried water from nearby rivers to the mission to power a grist mill and irrigate crops, making the mission one of the most successful in California's mission chain, archeologist John Dietler said.

On Tuesday, architects, city leaders and the ancestors of the mill's builders unveiled the restored millrace, unearthed last year, as a monument in Plaza Park in front of the Mission.

"For us it's an honor that the city decided to acknowledge and preserve something our ancestors built," Gabrieleno-Tongva Tribal Leader Anthony Morales said. "It's just proving that our ancestry is not extinct."

Carlos Chapman agreed, saying it was nice to see a piece of his family history preserved in the city.

"It's an honor. I'm so proud of Joseph Chapman and his feats of building everything," Chapman said. "I'm lost for words."

Archeologists uncovered the millrace last year during the excavation of a 2.2 mile-long trench that is being dug for a section of Union Pacific railroad track, as part of the Alameda Corridor-East rail project.

The 20-foot, 15-ton section of the historic millrace was relocated to Plaza Park and restored using rocks from the same area across the street from the mission where archeologists found it, explained Dietler, lead archeologist on the project. The reconstructed millrace also has water flowing through it.

"This is really unique. We do excavations all the time but this is once in an lifetime," Dietler said. "I can't think of any other example of a mission artifact that has been reconstructed and actually works."

The millrace display will also include historical drawings and information by Michael Hart, a former Sunny Slope Water Company employee whose series of historic Mission waterway maps were part of an exhibit at The Huntington Library. Hart has been studying the historic water system for more than 17 years.

"I went to San Gabriel High School and I would walk to class right on top of it and I had no idea," Hart said. "It's amazing now I've become a major part of it."

The dig also yielded more than 380,000 other artifacts, which Dietler and his team at Pasadena-based SWCA Environmental Consultants are still in the process of cataloguing. The artifacts include a U.S. Army belt buckle from 1846, several Native American arrowheads, a military button from the 1820s and a human foot bone. Once archeologists finish documenting all the artifacts, they will be dispersed to the Fowler Museum of Cultural History at the University of California, Los Angeles, the Mission Museum, the Union Pacific Railroad Museum and other historical groups.

Mary Cammarano, a former mayor and president of the San Gabriel Historical Association, said the millrace will add to the educational tours of the mission and the historical record of San Gabriel.

“This is what a historical association lives for,” Cammarano said. “And to have all this happen in our centennial year is just the biggest gift we could have asked for.”

The \$336.9 million San Gabriel Trench project, which will lower a 1.4 mile stretch of the railway through the city, is scheduled to be completed in 2017.





[See additional gallery images here.](#)

