



A VIEW OF THE SANTA MARGARITA RANCH HOUSE

By Faye Jonason, Director
Camp Pendleton History and Museum Division

The Santa Margarita Ranch House National Historic Site has been many things to many people over its nearly two centuries: a home, a center of business, a refuge, a place of outstanding hospitality and a cherished fond memory. This old and charming adobe is a place of considerable heritage and importance in the chronicles of California and American history. Its walls tell archeologists about the changes of times and people and the ways of doing.

Yes, there are the deep, large hand-made adobe brick walls in the Pio Pico room made without a plumb line by the Native Americans of his time. The work of the native people reflects their training by the padres during the building of the missions. Pico's original two rooms were adobe walls five to seven feet thick at their base tapering to three feet at the top. These not-quite perpendicular corners and very large and sturdy bricks make us smile, but also remind us that these have stood more than 180

years while some contemporary constructions have not fared as well.

Even if you climb a ladder to go up into the attic from Ysidora's Bedroom, what you find are those thick and impressive raw unpainted adobe walls. To protect young women from marauders who might kidnap them, the vast attic rooms became their bedchambers with only a ladder access. On an exploratory trip up the ladder, it was interesting to find in the same attic area a latter-era wiring for a servant call system with labels indicating the rooms that were linked.

In the main hall, a very deep wall exists between the Sala or living room and the Pio Pico room. Guesses are that it was the original exterior wall to the structure built under Pio and Andres Pico's direction. We are told that Pio and Andres built two rooms which first began the Ranch House structure. These are the thick adobe walls

Continued page 2, Ranch House

Ranch House, Cont.



Ranch House main entry with yellow foliage

built by Natives. The rest of the house has thinner walls built later for Pio and Andre's brother-in-law and Englishman, John Forster.

John Forster became a landowner in the 1840s only after he became Catholic, a Mexican citizen and husband to Ysidora Pico. As Governor of Mexico's Alta California, Pio Pico gave brother-in-law Forster several land grants. Once a landowner, Forster became a Don, and his name became Don Juan Forster. He was an enterprising soul who tried his hand at railroad development, building and colonizing Forster City at San Onofre and actually owned much of what is now Orange and San Diego counties. His property totaled about 226,000 acres, the largest Southern California ranch under the ownership of one person. By 1879, the Santa Margarita y Las Flores Rancho was patented and confirmed as the largest ranch in the United States.

Forster did much to expand the Santa Margarita Ranch House and built the levee to wall against the flooding of the Santa Margarita River. There was a major flood in 1916 that wiped out the large pond that had existed behind the Bunk House, but the real damage came later after the Marine Corps owned the property. In 1993, the river flooded and tore through the levee and took out the two long walls of the Ranch House Chapel. Volunteers raised money and even made adobe bricks to restore the chapel walls. The Marine Corps supported the rebuilding and later re-engineered and rebuilt the levee.

In 1882, the Forster family sold the Santa

Margarita y Las Flores property to silver mine king James Flood who partnered his money with Richard O'Neill's cattle management. At that time, there was a buggy shed on the service entrance side of the Ranch House. Later, around 1916, the O'Neills enclosed the buggy shed with more modern concrete hollow clay tile walls to create what later became the private living room and dining room for general officer residents. The rooms next to the private living room still have the original wood bars on the windows, but the new addition windows do not. The windows on the end are thought to have been the payout windows for the cowboy staff during Jerome O'Neill's administration. On the outside veranda, it is obvious where the concrete clay tile walls meet the adjacent adobe walls.

Then there is the great arch wall in the Cowboy Room entry made in 1946 to reuse the exterior cowboy eating hall built outside of the kitchen. That wall encloses part of the original exterior house wall and gave entry to the short-lived Officer's Club where one could enjoy lunch for fifty cents or dinner for a dollar with reservations.

The club's cowboy-styled wagon wheel and cattle-horn chandeliers along with heavy hard oak tables and chairs marked with the rancho's T-O brand still grace the room. These Spanish revival furnishings were custom-made by Frank and George Mason under the Monterey name. Although the Camp Pendleton contract was their largest World War II military base contract, the Monterey line ended in 1943. These furnishings, however, continued to serve the thirty-four generals with families



Veranda at the Ranch House.



Bell and Arch gate at the Ranch House.



Aerial view of Ranch House complex.

who lived at the Ranch House from 1947 to 2007 and remain very collectible today.

The club's foyer to the dining area featured a mural of San Francisco in the evening with cowboys out on the town and ships in the harbor. The painting was created for the club by a World War II Combat Marine, Master Sgt. Russell Vickers. He later worked as a combat artist during the Korean War. After his military service, he became a commercial illustrator for the aerospace industry in Los Angeles for twenty years. He moved to Arizona where he became renowned for his traditional, realistic paintings of Old West scenes. Vickers died in 1997 at age 73, having created a large body of popular western-themed paintings.

A community outcry against the Marine Club bar in the cherished historic ranch house was registered with the Command. In response, a decision was made to convert the club into a GOQ, or General Officer's Quarters. Veterans who at the time worked for the Facilities Maintenance Department were asked to cover the mural to make the area more appropriate for use by the general's family. The workmen selected the heavy-duty target paper of the time to cover the artwork, and in turn covered that in plaster. Years later, these workers talked to the new lady of the house convincing her to uncover the mural. According to legend, she asked that the nightshade be closed over the lady in the window of the Barbary Coast hotel. The area did become a breakfast nook for her children, but the painting has remained and delighted guests to the house ever since.

Jerome W. Baumgartner, a great grandson of the first Richard O'Neill, recorded his own father's oral history in his book, *Rancho Santa Margarita Remembered*. Referring to the Ranch House, Jerome O'Neill Baumgartner stated, "the Marines have done a wonderful job maintaining it and keeping it essentially as it was when I lived there. Of course, they've changed some of the rooms.... many of the rooms no



Maj. Gen. Erskine and his daughter Maureen in a theme-decorated Cowboy Room, 1949



A wagon wheel chandelier hangs in the redecorated Cowboy Room



T-0 branded custom-made furnishings



Docent Bob Rabourne tells the story about the Barbary Coast mural to Ranch House visitors.

longer serve the same functions as they did when it was the ranch headquarters. But everything is about the same except that now there is plumbing and electricity." Jerome O. Baumgartner continued and mentioned the construction, saying, "...to make the walls strong enough to support the heavy tile roofs, the walls had to be very thick they were terrific insulation. In the wintertime, the walls and tile roofs would hold the heat in from the fireplaces and in the summer, they kept the interior cool."

A favorite of guests to the Ranch House is the President's Room. It is so-called because during President Roosevelt's visit to dedicate the new base in September 1942, he remarked on the charm of that room and told Maj. Gen. Joseph Fegan to save the room for the next ex-President of the United States. Although FDR did not get a chance to use the room, the name remained linked to that visit and is still referred to as "the President's Room". The room had been used for many purposes before; dining room, room for the traveling padres to conduct prayers and a bedroom. To echo Ysidora Forster's religious use of the room, the Officer's Wives Club donated a period Prie-Dieu, or kneeler for private devotion. It is displayed with a rosary and a 16th century painting on wood of the Crucifixion donated by the padres of Mission San Luis Rey. Over the years, U.S. Presidents, Secretaries of State, and Secretaries of the Navy have visited or stayed in the room and slept on the antique carved wood bed donated by the O'Neill family. Photographs of Presidents' visits grace the walls and reinforce the room's name.

Over the years, many have agreed with President Franklin Roosevelt's impression of the Santa Margarita Ranch House as something special; a timepiece that needs to be preserved and visited. In 1971, the Santa Margarita Ranch House Complex became listed on the National Register of Historic Places for its specific and unique expression of Spanish and Mexican rancho culture in California history. Today, the Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores Docents and the Camp Pendleton History and Museum Division continue to share the rancho's past and its beauty with its many visitors and dignitaries.

Ranch House, Cont.



President's Room in the Ranch House



Painting from the 1870s depicting the Ranch House



President Roosevelt receives a lariat from Pancho Brown at the historic Ranch House, Camp Pendleton (Sept. 25, 1942)



Sgt. Reckless visiting Maj. Gen. and Mrs. Selden at the Ranch House. Photos courtesy of Camp Pendleton Archives.

Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores Docents

The Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores Docent organization began in 1975 when the Base Commander initiated a community outreach program and invited the support of the Officers Wives Club (OWC). OWC members researched the history of the National Historic Site and designed their unique Docent costume reminiscent of the early Californios. The tours they provided to host the general's guests at the Ranch House were popularly successful.

Today, the Docents attract service-minded people who find a special niche with the Docents. They come with a wide range of interests and talents, both men and women, from all ranks of the military and the civilian community. These volunteers have an interest in Camp Pendleton history and enjoy sharing it with military families, veterans, rancho descendants, elementary school classes, guests from surrounding communities and visiting dignitaries. While most prefer to provide valuable and informative tours presenting Camp Pendleton's fascinating storied past, others carry out much-needed research, documentation, restoration and preservation duties.

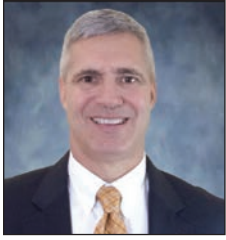
Contact us to reserve your tour at the Santa Margarita Ranch House or join to serve the community as one of the Base Commander's official volunteer Docents!! Contact the History and Museum Division by email at MCBCAMPEN_history@usmc.mil or phone (760) 725-5758 for more information.



In period dress, Docents Paul Durrance and Richard Leste at the Ranch House

President's Message

Jay Bullard



Eighty-one years ago, on Sept. 25, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt dedicated the base in honor of World War I veteran Major General Joseph H. Pendleton. General Pendleton was a staunch and vocal advocate of a west coast Marine Corps Base. Led by Colonel Lemuel C. Shepherd, a future Commandant, the 9th Marines marched to Camp Pendleton

from Camp Elliott, near present day Marine Corps Air Station Miramar. Soon after the dedication, a base headquarters and three Marine regiments were settled in tent camps at the Las Pulgas, San Onofre, and Talega areas. Each camp had its own combat and qualification ranges to facilitate training in small arms and infantry tactics. During this period, an expeditionary airfield (now Marine Corps Air Station Camp Pendleton) was built as well as a boat basin at Del Mar.

As we celebrate the eighty-first anniversary of Marines at Camp Pendleton, the Historical Society continues to flourish. Since our mission statement revision and strategy review, we continue to explore opportunities to increase membership and find opportunities to collect, preserve and interpret the history of Camp Pendleton. Specifically, we're looking at projects that will aid in the preservation of the Ranch House and finding corresponding grants to assist in funding.

On July 27, author Robin Hutton supported our Speakers Bureau by giving a presentation at the Ocean Hills Country

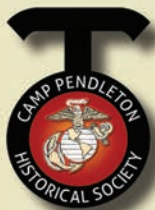


Evening Colors on Sept. 20, 2023 celebrating the 81st anniversary of the base at the Ranch House

Club. Anne Estes coordinated the venue and audience for Robin's presentation to Veterans' club at Ocean Hills. Robin gave a presentation about the story of Sgt Reckless and her new book, *War Animals: The Unsung Heroes of World War II*. Anne did a fantastic job of putting this all together that resulted in a very successful presentation. Robin enjoyed Ocean Hills and we hope to see her again. Our goal is to open up our lecture series with speakers that are able to give a presentation about our cherished history.

We cannot thank you enough for your continued support, and I look forward to seeing you in the future.

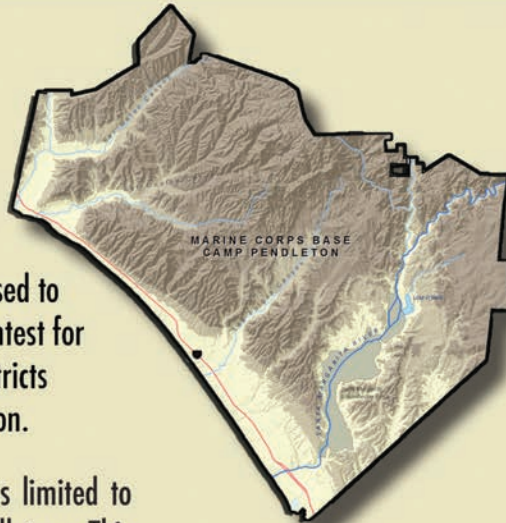
Jay Bullard



2024 Essay Contest

The Camp Pendleton Historical Society is pleased to announce the 4th Annual Historical Essay Contest for high school students living in those school districts adjacent to Marine Corps Base, Camp Pendleton.

SUBJECT SCOPE. The subject of the contest is limited to history of the land now known as Camp Pendleton. This scope includes the pre-history (archeology) of the land, its native American occupants, the Spanish exploration and mission era, the rancho era, and the history of the Camp as a significant cultural and economic institution in San Diego County since 1942. Not included in the scope is military history of Marine Corps units stationed at the camp as tenant organizations.



*For further details and
submission guidelines
visit:*

*Camp Pendleton
Historical Society website*

ELIGIBLE

High school students living
in those school districts
adjacent to Marine Corps
Base, Camp Pendleton

PRIZES

1st Place \$1,000
2nd Place \$500

All entrants will be
recognized with a certificate
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DEADLINES

Application Letter Dec. 31, 2023
Essay Submission Feb. 29, 2024



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Historical Facts about the Ranch House

- Notable Rancho owners were Pio and Andrés Pico, Don Juan Forster, James C. Flood, and Richard O'Neill.
- The Ranch House complex of buildings were constructed during five phases: pre-1842 Mission era, 1842-1864 Pio Pico era, 1864-1882 Don Juan Forster era, 1882-1942 O'Neill era, and post 1942 Marine Corps era.
- The Ranch House is approximately 12,000 square feet and has 23 rooms plus a partial basement.
- The Mexican government passed the August 1833 law to secularize all the missions resulting in the granting of property to citizens. The Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores became one of the largest Mexican land grants in California.
- Governor Juan B. Alvarado granted the Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores to Pio and Andrés Pico in 1841.
- By the 1850s, Pio Pico owned more than 500,000 acres in property and was one of the richest men in Alta (or Upper) California.
- Prominent California ranchero Don Juan Forster acquired several land grants which assembled the Santa Margarita into largest single cattle ranch in southern California. By adding the Mission Viejo and Trabuco ranchos to his holdings, his ranch covered about 226,000 acres.
- Rodeos to round up cattle were held twice a year. In late summer, cattle were counted and branded. In late spring, the cattle were collected into long droves to the San Francisco market. Such rodeos were opportunities to enact old Spanish traditions of dance, fiestas, horse racing and hospitality.
- The Santa Margarita's "extraordinarily fine grapes" were noted by a French attaché of the Mexican delegation in 1841-42. Don Juan Forster produced 1,200 gallons of wine in 1879. He successfully marketed his wines to San Diego and San Francisco.
- The California Fence Law of 1873 required all ranches to be fenced to protect plant crops against the foraging of cattle. The cost to Don Juan Forster was \$40,000 in wire and forty kegs of nails, plus months-long work from his ranch hands to cut the thousands of fence posts and to dig the post holes.
- Richard O'Neill, Sr. decided the odds were against getting rich in the California gold fields; he made his money as a San Francisco butcher during the Gold Rush.
- James C. Flood ran a saloon in San Francisco during the Gold Rush named the "Auction Lunch." He gained wealth as a "Bonanza King" of the famed Comstock Lode in Nevada. He is credited with establishing the Nevada Bank which later became Wells Fargo Bank. The bank was established to hold gold and silver product until shipping it to New York City or London.
- Richard O'Neill was referred to James Flood as a good resource for sizing up cattle ranches. They were both strong Irish Catholics who found they had much in common and became good friends.
- Indoor plumbing and electricity were installed into the Ranch House in 1917 under the direction of Jerome O'Neill. Until that time, a three-holed outhouse stood outside the current double front doors.
- The first railroad to connect Los Angeles and San Diego was the California Southern Railroad, completed in 1883. It ran along the river near the Ranch House and provided sidings for shipping out cattle.
- The Department of the Navy purchased the Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores from the families for about four and one-quarter million dollars to build the Marine Corps training base.



In branding lingo, the "flying T" and "hanging O" has long been recognized as an old 1884 historic cattle brand. Cattle purchased in Texas and brought to the rancho bore the "T and O" brand; Richard O'Neill decided to use the brand and left it on the cattle. In December 1844, O'Neill registered his Rancho Margarita brand with the San Diego County Recorder. When the Marine Corps acquired the rancho property in 1942, it was given permission to continue the use of the "T and O" brand as the Camp Pendleton logo.

www.camppendletonhistoricalsociety.org
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SPEAKERS BUREAU DEBUT

By Anne Estes

The newly reorganized CPHS Speakers Bureau launched its first event featuring Robin Hutton, master storyteller. Hosted by the Village Vets Club at Ocean Hills Country Club, in Oceanside, about 65 vets watched attentively as Robin related the story about Sgt. Reckless, famed warhorse and beloved Marine.

Author of best-selling book, *Sgt. Reckless: America's War Horse*, Robin is eminently qualified to hold the attention of her audiences with powerful images of the Korean War era, narrating carefully curated photos from original sources. Her impeccable research shows how the Marines taught the small mare to carry ammunition and supplies through live fire into battle areas and back. It is a story of love and trust and deep connection between man and animal.

Robin has been a driving force behind the erection of six statues of Sgt. Reckless around the U. S., including one at Camp Pendleton, her final resting place. Robin's second book, *War Animals, the Unsung Heroes of World War II*, also a best seller, tells the stories of a variety of heroic animals. She is closely associated with a national movement to encourage the U. S. Congress to acknowledge animal heroes with Medal of Bravery and Distinguished Service Medals.

Now your organization can hear the stories about these animals presented by an internationally recognized expert on the subject. Robin Hutton is in demand, so reserve your 2024 dates now.

Stay tuned for announcements of future Speakers Bureau topics and introductions to our master storytellers you can book for 2024. The presentations are free to your organization, though we do encourage donations. Speakers pay for their own transportation, bring visuals (slides, videos), handouts and books for sale. We ask that your venue provide audio visual equipment, pre-promotion and set up assistance. Contact us at speakers.cphs@gmail.com.



Robin Hutton speaking at Ocean Hills Country Club. Photos courtesy of Samson Chan



Ocean Hills Country Club residents listen to Robin's talk.



Robin Hutton personalizes each book for buyers.



Robin Hutton and CPHS President Jay Bullard



CPHS President Emeritus Dick Rothwell and his wife, Ann Rothwell, with Robin Hutton.

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