



President's Message



Richard B. Rothwell

It saddens me to report that *Tony Forster*, a founding member of the CPHS Council of Advisors, passed away on June 21, 2007. Tony's contributions to the

preservation of California history are highlighted elsewhere in this newsletter. He was as good friend and we will miss him.

Welcome aboard to a new member of our Board of Directors -- *Col R. Stewart Navarre*, USMC (Ret). Until his retirement on June 15, Stewart was Chief of Staff, Marine Corps Installations West. While holding that position he served as an ex officio member of the CPHS Board and was very helpful in getting us off on the right foot. I know he will be even more valuable as a full member of our Board.

In the last newsletter I mentioned our interest in assisting the Marine Corps in maintaining the Ranch House after it ceases to serve as a general officer residence. Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton continues to work through the issues relating to this change. When the path is determined and our role is defined, I will report to you.

In the meantime, CPHS is investigating several potential projects related to preserving and telling the history of Camp Pendleton. I expect that one or more of them will be adopted and look forward to reporting on them to you.

Thank you for your continued support and please pass the word about CPHS to your friends. Every member get a member!

Richard B. Rothwell

An Historical Treasure Lost

By Jim Williams

June 21, 2007, was a sad day at Camp Pendleton. The American flag flew at half-staff at the historic Santa Margarita Ranch House. This time it did not commemorate the loss of the Commander-in-Chief or a Marine General but, rather, the loss of one of Southern California's historical icons, Thomas Anthony "Tony" Forster. Tony passed away due to a brain aneurysm at age 72. His funeral was held in the Mission Basilica in San Juan Capistrano, the town he loved so well. More than 1000 people were in attendance to honor the town's former mayor.



Photo courtesy Jim Graves and the Capistrano Independent News

Thomas Anthony "Tony" Forster wearing the docent's hat for the San Juan Capistrano Historical Society

A founding member of the Camp Pendleton Historical Society's Council of Advisors, Tony is remembered as a larger than life figure, who carried on his family's historic traditions. Tony's great-great grandfather, Don Juan Forster, was the first

to develop the Rancho Santa Margarita into an extensive cattle ranch, covering 226,000 acres, 353 square miles extending from the former Marine corps Air Station at El Toro to Oceanside and as far inland as Fallbrook. During the course of his property acquisition, Don Juan bought the Mission San Juan Capistrano for \$710 and the family lived there until President Lincoln gave it back to the Catholic Church. The family then moved to the Ranch House on the Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores. When he passed away in 1882, Don Juan was California's largest landowner. Much of the original ranch is now Camp Pendleton and the Ranch House has served, for many years, as the residence of the Commanding General.

Tony Forster soaked up this family history from the time he was born in San Juan Capistrano. He reveled in the tales of the past and felt that it was his responsibility to keep the family legacy and the town's heritage alive. The editor of the Capistrano Dispatch wrote that Tony was "... a one-man historical treasure." As 17-year president of the San Juan Capistrano Historical Society, Tony was a driving force in making the Society among the most active in California. A favorite event for Society members was the annual Christmas visit to the Ranch House, hosted by the Commanding General's wife and the Santa Margarita y Las Flores Docents.

Not one to miss a good time, Tony was a 42-year member of the El Viaje de Portola' Riders. He was a perfect fit for the group's goal of perpetuating Western heritage and comradery. The Mission San Juan Capistrano was another of his favorite beneficiaries. He was active on the Mission Preservation Foundation Board and contributed in many ways to support the preservation, stabilization and renovation of the Old Mission.

Tony Moiso, CEO of the Rancho Mission Viejo as well as a founding member of the Camp Pendleton Historical Society's Council of Advisors gave

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the eulogy. Moiso, a member of the O' Neill Family, said he had known Tony Forster all his life. "Our families were intertwined through the vast land holdings each family has," said Moiso. "Tony Forster and I forged a friendship during childhood that remained steadfast to this day. It has been an honor to ride life's trail with him. I miss him already."

A graduate of West Point, Tony served in the Army for six years, leaving as a captain. He worked at TRW Systems for a time, and later owned several businesses in San Juan Capistrano, partnering with younger brother, Patrick. He is survived

by wife, Ann, children Christa, Carlos, Marco and Alicia and three grandchildren, step-children Ann, Susan and Jason, three step-grandchildren, and a large extended family.

The American flag that flew over the Ranch House upon Tony's death, was presented to the Forster family on behalf of MGen. and Mrs. Michael Lehnert, as well as the Camp Pendleton Historical Society and the Santa Margarita y Las Flores Docents. Tony's brother, Pat Forster, will continue on our Council of Advisors to carry on the family's name.

Profile: Bill Taylor Remembers

By Anne Estes

Some people are just lucky. Bill Taylor considers himself one of the luckiest people in the world. In the years following World War II, when much of the infrastructure of Camp Pendleton as we know it today began to take shape, Bill landed the enviable job of managing all of the Base real estate. He was on board when the Interstate 5 and the nuclear generating station at San Onofre were planned and constructed. And he remembers it all as if it were yesterday.

William Duncan Taylor was born in Redondo Beach, California, the son of a postman who had inaugurated the postal delivery service in that city in 1912. Bill graduated from Redondo Union High School, and went on to get his bachelor's degree in forestry from the University of Idaho, Moscow, in 1938, when horses and mules were still used to harvest wheat. No schooling however could have prepared him for what became his life's journey.

You might say Bill Taylor wrote the book on managing the land at Camp Pendleton. Everything involving cropland, range land, wildlife and watershed land and water resources for 125,000 acres of rugged terrain

came under his oversight and management. Truck farmers (those whose crops needed irrigation) grew tomatoes, celery, cabbage and strawberries. Paul Ecke, the famed poinsettia grower, had a 200-acre farm on the Base. There was a potato farm behind the main gate when Bill started his job.



Bill Taylor holds his retirement gift from the Base. The wagon wheel was a gift from Louis Magee.



Camp Pendleton received many awards for conservation during Bill Taylor's 26-year career as ranch manager. Holding a conservation trophy awarded by the USMC are (L) MGen. George S. Bowman, CG MCB, Camp Pendleton and (R) Col. A.C. "Ace" Bowen, USMCR, ACS-G4.

Much like today, there was pressure on the USMC to justify its vast land holding in such a desirable location. A memo from the Public Works Office dated November 2, 1964, could have been written in 2007: "Camp Pendleton land has become so attractive to private speculative and other outside interests that it has become necessary for the Marine Corps to justify the ownership and management of its vast land holdings." Bill was frequently tasked to handle politically sensitive issues. He represented the command during the design and construction of the I-5 through the Base. And, it was he who suggested the two rest stations at Aliso Canyon.

Bill was on board when a number of movies were made at the Base, such as "The Gallant Hours," starring James Cagney as Admiral Halsey. As might be expected, the film production companies had some unusual requests. One needed corrugated metal for a scene, so an old building was torn down. Sheep needed for an

Australian-themed film? No problem. The Base had thousands available.

One day in 1972, the curator of mammals at the San Diego Zoo phoned Bill and said he had a surplus of bison that other zoos couldn't accept. Would Camp Pendleton be able to handle a herd of twelve? MGen. Herman Poggemeyer, Jr., Base commander at the time, approved, and the bison were re-located to Case Springs. The herd today, descendants of the original bison, numbers about 113.

Bill and Mildred Eleanor ("Milly"), his wife of 68 years, live on three scenic acres in Vista in the home that Bill built himself in 1950 - 1951 while he and Milly lived on the Base. A son and daughter live nearby. Bill cultivates a variety of crops on the property including a good-sized plot of corn. He is active in Rotary and the Vista Historical Society.



L to R Melvin R. Laird, Secretary of Defense under President Richard M. Nixon, Milly Taylor, Bill Taylor, and an unidentified aide to Mr. Laird, at the reception held at Ranch House after the ceremony in 1972 where Bill received the Department of Defense award for conservation.

During his 26-year career, Bill served under 18 generals. When he retired, the Marine Corps gave him a large party and a unique gift for his long and dedicated service. On a piece of a beam from the Ranch House that had been removed because of termite damage is a reproduction of a branding iron, the USMC globe and anchor, and an etching of the T-hanging-O brand. A brass plaque on one side reads: William D. Taylor, Director Natural Resources, MCB Camp Pendleton, 15 Nov. 1948 - 15 Jan. 1976. The plaque on the other side reads: From the Ranch House, Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores. A well-earned tribute to a lucky man.

Founding Families of the Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores Continued: The Irsih Take Over

By Anne Estes

After Don Juan Forster died in 1882 his heirs were forced to sell the rancho to settle debts. The story of the next owners covers the 60-year period from the 1880s until 1942. James Flood was a saloon-keeper in San Francisco. He became the money-man, his vast wealth derived from the famous Comstock Lode. His friend, Richard O'Neill, was a butcher who became a successful cattle rancher in Northern California.



James Flood

Like many business deals of the time, their partnership was sealed with a handshake. Flood provided the bulk of the cost of the Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores, \$450,000. He visited only occasionally, traveling in his pri-



Richard O'Neill, Sr. and grandson pose next to James Flood's private railroad car;

ate railroad car. Richard O'Neill, and later his son, Jerome, ran the ranch and re-built it into a lucrative cattle operation with around 25,000 head on 225,000 acres.

Richard O'Neill was born in Ireland in 1824. His family emigrated to New Brunswick, Canada, when he was only a year old, later moving to Boston. O'Neill followed his father into the butcher business. In 1849, he moved west to try his hand at gold mining, and when that proved unsuccessful, he opened a butcher shop in San Francisco. James Flood owned a nearby saloon, the Auction Lunch, and O'Neill provided meat for the saloon's customers.

James Clair Flood, whose parents were also from Ireland, was born in New York in 1826 and he too moved to San Francisco in 1849. His saloon was a popular spot for brokers. The Comstock Lode, the largest silver deposit in history, had been discovered in 1859, and Flood and his partners began to speculate in mining stock, amassing enormous fortunes. When the silver ore ran out, they in-

vested in real estate and railroads. James Flood's fortune would have been worth about \$20 billion today.

As a testament to his great wealth, Flood built a 42-room mansion atop Nob Hill in 1886. It was one of two Nob Hill structures to survive the 1906 earthquake and fire, and is the home today of the private Pacific Union Club. Flood died in 1889; O'Neill lived until 1910. By an odd coincidence, their sons, Je-



Richard O'Neill, Jr., Richard O'Neill, Sr. holding grandson John Baumgartner, unidentified gentleman, and Jerome O'Neill on the Ranch House porch;

rome O'Neill, and James L. Flood, died within a day of one another in 1926.

When the United States Marine Corps bought the southern half of the ranch from the Flood and O'Neill heirs, a large section on the North side, in what is now Mission Viejo, remained in the hands of the heirs. About 20,000 acres in Orange County are currently held by O'Neill family members. Among holdings that remain in the Flood family are the landmark wedge-shaped Flood Building built in 1904, and a 37,000 acre spread in Santa Barbara County.

In a 1994 oral history interview Alice Marguerite O'Neill Avery, the granddaughter of Richard O'Neill, observed that although they owned miles of valuable beachfront, the Floods needed money after the Depression. Her father, whose income was around \$25,000 to \$30,000 annually from the ranch, had to borrow money for her wedding in 1938. Mrs. Avery said the sale of the rights to build the I-5 in the Fifties was the first "real" money she made.

Mrs. Avery still considers the Ranch House "home," and has visited there many times over the years as a guest of

the general residing in the Ranch House. She watched the troops leave for Korea with her mother, "Daisy," who lived to be 102. Mrs. Avery and her family have hosted numerous barbecues at her Rancho Mission Viejo, reciprocating the generals' hospitality.

Recommended reading: *Rancho Santa Margarita Remembered* by Jerome W. Baumgartner, Fithian Press, Santa Barbara, California, 1989; *Silver Kings, the Lives and Times of Mackay, Fair, Flood and O'Brien, Lords of the Nevada Comstock Lode*, by Oscar Lewis, Alfred A. Knopf, NY, 1947.

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Charter Members

We are pleased to welcome to our newest member, J. Peter Baumgartner, who joined at the Commander's Circle level (\$250 to \$499). Mr. Baumgartner lives in San Francisco, and is a descendant of the O'Neill family who managed the Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores from the 1880s until the Marines bought it in 1942.

Volunteer Staff

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New On Our Website

Items of interest which may not be included in Groundbreaker are on our website, www.camppendleton-historicalsociety.org. For example, we have reprinted an article that appeared in the Marine League's magazine, *Semper Fi*. It salutes Camp Pendleton's 65th Anniversary with photos and an essay covering the early history of the Base when it was known as Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores. Check it out!

Get On Board

One of the keys to building awareness of CPHS is networking with our friends. To help members become familiar with our story, we are offering two brochures for distribution. Please order your free copies by e-mail to Howard Blair at hgblair@cox.net, or phone 858-583-0067.

Stay Tuned

Future issues will feature stories about the tradition of horse rides on the Base, a story about SSgt. Reckless, horse hero of the Korean War, and an article by Paul Bryan Gray, author of *Forster vs. Pico*. We invite our readers to contribute stories of their experiences at Camp Pendleton for publication in future issues. Humorous pieces would be particularly welcome. Please e-mail your 300 words or less to anneestes@adelphia.net. Submissions may be subject to editing.

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