



## President's Message

Richard B. Rothwell



Your society continues to build alliances as part of our effort to get the word out. I gave a presentation about our efforts to help the Marine Corps preserve the history of Camp

Pendleton to the Vista Historical Society. Part of my program included a showing of our video, "Friars, Vaqueros, and Marines," which was well received. That meeting led to requests from two other local organizations for similar presentations and to the beginnings of an alliance with the Camp Pendleton Rotary Club. On a broader front "The Leatherneck", a monthly publication of the Marine Corps Association, has agreed to place a promotional piece about CPHS in a forthcoming edition and the 1st Marine Division continues to support our cause in their publication, "The Old Breed."

In April Major General Michael Lehnert, Commanding General, Marine Corps Installations West presented two hand made wooden bowls to CPHS. In his off time General Lehnert is a skilled craftsman. CPHS will donate the bowl I am holding to the Marine Corps for display in the Ranch House. We will offer the other at auction during a future fundraiser.



Our project to reframe and format the collection of Col Charles Waterhouse original oil paintings is now complete. The 15 paintings depicting life in the Southeast Asian refugee camps aboard Camp Pendleton in 1975 will be on

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## The Rancho's Journals: An Inside Glimpse of the Working Ranch

*Article contributed by Ann Hallock. She is a Southern California native and retired professor. Her research and writing now focus on the Rancho's Las Flores Adobe--an interest that began fifty years ago, when her uncle described this remarkable adobe home of his friends, Louis and Ruth Magee.*

Although much is known of the Magee family, who were Las Flores' residents from 1888 until 1967, I knew little about the daily life of the Adobe's first residents—Marcos Forster, his wife Guadalupe de Avila, and their three sons and two daughters—who lived in Las Flores from ca. 1868 until 1882. The only glimpses into the Forsters' private life during those years are a few posed, family photographs, and the brief notation by an 1879 guest who had arrived by stage that he enjoyed a lavish luncheon at Las Flores before traveling to Don Juan's ranch house.

Hoping to learn more about the Forsters' life at Las Flores, I was privileged to read four of six of the Rancho's journals of the years 1873 (incomplete), 1876, 1877, 1878, 1879, and 1881. Those journals have been preserved by Marcos Forster's descendants--his great-grandson Patrick and wife Kathy, and Tony Forster's wife, Ann-- to whom I am indebted for their generosity and thoughtfulness.

Each of the year-long journals is wrapped in a leather casing and is about 3 1/2" wide and 6" long. Their paper pages are secured together at the top and look very much like a miniature legal pad. Each page is lined across the 3 1/2" width on both sides, and each side is divided into three, chronological, dated segments that continue from January 1 to December 31.

The journals' daily entries are not always written by the same hand. Some of the early pages are in a large script written in faint pencil. The entries in the later years, however, are in Don Juan's tiny handwriting penned in black ink. The entries are written at times in Spanish, at times in English, and sometimes both languages are used in the same entry.



*Twenty-three-year-old Don Juan Forster with his bride Isidora Pico Forster (six years his senior) (circa 1837).*

When Don Juan writes about roundups, cattle, and horses, he uses the Spanish terminology, much as he would have done in speaking with his vaqueros. But when he writes about other matters—including his meticulous observations on rainfall or its lack—he prefers his native English tongue.

Although these journals provided scant additional information about the Marcos Forsters at Las Flores, they offer a detailed synopsis of the notable events of each day in the life of the working Rancho. The 1873 and 1876 journals recorded three cattle drives, documented in English. The unknown writer of the penciled, 1873 entries details each day of the two horse drives he made with Chico (perhaps Marcos' brother, Francisco Pio, known as Chico) from the Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores to Camp Verde, east of Prescott, Arizona. Camp Verde was adjacent to Fort Verde, which served as the staging base for military operations in the surrounding area from 1865 to 1880 during the Indian Wars. His daily entries note the hour he and Chico awakened (around 6:00 a.m.), the sites

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# WHO OR WHAT WAS CHAPPO?

by Col. Richard B. Rothwell USMC (Ret)

Many old friends of Camp Pendleton are familiar with Chappo Flats. Today it is known as the Chappo Area or, for those who prefer numeric designations, the 22 Area. You can't miss it if you are traveling east along Vandegrift Blvd from the Main Gate. About eight or nine miles into the base the road rounds a bend and suddenly the open countryside becomes a built up area. The air station is on your left. Beyond it to the north is a range of hills that serve as the impact area for what many have known as the Chappo Flats rifle and pistol ranges. Thousands of Marines have watched those hills come alive with the rising sun as they waited to send rounds down range.

As with the names of many places on Camp Pendleton, Chappo Flats predates the Marine Corps. Some old names can be traced to the early Spanish explorers. Others stem from the mission and rancho eras. Marines have retained most of the old Hispanic names because of their strong appreciation of history. Some say that in this case President Franklin Roosevelt fortified their appreciation when he visited Camp Pendleton in September 1942 for its official dedication. Having been advised that some prominent local citizens were concerned that Marines might destroy the historic ranch traditions, he asked base leaders to maintain its rich heritage insofar as possible. A President's request is not soon forgotten.

Since 1942 hundreds of thousands of people have driven through or worked in Chappo Flats, but it is a safe bet that very few, if any, know how it got its name. Who or what was Chappo? Some speculate that the word comes from "chaps," the leather leggings worn by

cowboys for protection from the chaparral. That's possible, but does not seem likely. Vaqueros on the Santa Margarita y Las Flores Ranch generally wore only jeans, two pair if they were working in thick brush. Chaps were uncomfortable, particularly if a cowboy had to dismount, which he often did. Until recently, Chappo seemed to be one of the old names whose story of origin had been lost in time.

One our members, Robert W. Carrick, believes he has solved the mystery. Bob told his story during a recent oral history session.



PFC Bob Carrick (1943)



Bob Carrick present day

Bob moved to San Clemente, California as a teenager in 1940 from a Chicago suburb. He adapted readily to Western life, quickly learning to ride and later purchasing his own horse. Bob and his friends spent much of their free time riding through what is now the northern part of Camp Pendleton. He attended high school in the nearby town of San Juan Capistrano. During an off-campus lunch

break he met and became friends with a Mexican cowboy, who was well known and respected in the town. Although the quiet, handsome man had many friends, everyone seemed to know him only as Chappo. It was not clear if that was his first name, last name, or just a nickname. Bob didn't care. To him, Chappo, an authentic, working cowboy, was just his friend.

During World War II Bob enlisted in the Marine Corps, serving in the South Pacific and, after the war, in China. When he returned home, he reestablished his friendship with Chappo. During one of their conversations Bob asked Chappo if his father had been a cowboy. Chappo replied, "Yes. My father was a very good cowboy."

He went on to say that he and his father had the same name – Ambrosia Valenzuela – and that they also shared the nickname Chappo. He told Bob that Chappo Flats on Camp Pendleton was named after his father.

Bob's casual question led to a story that, in collaboration with other evidence, seems to solve the mystery of Chappo Flats. Unlike his son, who stood about 5' 10" tall, Chappo Sr. was a smaller man. It appears that Chappo is a derivative of the Spanish word "chaparro" that means "short person." Around the beginning of the 20th Century Chappo Sr. was the head vaquero on the Santa Margarita y Las Flores Ranch. Jerome O. Baumgartner, one of the heirs to ownership of the ranch, recalled that Chappo Sr. was an expert horseman. Stories, no doubt exaggerated, told of him "riding a bucking horse with silver dollars



between the soles of his boots and the stirrups and he would keep them there while the horse was bucking and twisting. Sadly and ironically, Baumgartner reported that this expert horseman died in 1910 from a broken back after his horse ran under a sycamore tree.

Chappo Jr. died in 1970 and, as far as we know, left no documentation to verify his report that Chappo Flats was named after his father. Jerome Baumgartner, now deceased, confirmed that Chappo Sr. was a key hand at the Santa Margarita y Las Flores Ranch and that he died tragically at the height of his career. While neither story proves that Ambrosia Valenzuela was the namesake for Chappo Flats, both have a ring of truth and in combination support that conclusion. Someone once said that history is a bunch of stories generally believed. I choose to believe that he was.



Chappo Jr. (circa 1944)



Chappo Sr. (circa 1907)



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they passed, and the distance they traveled each day (from sixteen to twenty miles). A contemporary map allowed me to trace their route across the Mohave Desert to present-day Needles, Arizona, where they ferried 300 head across the Colorado River and "swam the rest." After delivering their herd, the men stopped in Prescott for three days before heading home to the Rancho.

The 1876 journal similarly traces a cattle drive from the Rancho to Bakersfield, and then northwest to Gilroy, California, where the herd was delivered to its purchaser. During those years the Rancho's cattle sold for \$16.00 to \$20.00 a head. This drive netted in excess of \$4,000. Don Juan's meticulous entries of credits and debits to the accounts of his sons indicate that each son had his own herd—and brand—for each account is marked by his brand. Marcos' brand was ↑.

The 1876 journal is also remarkable for Don Juan's frequent entries concerning payments of his mortgage notes and his travels by train from Anaheim to Los Angeles and San Francisco to make those payments. He observes that he rented quarters in San Francisco to avoid the expense of repeated stays in hotel rooms.

Don Juan's tiny, neat script in black ink captures the notable events of each day in the 1877 journal. 1877 was a particularly active year, filled with sixteen cattle drives for the northern market of Tulare, California. Each drive had about 200

cattle. In this year the Rancho also began to herd its cattle to Anaheim, where they were shipped north by rail. The journal entries note that the Rancho shipped cattle hides and sheep hides as well. They sold for \$2.00 a hide.

His entries in his journal of 1877 also describe in minute detail the survey he had commissioned of the Rancho, noting its boundary lines by physical features such as a cabin, a tree, an outcropping or rocks, etc. At the conclusion of this description of his property, he notes its perimeter is 77.44 miles. Certainly his final calculation focused on the fencing of the Rancho, which began that year in compliance with the fencing law that spelled the end of the rancheros' open ranges. In fact, a later entry is his itemized list of purchased fencing materials and their cost.

In the early months of his journal of 1881, the year before his death and the sale of the Rancho, Don Juan writes that a schooner arrived at Forster Landing to receive Marcos' shipment of wheat. This entry confirms that in his last years at Las Flores Marcos had increasingly turned to raising sheep and wheat. Then, in a larger script, these few tragic words fill his March 15 entry: "Alas! Alas! On this day my son Francisco Pio was assassinated in Los Angeles."

Time did not permit reading beyond this entry of the 1881 journal nor reading the journals of the pivotal years 1878 and 1879. They will be the focus of a subsequent article.

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## Western Hoedown at Las Flores Adobe

**Saturday, Oct. 11, 2008 from 4 p.m. - 9 p.m.**

**Las Flores Adobe, Camp Pendleton**

*for a*

**Western BBQ with Western Shows**

**by the "Code of the West"**

*and*

**Western Music, Barn Dancing and a Silent Auction**

**for only \$50 a plate**

*Make checks payable to the Camp Pendleton Historical Society.  
All net proceeds go to the restoration of the Historical Landmark,  
The Las Flores Adobe at Camp Pendleton.*

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display at the Ranch House and available for special off-Base showings for the general public.

In my last report I mentioned conducting an oral history interview with one of our members, Bob Carrick. Bob's story is retold in this edition of the Groundbreaker.

At its June meeting, your Board of Directors voted to focus the near term efforts of CPHS on helping the Base complete the restoration of the Las Flores adobe. As I have previously reported, this Monterey style adobe dates from the 1850's and is on the National Register of Historic Places as a National Historic Landmark. While considerable restoration has already been accomplished, more is needed. The Camp Pendleton staff estimates the cost of completing the restoration to be \$125,000. The Board of Directors is investigating various options to help raise this money.

As always, I thank you for your support. I look forward to reporting to you again next quarter or as significant events occur.

*Richard B. Lathwell*

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## 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 [hgblair@cox.net](mailto:hgblair@cox.net) or phone 858-583-0067.

## Next Issue

Rendering of the Las Flores Adobe, located just inside the Pulgas Road gate on Camp Pendleton property. Built in 1864, the adobe building was neglected for years and was in a poor state before some restoration began. Who's doing the restoration? How much is left to do? What's it look like today? How much will it cost to finish? Find out in the next issue of the Groundbreaker.



## Stay Tuned

We invite our readers to contribute stories of their experiences aboard Camp Pendleton for publication in future issues. Humorous pieces would be particularly welcome. Please e-mail your 300 words or less to [hgblair@cox.net](mailto:hgblair@cox.net), subject line "CPHS." Submissions may be subject to editing.



## Preserving a Rich and Colorful History

[www.camppendletonhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.camppendletonhistoricalsociety.org)

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