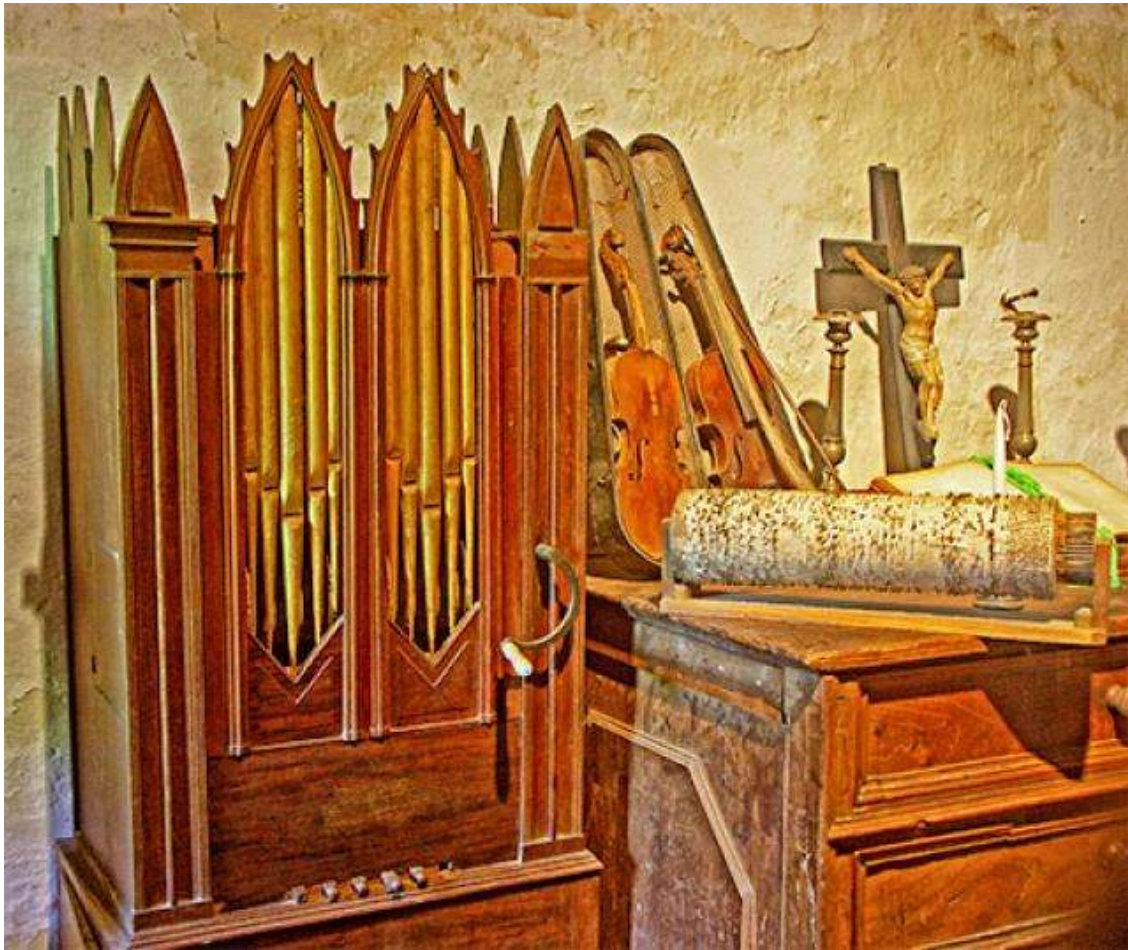


### English captain George Vancouver's gift to Father Fermín Lasuén



On his second visit to the California coast, in 1793, captain George Vancouver showed his esteem for Father Fermín Lasuén by giving him an organ. Lasuén had seen the instrument in the captain's cabin during Vancouver's previous visit, but it never occurred to him that it might one day be his. Lasuén wrote about it to Fray Tomás Pangua:<sup>1</sup>

The three English ships of last year have been in San Francisco and Monterey once more, and have anchored, too, at Santa Barbara and San Diego. [...] Several have told me and written me that Commandant Wancouver [Vancouver] and the officers often asked about me. Finally I

came upon them in San Diego without looking for them. I visited them, and they were very gracious to me. Señor Vancouver made me a gift of an organ. I saw it in his cabin the previous year, and noted how much he esteemed it. I would not have parted with it for anything, and the thought of such a present never entered my mind. By merely turning a small handle you get the most beautiful sound. It plays thirty-four brief melodies [*tocadas*], and none is far removed from what is sacred. It is an instrument of beauty and a truly precious piece. May God be his reward –for that was and can be the only price I can give in return.

He asked me to what church I would assign it, and I said to San Carlos of Monterey. He was much pleased; and now I find I have the unavoidable problem of transporting it there. The job will be a little risky, but not very difficult. It is now here in San Juan, and on Christmas Night and Christmas Day it was played to the indescribable delight and amazement of the Indians.”

The instrument was not the most appropriate one for the purposes to which the friars put it. Among those thirty-four melodies were pieces such as “Go to the Devil” and “Lady Campbell’s Reel,” which would have disturbed the friars if they had understood the titles.

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<sup>1</sup> “To Fray Tomás Pangua” (San Juan Capistrano, 27-12-1793) in Lasuén, Fermín Francisco de; Kenneally, Finbar (1965). *Writings of Fermín Francisco de Lasuén*, Academy of American Franciscan History, Washington D. C. Volume I, page 298.