



President's Message

Richard B. Rothwell



On October 30, Tony Moiso, CEO of the Rancho Mission Viejo Corporation, hosted our board of directors at his headquarters in

San Juan Capistrano for a meeting and lunch. Although the names "Moiso" and "Rancho Mission Viejo Corporation" may not be familiar to many readers, they are closely associated with the history of Camp Pendleton and our Society. Tony and his company are among our major supporters.

Tony's great, great grandfather, Richard O'Neill, and his partner, James C. Flood, purchased Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores in 1882. It was a huge property that included all of present day Camp Pendleton and a sizeable portion of southern Orange County to the north. The O'Neill's lived in the Ranch House until the Marine Corps purchased the San Diego County part of the ranch in 1942. The O'Neill family has maintained a strong affection for Camp Pendleton to this day and has been a generous supporter of our efforts to preserve and tell its stories.

Following lunch, Tom Ostenson, President of the San Juan Capistrano Historical Society, gave us an overview of his society's activities. A major part of their interest is restoring and maintaining the O'Neill Museum and other properties in the historic district on Los Rios Street. SJCHS has done a wonderful job in preserving the history of its community. San Juan Capistrano is a

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Forster & O'Neill and Their Great Ranch

by Don Tryon

Editor's Note: The feature article this quarter is written by Don Tryon, friend of our vice president, Jim Williams, and member of the San Juan Capistrano Historical Society. Originally written for the SJCHS newsletter, we are pleased to be able to republish this gem for our members. Thanks to Don and Jim for directing this article our way. This is part 2 of a 2 part article; part 1 of 2 appeared in the last issue of the Groundbreaker.

Almost immediately upon striking up their friendship around 1850, Richard O'Neill and James Flood decided to try their luck in the great California Gold Rush. They soon discovered that the "diggings" weren't always that productive. So O'Neill, an experienced butcher, set up shop in San Francisco, while Flood set up a saloon. O'Neill's fortunes fluctuated. Flood, however, went on to become the "King of the Comstock Lode," a founder of Wells Fargo Bank, and had many other highly successful endeavors. But the O'Neill/Flood friendship always remained constant.

O'Neill abandoned the butcher shop and went on to successfully manage a ranch up north for its owner. In 1882, O'Neill decided to inspect some interesting ranch properties for sale in Southern California. After he took the Southern Pacific train to Santa Ana, he rode the Sealy & Wright stage to San Juan Capistrano. When that stage stopped in an alleyway between two adobe buildings, little did he realize that one day these two buildings would be joined and eventually become the El Adobe de Capistrano Café and be owned by his grandson, Richard Jerome O'Neill. He then booked into the French Hotel, a two-story Monterey style adobe next door.

After Don Juan Forster (who had acquired the land in the early 1840's) passed away, his heirs, strapped with a huge mortgage, decided to sell the vast Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores, Mission Viejo, and Trabuco. O'Neill, determined to see this land, saddled up after his arrival in San Juan Capistrano and began to inspect this property. He liked what he saw. So O'Neill turned to his friend James Flood and explained the possibilities. Flood liked what he heard and invested his capital to buy the huge rancho, thus forming a partnership with his friend O'Neill on a handshake. Two months later, a title was recorded with Flood's name, and the purchase price was set at \$457,000 to reflect the \$207,000 mortgage the Forster heirs transferred as part of the sale. O'Neill became the ranch manager for those 205,000 acres. Flood remained in San Francisco but occasionally came to visit, mainly for recreation.

Richard O'Neill was a dynamic individual. Tom Forster, grandson of Don Juan Forster, once remarked about O'Neill's appearance that "he was very slight of build and very short, but you almost stood at attention when he came around. He gave orders constantly and no one dared disobey him. He worked hard himself, getting up all hours of the night, and everyone on the ranch had to work. He wore boots and denim trousers most of the time because he actively worked the ranch.

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He generally had a short stubble of beard. He was a little man in stature, but big in personality.”

By 1888, O’Neill’s management skills were bringing Flood an annual income of \$100,000. Flood passed away in 1891, leaving the ranch to his son, James Flood Jr. An excellent relationship remained between Richard O’Neill and Flood Jr., who honored his father’s commitment, and in 1906 Richard was given a half interest in the ranch as a reward for his 24 years of faithful management.

In 1907, Richard gave his half interest to his son, Jerome O’Neill, and passed away in 1910 at the age of 83. Jerome was crippled from polio, but this did not slow him down. He was well known for horsemanship and rode more, and better, than any vaquero. He became more successful than his dad and netted a half-million dollars profit in one year. Jerome always had an active interest in the ranch, and he and Flood Jr. formed a partnership as a corporation to own and operate the ranch. The two passed away two days apart in 1926. Jerome had established a trust dividing his half share of the stock benefitting his sister, Mary Baumgartner, and his brother, Richard O’Neill Jr.

In 1940, the ranch was divided between the Floods, Baumgartners, and O’Neill Jr. Fortunately, O’Neill Jr. took the Rancho Mission Viejo portion, which was 52,000 acres in Orange County, and the Floods and Baumgartners kept Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores, the San Diego County portion. In 1942, the U.S. Navy wanted a Marine Corps base on the West Coast and bought the San Diego acreage, which became Camp Pendleton. Even though the Marines use this for a training base, the land still looks a lot like it did in the old rancho days, with the rolling hills and valleys resembling the former cattle grazing era. The exceptions, of course, are the training areas and operating structures.

The Jerome O’Neill Trust was a banking trust, and the banks took on the responsibility of operating the ranch for the O’Neill heirs. They employed managers, the first being Charles Hardy, who had once managed a packing house in San Diego. Upon O’Neill’s death in 1943, the ownership of Rancho Mission Viejo remained in the Trust. The beneficiaries were his wife, Marguerite, affectionately known as Daisy or Ama Daisy, and their two children, Alice O’Neill Moiso Avery and Richard Jerome O’Neill. In 1944, the Bank Trust officers tried to sell the ranch without the beneficiaries’ approval. They had an offer of \$1.2 million and apparently had very little interest in ranch operations and just wanted to get out of the situation. But Daisy refused, held firm, and continued operations. Her interests

were in land and what it could do for her family. Thereafter, the bank was uncooperative and indecisive. Under Daisy’s direction and improvements, the ranch eventually provided a generous income.

Daisy was born Marguerite Petra de la Concepcion Moore in Los Angeles in 1879. A fifth generation Californian, she would have added that some of her ancestors were here to greet Father Junipero Serra and Commander Gaspar de Portola when they first came to California in 1769. She was baptized in the old Plaza Church in Los Angeles and was in the first graduating class at Los Angeles High School in 1898. Her father, Walter S. Moore, came from Philadelphia, settled in L.A. and married Amenaïda Rafaela Lanfranco, known as Phrosie. At a social event in the old Oceanside Hotel in 1900, their daughter, Marguerite, first met Richard O’Neill Jr. She left shortly thereafter to visit a sister in South Africa and stayed for six years. When she came home, she met O’Neill Jr. again, and this time romance blossomed. They married in 1916 and established a home in Los Angeles.

Daisy always had a deep distrust of banks and individuals who tried to manipulate her. Her grandson, Tony Moiso, now CEO for Rancho Mission Viejo, likes to tell the story of when he was 23 and was urged to talk to her about the family’s idea of developing a portion of the ranch. Other interests were encouraging her to accept a different plan, one the family felt was unacceptable. Tony was successful, but she said, “Okay, if that’s what you and Richard want to do, take care of the Ranch, watch out for connivers, and be sure that I get paid.” As a result, a partnership was formed with Donald Bren, called the Mission Viejo Company. This company was formed to develop what is known today as the City of Mission Viejo.

CEO Tony Moiso, son of Alice Avery, continues to manage Rancho Mission Viejo for the family. His grandmother, Daisy, and uncle, Richard Jerome O’Neill, have passed on. Under Tony’s stewardship the ranch has developed, with various partnerships, some of the finest communities in Orange County, including Rancho Santa Margarita, Los Flores, Ladera Ranch, Covenant Hills, and many more. They have donated substantial land for parks and conservation areas. Much of the land, however, is still set aside for cattle ranching and raising crops. This is the land that sits on a large portion of Camp Pendleton’s northern border. And Tony Moiso, ever mindful of his family’s heritage in the land that is now Camp Pendleton, is certainly one of the Camp’s closest and best neighbors. He is, also, a very generous benefactor of the Camp Pendleton Historical Society.

Do you have a good Camp Pendleton story?

We welcome personal memoirs of experiences at Camp Pendleton for publication in future issues.

Please email your story (500 words or less) to calfrantz@verizon.net. (Submissions are subject to editing.)

Old Corps Parade Mystery

This photo of a large parade formation at Camp Pendleton is the source of many a mystery. (The picture is from the memorabilia collection of Lt. Col. James C. Hitz, USMC (Ret.)) Stamped on the backside of the photo is the following: "SWANSONS Service Studio, 303 N. Hill St., Oceanside, Calif." Below the stamp is a penciled date: "6/17/49." That is as much as we know. The occasion of the parade, the units on parade, the exact location on the base, and much else are all unknown.



At the left side of the marching column, in about the middle of the photo, one can see two guidons stuck in the ground, possibly indicating a position for reviewing officials. That there is no one positioned there indicates this may have been a rehearsal. Of particular note are the six observation planes flying over the formation — a show of the Marine Corps air/ground team of that era. Obviously it took some delicate timing to catch this flight in the picture. If you look closely at the nearest unit in the foreground, you will see that the second and fourth ranks are pulling some sort of wheeled objects. What could they be?

On the right side of the picture is the band unit. In the background, behind the band, one can barely make out additional units in the parade, including what appears to be a truck unit. All quite mystifying. Can any of our readers shed light on these mysteries?

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charming town. The town, its mission, and its historic district are well worth a visit.

Writer Robin Hutton has completed a soon to be published book about Reckless, a mare that supported the 5th Marines recoilless rifle platoon during the Korean Conflict. Reckless was twice wounded in action in the line of duty. After the war, Marines brought her back to Camp Pendleton. It is a wonderful story of the mutual dedication between horse and Marines. Robin's friend, Jocelyn Russell, created a life-sized statue of Reckless that was placed on the grounds of the National Museum of the Marine Corps this past July. Both women would like to place an identical statue at Camp Pendleton. Cost for production, transportation, and installation is estimated to be about \$100,000. I invited Robin to attend our January 2014 board meeting to discuss her plan. I am hopeful that the board will agree that CPHS should help with this exciting and worthwhile project.

Thanks to our members, CPHS has made significant contributions in telling and preserving the history of Camp Pendleton. I look forward to reporting additional progress in future issues of Groundbreaker.

Richard B. Rothwell

www.camppendletonhistoricalsociety.org
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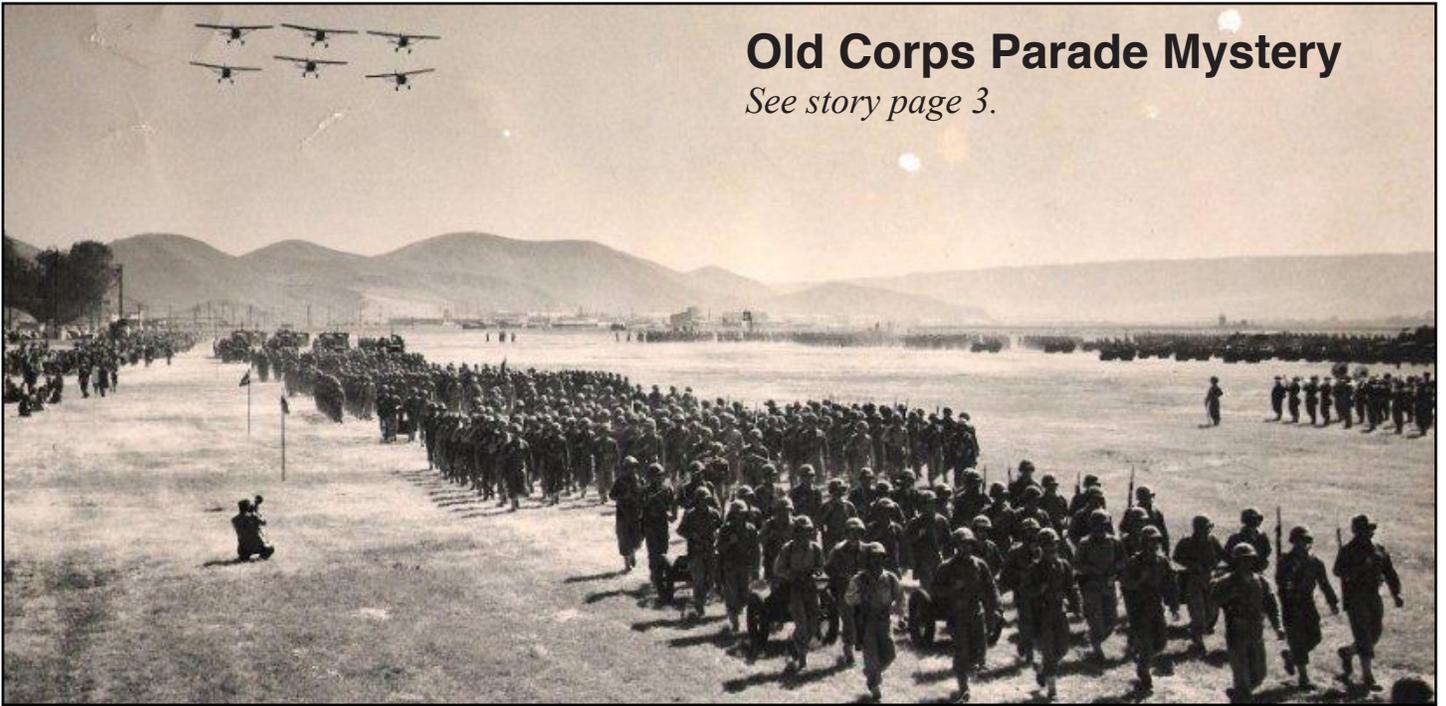
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Old Corps Parade Mystery

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Camp Pendleton Historical Society
...preserving a rich and colorful history