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The story of a place is told in the uses of its land and in

the lives of the men and women who till its soil, harvest

its bounty, and shape its destiny. For Laguna Hills and

the Saddleback Valley, the land uses have included

raising cattle, growing crops, and cultivating citrus

groves—activities that are pictured in three murals

on the lobby wall.

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northern San Diego County.

From these early inhabitants, Los Angeles County inherited several place names, including Azusa, Cahuenga, Malibu, Tajunga, and Topanga; and San Diego County received Cuyamaca, Jacumba, Jamul, and Pala. In contrast, Orange County has preserved only one place name from its aboriginal past: Niguel. Apparently derived from nawil, a Luiseño word meaning "maiden" or "adolescent girl," this name was given to the main ford across Los Alisos Creek, possibly because this shallow spot was regularly the site of ceremonies that marked the coming of age for Acjachemen girls.

This region's destiny was shaped by the Native Americans who hunted, harvested, and gathered here, by the Spanish soldiers who explored its gently rolling written as Niquel—not only named a specific place where all traffic heading north along original Indian trails and subsequent Spanish hills, and by the six landowners whose vast ranchos thoroughfares crossed a major local creek but also indicated a general sustained its herds and crops. Terra-cotta busts of these landowners adorn the alcoves, and their iron brands important crossing point and beyond. Eventually, this Native-American are among those displayed on the wall. place name was used to identify the 13,316 acres of land granted to

* Brochure images courtesy of the Saddleback Valley Historical Society

Southern California was home to two tribes of Native Americans, whose way of life goes back thousands of years. The Tongva (whom the Franciscan missionaries called the Gabrielino because many of them eventually became neophytes at Mission San Gabriel) lived on the flatlands north of Los Alisos Creek, in what is now northern Orange County and southern Los Angeles County. The Acjachemen (whom the Franciscan missionaries called the Juaneño because of their similar association with Mission San Juan Capistrano) lived in the coastal foothills and mountains of the present southern Orange County and

Islands to the Colorado River.

For a time, Nawil—also spelled Nigüili or Nigüil in early texts and later direction of travel north from Mission San Juan Capistrano, toward this Don Juan Àvila in 1842 as Rancho Niguel.

Native Americans

Both tribes established villages atop ocean bluffs, in foothill valleys, along rivers, and beside springs, where the environment offered a rich food supply and many natural resources. They harvested acorns, gathered grasses and fruits, hunted on land, and fished in the sea. They wove fine baskets, painted religious pictures on rock walls, and were part of a flourishing trade network that stretched from the Channel

The Portolà Expedition (1769)

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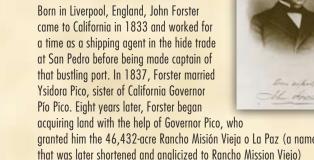
In July 1769, Captain Gaspar de Portolà led a party of Spanish soldiers north through what eventually became Orange County on their way to find Monterey Bay. Their purpose was to found settlements in Alta California and thus secure the area for Spain. As they traveled, they made journal entries about the landscape, noting where they would establish missions, build presidios, and locate villages.

and among its lasting legacies are place names like Christianitos, Las Flores, Santa Ana, Santiago, and Trabuco. Along the way, Portolà and his soldiers came across two Tongva and six Acjachemen villages. Some of the soldiers on this expedition—namely, Nieto, Serrano, and Yorba—returned later to acquire land and become rancheros.

Captain Gaspar de Portolà

Theirs was the first land exploration of California by a European power,

SANTA ANA RIVER

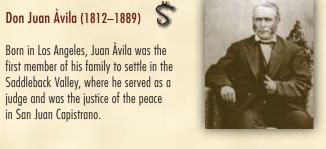


and the smaller Rancho Trabuco. In 1844, Forster and his partner, James McKinley, purchased Mission San Juan Capistrano for \$710 in gold and hides. The Forster family lived on the mission grounds until 1864, when President Abraham Lincoln returned the mission to the Catholic Church. In that same year, Forster's acquisition of Pío Pico's rancho, Santa Margarita y Las Flores ("Saint Margaret and The Flowers"), brought Forster's total acreage

to more than 200,000 and made him the largest landowner

Don Juan Avila (1812—1889)

in San Juan Capistrano.



Early Ranchos (1821–1848)

After Mexico won its independence from Spain in 1821, the Mexican governors of California made a practice of granting large ranchos to men who were politically or socially well connected. Because Alta California's primary exports were hides (worth one dollar apiece) and tallow (used to make candles and soap), rancho owners prospered by raising cattle and sheep.

Most of what is today southern Orange County was once owned by Juan Forster, Juan Avila, and José Serrano. In their heyday, these three rancheros enjoyed a lifestyle similar to that of the landed gentry in Spain, replete with fiestas, roundups, and rodeos.

John "Don Juan" Forster (1815–1882)

acquiring land with the help of Governor Pico, who granted him the 46,432-acre Rancho Misión Vieja o La Paz (a name

watermelon and to raise cattle. To house his family, Serrano constructed five adobe residences on this property, including one overlooking El Camino Reál on a site now marked by a monument in Mission Viejo's Sycamore Park and another, built around 1863, which is part of Lake Forest's Heritage Park. Don José Serrano was buried at Mission San Juan Capistrano on March 16, 1870.

In 1842, California Governor Juan Bautista Alvarado granted Àvila the

Mission San Juan Capistrano and on which Avila raised cattle and sheep.

Juan Àvila built his hacienda near a spring on the south bank of Los Alisos

Creek, just west of El Camino Reál (literally, "The King's Highway," the

designation used to differentiate this public road from private ones).

prosperous man, widely known for his gracious hospitality. The Àvila

hacienda, located within the borders of what later became Laguna Hills

was the site of frequent fiestas and served as a way station for weary

travelers. In 1865, Avila sold this ranch to his friend Juan Forster and

moved his family to a larger home in San Juan Capistrano. Although

the Àvila hacienda is gone now, the City of Laguna Hills has placed a

marker on the site where this adobe structure once sheltered families

years later, California Governor Juan Bautista Alvarado granted him

Rancho Cañada de los Alisos ("Valley of the Sycamores"), located in

California's last Mexican governor, Pío Pico, brought Serrano's total

the Saddleback foothills. A subsequent grant of adjacent land by

Serrano and his sons used their land to grow beans, corn, and

and welcomed guests.

Don José Serrano

José Serrano was born and grew up in the

appointed magistrate for Los Angeles and

most of what is now Orange County. Seven

Los Angeles area. In 1835, he was

the surrounding territory, which included

landholdings to 10,668 acres.

(1809-1870)

the main thoroughfare between Los Angeles and San Diego. Avila was a

13,316-acre Rancho Niguel, land that had previously belonged to



From Ranchos to Cities

The signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo on February 2, 1848 officially ended the Mexican-American War. Under the terms of this treaty, Mexico ceded Alta California to the United States. As a result, Mexican land grants had to be validated by a federal land commission, a process that took many years. Meanwhile, uncertainty of ownership, imposition of a general property tax, the flood of 1861–62, and the droughts of 1863–64 and subsequent years caused some rancheros to sell their lands and induced the new owners to diversify by growing seasonal cash crops rather than deriving their livelihood exclusively from raising cattle and sheep.

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During the drought of 1863-64, many of

Whiting, a forester and a recognized authority on eucalyptus culture in America, tried to recruit English settlers to become "gentlemen fruit farmers" in a village he called Los Alisos by subdividing the level land; planting olive trees, grape vines, and 400 acres of eucalyptus trees; and bringing the railroad through the property. When train officials asked what the local station should be called, Whiting's wife Emily reportedly suggested "El Toro" for a hapless bull that had recently fallen into a well and drowned.

Because blight shriveled the vines, and poor soil and fickle rains made later the train stop of El Toro became the city of Lake Forest.

Richard O'Neill (1824-1910)

Richard O'Neill grew up in County Cork, in the heart of Ireland's dairy country. During the 1840s, a potato famine caused members of his family to emigrate from Ireland to the New World. They settled in New Brunswick, Canada, where they worked as fishermen even though Richard's father was a skilled beef butcher.



Dwight Whiting (1854–1907)

José Serrano's cattle died, forcing him into financial ruin and his ranch into foreclosure. Los Angeles banker J. S. Slauson acquired the property and then sold it, in 1884, to Dwight Whiting, a Bostonian who had become a resident of the area.

agriculture difficult, the land was developed instead for residential use. Thus, what had once been the English farming village of Los Alisos and

When gold was discovered in California, young Richard O'Neill sailed around Cape Horn to California, hoping to find his fortune in the waters of the Sacramento River. Unable to strike it rich, O'Neill set up a butcher shop in San Francisco, where he met fellow Irishman James Flood. Flood had made a fortune operating silver mines on the Comstock Lode. Impressed with O'Neill's knowledge of beef and cattle and with his business sense, Flood hired him to rescue several faltering ranchos.

So successful was O'Neill that he persuaded Flood to put up the money to

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purchase Ranchos Mission Viejo, Trabuco, and Santa Margarita y Las Flores by promising to serve as resident manager. O'Neill introduced new cattle breeds, such as the British Angus and Hereford, and new agricultural crops, such as alfalfa and wheat. By 1907, at the age of eighty-three, Richard O'Neill had invested enough "sweat equity" at the agreed-upon compensation rate of \$500 a month to become half owner of the property, which included more than 200,000 acres and stretched from Aliso Creek (formerly known as Los Alisos Creek), near El Toro Road, to Oceanside.

In 1941, as America was preparing for war, the U.S. Navy identified the need for a West Coast training facility and purchased the 122,798-acre Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores for this purpose. The land that had once belonged to Pío Pico, to Don Juan Forster, and to Richard O'Neill became Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton. Members of the O'Neill family gave the name Rancho Mission Viejo to their remaining 52,000 acres and adopted the "Rafter M" brand for their herds. Beginning in 1964, the family and its partners developed portions of the ranch as the planned communities of Mission Viejo, Rancho Santa Margarita, and Ladera Ranch.

Lewis Moulton (1854-1938)

Lewis Moulton was born in Chicago. Despite growing up in a family of doctors and lawyers, he left Illinois for California in 1874 because he yearned for the outdoor life. Soon after he arrived in Santa Ana, he was hired by James Irvine for \$35 a month to do odd jobs under the supervision of Charles French, who was general manager of early Irvine interests on

Rancho San Joaquin. Ten years later, Moulton leased Rancho Niquel, which had previously belonged to Don Juan Àvila, and hired Jean Pierre Daguerre, a Basque shepherd, to supervise ranch operations. Moulton and Daguerre began raising sheep and cattle and growing barley and beans. In 1885, the success of their efforts made it possible for Moulton to buy the rancho,

which became known as Moulton Ranch, and to make additional land

purchases that increased its size from 19,000 to 26,000 acres. In 1908. Moulton deeded one-third ownership of the ranch to Daguerre.

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That same year, Lewis Moulton married Nellie Gail. Born in Irving, Kansas, on December 8, 1878, Nellie grew up in Nebraska and then began teaching school near Seattle, Washington. Her father, John Gail, was a storekeeper in the community of El Toro, and Nellie frequently visited him during the summer months. On one of these sojourns, she met and fell in love with Lewis Moulton. Their marriage produced two daughters, Louise Moulton Hanson and Charlotte Moulton Mathis.

In 1938, after working the land for more than fifty years, Lewis Moulton died. For twelve years following his death. Nellie Gail continued to manage the ranch before eventually turning the day-to-day operations over to Charlotte and Louise, their husbands, and Daguerre's three daughters. Beginning in 1950 and continuing for a quarter century, the ranch land was slowly divided and sold off, with the final purchase being the one made by the Mission Viejo

Company in 1976. Gradually, what had once been a California rancho became part or all of the cities of Aliso Viejo, Laguna Hills, Laguna Niguel, and Laguna Woods. A large hillside community in Laguna Hills is named for Nellie Gail Moulton.



Charlotte Moulton Mathis and Louise Moulton Hansen



Chamber Murals

The three murals in the council chamber portray events that took place in the Saddleback Valley in 1769, during the 1790s, and in 1847.



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was appointed to command an expedition traveling northward into the unmapped territory of Alta California. His assignment was to seek out the legendary Bay of Monterey and secure Spanish claim to this vast frontier. With a company that numbered sixty-three and included twenty-six soldiers, fifteen Baja California Indians, two missionaries and seven muleteers to care for their one hundred mules, Captains Gaspar de Portolà and Fernando Rivera y Moncada first entered what is now Orange County, on July 26, 1769.

Francisco de Ortega and a small group of scouts, who marked trails located water, and identified possible campsites. Along the way, they came across six Acjachemen villages, including Piwiva and Huumai in Cañada Gobernadora. In the mural, the scouting party marches onward, heading toward Trabuco Canyon through the rich grasslands and the alder, oak, and willow trees of Orange County.



Soon after Father Junípero Serra dedicated Mission San Juan Capistrano in 1776, Franciscan missionaries began converting local Acjachemen to Christianity and bringing them to the mission to learn the European way of life. These converts—or neophytes, as they were called—tilled the soil, tended the crops, and helped construct mission walls and buildings.

The mission population increased steadily, and by the 1790s, lime was constantly needed to make the plaster and mortar used to enlarge existing buildings and to construct new ones. One source of this mineral was the fossil limestone reefs of ancient seabeds. Native-American



In 1769, Gaspar de Portolà, a military officer and a Spanish aristocrat,

Traveling three days ahead of this large party were Sergeant José

During the Mexican-American War, a combined force of six hundred American soldiers, sailors, and Marines under the joint command of Army General Stephen W. Kearny and U.S. Navy Commodore Robert F. Stockton made camp at Don Juan Avila's Rancho Niguel. They were traveling north from San Diego to the Los Angeles area between December 29, 1846, and January 8, 1847. Their mission was to

secure Southern California and then retake Los Angeles, which was

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neophytes cut blocks of limestone from deposits like that found in Pecten

Reef (an exposure of the middle to late Miocene Monterey Formation

located in what became Laguna Hills) and took them to the mission to

be heated in ovens until they were reduced to the valuable powder.

held by Californios. Some four weeks earlier. General Kearny and 139 mostly mule-mounted dragoons had endured a grueling 850-mile march from Santa Fe, New Mexico, to California. In the San Pasqual Valley, near San Diego, they had been besieged by Californio lancers for four days, until Commodore

Stockton arrived with reinforcements. At Avila's hacienda on the south bank of Los Alisos Creek, just west of El Camino Reál and within the borders of what later became Laguna Hills, the battle-weary Americans stopped to rest before continuing their trip north. Following their visit. Don Juan Avila went to Los Angeles to persuade his

brothers to abandon the Mexican side. On January 9, 1847, he was

present at the decisive Battle of La Mesa, where a victory by the

Americans resulted in their reoccupation of Los Angeles and helped

bring an end to the war in California three days later.

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Since the dawn of civilization, communities have called upon artists to help them honor heroes, commemorate events, and record the themes of history. In this tradition, the City of Laguna Hills commissioned six artists to capture on canvas and wood, with clay and paint, and in both metal and stone some of the important images and ideas from this region's past. These six artists are T. J. Dixon, David Harrington, James Nelson, Paul and Claudia Riha, and Robert Evans.

T. J. Dixon and James Nelson, sculptors Six life-sized terra-cotta busts in the lobby

Additional information about these artists can be found on

the city's web site at www.ci.laguna-hills.ca.us

About the Artists

David Harrington, impressionist painter Three oil-on-wood scenes on the lobby wall

Paul and Claudia Riha of Stone Imagery, mixed-media artisans Vaguero on horseback amid cattle brands on the lobby wall Interpretive signage in the lobby and city seal in the council chamber

Robert Evans, muralist Three acrylic-on-canvas murals in the council chamber Visit the City's website for Online Exhibit and

24035 El Toro Road Laguna Hills, California 92653 (949)707-2600



City of Laguna Hills

Center public art viewing is available during regular business hours.

Archive Information: www.ci.laguna-hills.ca.us

