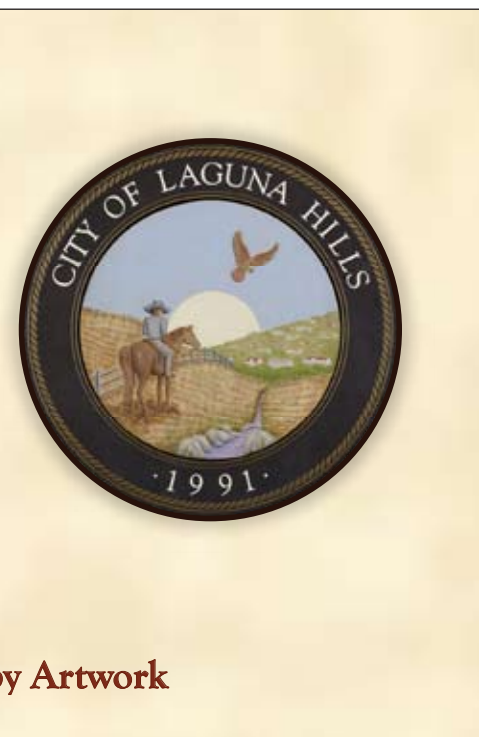


cover, page 1



BROCHURE IN METAL HOLDER WITH MOUNTAIN PROFILE DESIGN COVERING QUOTATION

inside cover, page 2



**Lobby Artwork**

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.

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 hills, and by the six landowners whose vast ranchos sustained its herds and crops. Terra-cotta busts of these landowners adorn the alcoves, and their iron brands are among those displayed on the wall.

\* Brochure images courtesy of the Saddleback Valley Historical Society

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**Native Americans**  
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 of 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 northern San Diego County.

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 Islands to the Colorado River.

From these early inhabitants, Los Angeles County inherited several place names, including Azusa, Cahuenga, Malibu, Tujunga, 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 *navil*, 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.

For a time, *Navil*—also spelled *Nigüli* or *Nigüli* in early texts and later written as *Niguel*—not only named a specific place where all traffic heading north along original Indian trails and subsequent Spanish thoroughfares crossed a major local creek but also indicated a general direction of travel north from Mission San Juan Capistrano, toward this important crossing point and beyond. Eventually, this Native-American place name was used to identify the 13,316 acres of land granted to Don Juan Avila in 1842 as Rancho Niguel.



Tongva Acjachemen

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**The Portolà Expedition (1769)**  
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.

This was the first land exploration of California by a European power, and among its lasting legacies are place names like Christiansitos, 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.

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.

During the drought of 1863–64, many of José Serrano's cattle died, forcing him into financial ruin and his ranch into foreclosure. Los Angeles banker J. S. Sluason acquired the property and then sold it, in 1884, to Dwight Whiting, a Bostonian who had become a resident of the area.

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.

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**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.

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John "Don Juan" Forster (1815–1882)  
Born in Liverpool, England, John Forster came to California in 1833 and worked for a time as a shipping agent in the hide trade at San Pedro before being made captain of that bustling port. In 1837, Forster married Ysidora Pico, sister of California Governor Pio Pico. Eight years later, Forster began acquiring land with the help of Governor Pico, who granted him the 46,432-acre Rancho Mission Vieja o La Paz (a name that was later shortened and anglicized to Rancho Mission Viejo) and the smaller Rancho Trabuco.

Don José Serrano (1809–1870)  
José Serrano was born and grew up in the Los Angeles area. In 1835, he was appointed magistrate for Los Angeles and the surrounding territory, which included most of what is now Orange County. Seven years later, California Governor Juan Bautista Alvarado granted him Rancho Catalina de los Alisos ("Valley of the Sycamores"), located in the Saddleback foothills. A subsequent grant of adjacent land by California's last Mexican governor, Pio Pico, brought Serrano's total landholdings to 10,668 acres.

Serrano and his sons used their land to grow beans, corn, and watermelon and to raise cattle. To house his family, Serrano constructed five adobe residences on this property, including one overlooking El Camino Real 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.



Don Juan Forster

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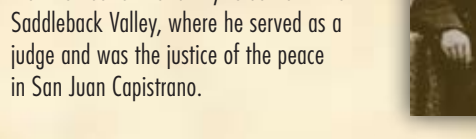
**From Ranchos to Cities**  
The signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo on February 2, 1848, officially ended the Mexican-American War. Under the terms of this treaty, Mexico ceded Alta California to the United States. As a result, Mexican land grants had to be validated by a federal land commission, 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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Because blight shriveled the vines, and poor soil and fickle rains made agriculture difficult, the land was developed instead for residential use. Thus, what had once been the English farming village of Los Alisos and 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.



Richard O'Neill

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**Discovering Orange County**  
In 1769, Gaspar de Portolà, a military officer and a Spanish aristocrat, 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 Montcada first entered what is now Orange County, on July 26, 1769.

Traveling three days ahead of this large party were Sergeant José 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 Pwiva and Huamai in the Cañada Gobernadora. In the mural, the scouting party marches onward, heading toward Trabuco Canyon through the rich grasslands and the older, oak, and willow trees of Orange County.

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 reconquest of Los Angeles and helped bring an end to the war in California three days later.

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.

War Brings Change  
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 held by Californians.

Mining Pecten Reef  
Soon after Father Junipero 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.



Lewis Moulton

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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 California 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 Real and within the borders of what later became Laguna Hills, the battle-weary Americans stopped to rest before continuing their trip north.

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Lewis Moulton

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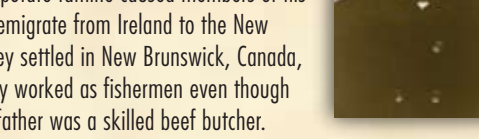
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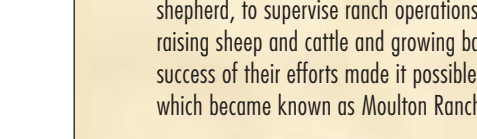
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Lewis Moulton

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**About the Artists**  
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

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

Paul and Claudia Riha of Stone Imagery, mixed-media artisans  
Vaquero on a 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

Additional information about these artists can be found on the city's web site at [www.ci.laguna-hills.ca.us](http://www.ci.laguna-hills.ca.us)



City of Laguna Hills seal

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

**Civic Center Hours of Operation**  
Monday – Friday  
8:00 am – 5:00 pm

Civic Center public art viewing is available during regular business hours.

Visit the City's website for Online Exhibit and Archive Information: [www.ci.laguna-hills.ca.us](http://www.ci.laguna-hills.ca.us)



City of Laguna Hills seal