The Mission Inn: A Jewel for the Institute
The 41st Annual SCALL Institute was held at the **Mission Inn Hotel & Spa** in downtown Riverside, CA. Replete with a treasure trove of history, unique architectural features, and a varied art collection from around the world, the Inn was an attraction all its own for Institute attendees.

The Mission Inn was the brainchild of **Frank Augustus Miller**, a Wisconsin native who moved to Riverside as a teen in 1874 and quickly enmeshed himself in the local community. The Miller family originally opened up their home as a two-story guest house to supplement the family income. Frank Miller later purchased the inn from his family, envisioning a destination hotel that would serve as a major tourist attraction for Riverside. He partnered with architect **Arthur Benton** to expand the hotel over the next several decades. Greatly influenced by the Catholic tradition and the Spanish and mission revival styles, they added gardens and several wings built to resemble California missions.

Given the detailed architectural stylings, first-time Mission Inn visitors cannot be faulted for assuming that the hotel was originally a real mission. In fact, Miller enjoyed having guests believe this. He sometimes went so far as to dress up as a monk and board trains that were passing through town, telling passengers to visit “the mission” in Riverside but directing them straight to the Mission Inn.

It is important to mention Miller, as his personality and influence are embedded in every corner of the Mission Inn. His love of travel and of different cultures, particularly Asian, led him to collect an extraordinary amount of foreign art and artifacts. Miller put many of these objects on display in the Inn, hoping that they would add to the hotel’s attraction for visitors coming from around the world. From Chinese vases in the lobby to a pair of “pacifist cannons” in the front courtyard and an 8-foot-tall Buddha statue in a conference room, there are items from the world over literally around every corner. The **Mission Inn Museum**, located on hotel grounds, features even more of Miller’s collection.

Many of the meeting spaces in the Inn have names reflecting the unique character of their contents. The **Music Room**, in which the main portion of the SCALL Institute was held, features a working cathedral organ and choir benches modeled on those found in Westminster Abbey in England. The **Spanish Art Gallery**, site of the Institute’s closing luncheon, displays over 100 European paintings. And the **St. Francis of Assisi chapel**, of which I was fortunate to get a glimpse on an Inn tour following the Institute’s conclusion (it is normally closed off for weddings), holds several beautiful Tiffany stained glass windows and a massive gold leaf altarpiece from Mexico.

A common symbol in and around the hotel grounds is the “raincross”, consisting of a double cross on top of a bell. The raincross is the original logo of the Mission Inn; it is now also the Riverside city logo. The bell was one of Miller’s favorite symbols. He collected over 800 of them throughout the course of his travels; over 400 of these are presently located throughout the Inn. (The origin of his interest in bells is unclear, but may have been associated with the name of his first wife: **Isabella**.)

The Mission Inn is famous not only for its building and grounds, but also for its many notable guests. Over the years, the Mission Inn has played host to an array of presidents and celebrities. Bette Davis and Richard & Patricia Nixon were all married there, and Ronald & Nancy Reagan spent their wedding night at the hotel. When President Taft visited in 1909, Frank Miller had a special chair built to accommodate Taft’s famous physical heft; the chair sits in the hotel lobby today.

The Mission Inn became a National Historic Landmark in 1961 and Riverside City Landmark No. 1 in 1969. A non-profit organization, the **Mission Inn Foundation**, is dedicated to the hotel’s ongoing preservation. With its eclectic blend of museum-worthy sights and architecture alongside luxury hotel features, the Mission Inn was a unique and entertaining site for this year’s SCALL Institute.

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