

Once Upon Laguna Woods

by Dean O. Dixon

Once upon a time in a magical land there were fiery volcanos, roiling seas, and fearsome animals. Then came warriors, conquerors, banishment, empires, slaves, wars, pirates, corruption, bandits, posses, lynching, ghosts, invasion, exploitation, riches, scandal and, yes, even happily ever after.

Fiction? No. These are true stories about the land right under your feet in and around Laguna Woods. So what did happen once upon Laguna Woods? Well, are you up for some time travel?

The beloved natural vistas from Laguna Woods reflect decades of conservation efforts that preserved tens of thousands of pristine acres from any future human development. You get to enjoy this in perpetuity without it ever being disturbed. Woods End Wilderness Preserve, Laguna Coast Wilderness Park, Aliso & Wood Canyons Wilderness Park, Crystal Cove State Park, Laguna Niguel Regional Park, and City of Irvine Open Space Preserve are contiguous in a synergistic display of your natural history. But what exactly do you see?

Natural erosion has exposed up to 65 million years of rock strata laid down and compressed one layer atop another by eons of changes in the earth's crust as influenced by climate, flora and fauna. Sand from deserts and beaches, mud from swamps and rivers, skeletons of sea and land creatures, recurrences of these, and still more are solidified and revealed like layers in a slice of cake for the delight of geologists and further study by anyone so inclined.

Related tectonics further changed and are changing your area even today as the Atlantic Plate pushes the North American Plate westward into the Pacific Plate along that constant worry of yours, the San Andreas Fault. The 800-mile San Andreas Fault is slightly longer than the entire state of California as it comes down the northern coast, starts inland from San Francisco Bay, moves southeast through the central valley to San Bernardino, and continues southeast through the Sonoran Desert to the Salton Sea where it ends into smaller branch faults. Sudden slips between these tectonic plates of the earth's crust, sliding on magma below, create fractures called faults and jolts called earthquakes. Some fractures opened fissures for lava

flows from and volcanic dikes between hills and mountains.

The westward movement of the North American Plate is forcing the Pacific Plate northwest. Although such rifting of the southern California coastline has occurred before, it's now slowly inching up beside northern California along the San Andreas Fault. At current pace, Laguna Woods could arrive next to and west of San Francisco in about 20 million years.

Maybe. But, as you will see, past events and current facts can be fickle predictors of future occurrences despite popular culture's aphorisms to the contrary. History can repeat itself despite your best efforts.

With pressure of the Pacific Plate opposing pressure from the North American Plate, the Pacific Plate was forced upward from the bottom of the ocean to create the Santa Ana Mountains, the border between Orange and Riverside Counties. These mountains created Orange County's Santa Ana Valley and Saddleback Valley a few miles inland from coastal beaches, cliffs, hills and canyons. The most prominent portion of the Santa Ana Mountains is referred to today as Old Saddleback and

consists of the two tallest peaks in Orange County appearing in profile as a saddle's pommel and cantle with seat between. Saddleback still is the common name for Santiago Peak (5,689 feet), Modjeska Peak (5,496 feet), and the mile-wide geological saddle between.

Despite a hundred years of intermittent usage, Santiago Peak was not named officially until the late 1800s by a U.S. government survey team. But the northern peak remained nameless until the 1909 death of Madame Helena Modjeska, an internationally famous Shakespearean actress, Polish patriot, and local resident. She owned Bay Island in Newport Beach's marina where she built the house she died in as well as her ranch and its house, National Historic Landmark "Arden," in the foothills of the canyon also bearing her name. The latter is still available today for infrequently scheduled tours.

Natural history venues near Laguna Woods are the Nix Nature Center in Laguna Coast Wilderness Park and the Laguna Hills Community Center on Alicia Parkway at Paseo De Valencia. The latter is an unexpected natural history resource from its exterior and interior designs to the exhibits in its lobby.

About 16,000 years ago, the first human beings came to and evolved in North America after traversing the harrowing Bering land bridge between Asia and North America then connecting present day Russia and Alaska. Longterm migration southward along the Pacific Ocean coastline led to the establishment of Native-American tribes in and around Laguna Woods 13,000 years ago.

The Tongva nation ranged from the north bank of Los Alisos Creek (now Aliso Creek) to southern Los Angeles County. The Acjachemen nation ranged from the south bank of the creek to northern San Diego County. Both tribes built villages within foothill canyons and atop ocean bluffs alongside freshwater springs, creeks and rivers. They gathered fruit and nuts, hunted game, and fished waterways. These tribes created a trade network with other tribes as far east as the Colorado River and as far west and north as the Channel Islands, a coastal archipelago of eight in Santa Barbara, Ventura and Los Angeles Counties, which includes Santa Catalina Island.

The de facto boundary between Tongva and Acjachemen territories was named Los Alisos Creek by Spanish explorers but today is known simply as Aliso Creek.

Part of the natural watershed from the Santa Ana mountains to the ocean, Aliso Creek is still fed by natural springs along its course so it even flows during your three dry seasons (winter is supposedly rainy) including the picturesque mile or so within Laguna Woods Village.

Los Alisos (Spanish for Alders) or, more correctly, California Sycamores lined the banks of the creek, hence its former name. However, in roughly 1570, one particular tree sprouted and outlived others to survive today in its fifth century. El Aliso Viejo (The Old Sycamore) is recognized by the landmark plaque the Daughters of the American Revolution placed in 1968, the singular word form of Aliso Creek, the derivative name of an adjacent city, and Aliso Creek Park in Laguna Woods Village where this tree perseveres as a living and fitting symbol in an ageless community.

Further downstream (westerly) on Aliso Creek there was a shallow crossing place that evolved into a sacred area for the Acjachemen people. Their name for this ford and subsequent village was Nawil (also spelled Nigüili and Nigüil), which literally translates to "maiden" meaning adolescent girl. The site was used

for ceremonies that marked the coming of age for Acjachemen women. As you will read later, this Native-American word was the basis for a Spanish proper noun, Niguel.

Europeans first arrived in Baja California (Lower California, a state in modern Mexico) when Hernán Cortés de Monroy y Pizarro and his men claimed that territory in the mid 1530s for King Carlos I of Spain. Then, in June 1542, Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo sailed three ships north along Alta California (Upper California, State of California, U.S.A.) making landings as far north as the Russian River after having missed the entrance to San Francisco Bay as all Spaniards did for the next two centuries.

To overwinter and make repairs in November 1542, Cabrillo's fleet returned south to Santa Catalina Island that he already had discovered and named "San Salvador" after his flagship. There, while trying to rescue some of his men from attacking Tongva warriors, Cabrillo broke his leg coming onshore. His injury infected, turned gangrenous, and he died within a fortnight.

Ironically, Cabrillo had accumulated his personal fortune via Spanish laws that enslaved indigenous peoples, which may indicate why Tongva warriors attacked his men. The Tongva tribe was the most powerful of local natives and resisted Spanish rule from the start. Regardless, Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo, the discoverer of California, was buried on Santa Catalina Island within sight of coastal Orange County.

Over the following two centuries, Spain set up four viceroyalties in the New World with three in South America alone. But you are concerned here with España Nueva (New Spain) that included American states from Florida to California, old Mexico, Central America, and Caribbean islands. Related explorations were focused on rumors of treasure more than settlement of lands. For Spain, sailing around Cape Horn also meant administering enormous South American viceroyalties along the way. Dedicated explorations of Alta and Baja California were further delayed because the official records of Cabrillo's voyage were lost. Subsequent summaries were not based on firsthand observations so drew little attention until the 17th Century.

In 1767, King Carlos III of Spain banished Roman Catholic Jesuits and their Society of Jesus from the Spanish kingdom and viceroyalties. Don Gaspar de Portolá, was appointed governor of Las Californias province (combining Alta and Baja California) of New Spain to replace Jesuits with the Franciscan order.

The Spanish government had become concerned that Russians might move down from Alaska to found settlements in Alta California. In 1769, Portolá volunteered to lead the first European land exploration later known as the "Sacred Expedition" because Franciscans were to convert indigenous peoples to Christianity along the way. And enslave them.

Specifically, Portolá was to route El Camino Real (The Royal or King's Road) and site mission settlements from San Diego to Monterrey with presidios or military bases at both termini. Over the next 54 years, Spaniards would found 21 missions along this first road linking Northern and Southern California.

Portolá's expedition of 63 people departed San Diego in two groups that required a hundred mules to haul their provisions as well as settlement items such as

furniture, seeds, plants and domestic animals for husbandry. Under Captain Fernando Rivera y Moncada, the lead group left two months before the second contingent so they could clear the wagon trail and pacify natives as necessary.

Among other notables in the expedition were Sgt. José Oretaga (scout), Miguel Costansó (cartographer), Father Junípero Serra (Franciscan leader), and Father Juan Crespí (Franciscan diarist).

Both groups were protected by "leather-jacket" soldiers (soldados de cuero) chosen from dragoons or cavalrymen Captain Portolá commanded before being appointed governor. To protect against arrows, the soldiers wore a leather jacket or sleeveless jerkin of six deerskin layers and carried a bullhide shield, lance, broadsword and blunderbuss (early musket with flared muzzle).

Progress was slow at two to four leguas or Spanish leagues (5.2 to 10.4 miles) per day. These first Europeans set foot on Orange County soil on July 23, 1769 and camped here in Saddleback Valley along San Juan Creek a few miles from where Mission San Juan Capistrano would be built. The next day they moved

camp to Plano Trabuco so named because a soldier lost his blunderbuss or trabuco there. (The blunderbuss can be seen at Bowers Museum in Santa Ana.) Then, after a day's rest, they proceeded within view of the next valley to the north. This was July 26th or El Día de Santa Ana (St. Anne's Day) so the Santa Ana Valley was named although the men camped that night in the hills near El Toro, present-day Lake Forest.

The next day the Portolá Expedition came upon a creek in an arroyo that they named Santiago for St. James, the patron saint of Spain. Then they went on to camp along the longest river in Southern California across from a friendly Tongva village. Here they experienced an earthquake and three aftershocks. About this, Father Juan Crespí wrote that the Tongva shaman "began with frightful cries and great demonstrations of fear to entreat heaven. I called this place the sweet name of Jesús de los Temblores." But Crespí's journal further notes that the soldiers simply called the river Santa Ana as it is named to this day.

As they moved north through today's Orange County, the Portolá Expedition encountered a half dozen Acjachemen villages as well as a couple Tongva villages. The

proximity of Spanish missions eventually caused Europeans to rename tribes by their closest governing mission. Accordingly, Acjachemen became known as Juaneño due to Mission San Juan Capistrano. Europeans regionally called the Tongva by Gabrieleño (Mission San Gabriel Arcángel), Fernandeno (Mission San Fernando Rey de España), and Nicoleño (San Nicolas Island, a Channel Island).

Today throughout the State of California, markers along El Camino Real routes are symbolic scaled-down mission bells hanging on arched poles although there are fewer in your neck of the woods because Interstate 5 a/k/a Santa Ana Freeway literally overrides the same route.

The Spaniards and Franciscans strewed mustard seeds along the original route of El Camino Real in this "pagan" wilderness where Christian-conversion success might be the "faith as small as a mustard seed" of biblical verse. The tiny seeds proliferated to mark El Camino Real with a carpet of intense yellow blossoms in spring after winter rains. This hardy wild mustard is still found marking their first route where not eliminated by development. Reportedly sheep would eat the introduced mustard plants while cattle would not so

sheep would be found grazing pastures where the mustard plants eventually choked out native vegetation.

Since bears ate sheep, shepherders eventually wiped out local grizzly bears with strychnine and bullets. Before that, however, Californios used legendary horsemanship and reata (lasso) skills to collectively rope a bear, bring it back to the town square, and enrage it to fight a bull. Admission was usually charged, and such bloodsport was common and popular. This Alta California variant of Spanish bullfighting usually led to the bear killing the bull but Californios celebrated and named those bulls that killed bears and survived to fight again.

Alta California's Spanish government was seated in Monterey along with a presidio or military base like the other one in San Diego. With presidios too far from some mission sites to adequately protect them, assignment of soldiers as guards became contentious between government, military and church officials so compromises expedited the founding of Laguna Woods' closest, Mission San Juan Capistrano.

Lt. José Francisco de Ortega and Padre (Father) Fermin Francisco de Lasuén explored the area halfway between San Gabriel and San Diego and decided on a site subsequently called Misión Vieja near native villages in hills about five miles northeast of the Mission San Juan Capistrano's present site. There Padre Lasuén raised a cross, built an enramada or arbor of tree boughs, and celebrated the first mass on October 29, 1775. Construction commenced immediately with unexpected voluntary assistance from local natives.

But a few days later news arrived that other natives had attacked and burned the San Diego mission killing a priest. When their natives mysteriously vanished around San Juan Creek, an attack was presumed imminent so the mission's bells were hastily buried and the Spaniards temporarily abandoned the site.

Almost a year later, with native revolts less of a threat, Padre Serra appointed Padres Gregorio Amúrrio and Pablo Mugártegui to be the first missionaries at Mission San Juan Capistrano. They located the cross raised the year before, dug up the mission bells, and hung them on wooden beams. There, on November 1, 1776, Padre Junípero Serra officially founded Mission San

Juan Capistrano by personally conducting a High Mass under an arbor. In 1778, the mission was moved to its present location where an adobe church was then built and enlarged in 1784. Commonly called Father Serra's Church, it is still in use today and is thought to be the oldest surviving building in California.

The success and self-sufficiency of Mission San Juan Capistrano reached beyond its quadrangle of buildings that even included a tannery and soap factory. By 1811, nearly 1,400 Native Americans lived, worked and worshiped in this settlement. They raised cattle, sheep and horses as well as cultivated wheat, barley, corn, beans, grapes, olives, pomegranates, peaches, and apricots. Although they had never seen a horse before Spaniards brought them, Native Americans became skilled horsemen earning the moniker vaquero or cowboy. By claiming conversion to Roman Catholicism, natives were promised food for life yet many secretly held to Native-American culture, beliefs and religion.

In 1797, the mission began constructing a new church with a spacious Latin-Cross floor plan enclosed by seven masonry domes. During the next nine years, construction used sandstone quarried near the mission's

first site in Mission Viejo, lime from limestone obtained near El Toro, and wood from Alisos or California Sycamores in Trabuco Canyon. Completed in 1806, the beautiful church was destroyed by an earthquake in 1812. Still standing today, the ruins seem older perhaps because they enduringly symbolize human perseverance over primitive frontiers.

In keeping with the original intent of settling the Las Californias province, even seemingly minor participants the Portolá Expedition were rewarded with massive land grants by Spanish governors. The earliest of these covered hundreds of thousands of acres in Orange County. However, land-rich cash-poor leather-jacket soldiers would prove hard pressed to control and retain such vast holdings longterm. But that's another story.

The Mexican War of Independence (Guerra de Independencia de México) was an armed insurrection culminating from years of political and social upheaval, which, in 1821, ended rule of the Viceroyalty of New Spain by Imperial Spain. Alta California including Laguna Woods became an estado or state in Mexico. Concern over continued influence by Spain in

this new republic of Mexico brought about two major changes that would further impact your Laguna Woods.

The first Mexican-born governor of Alta California was José María de Echeandía, who issued the Proclamation of Emancipation in 1826, which freed enslaved Native Americans from missionary rule and corporal punishment while making some eligible for Mexican citizenship.

Then the Mexican Congress passed The Act for Secularization of the California Missions in 1833, which replaced Spanish-born Franciscan priests with Mexican-born Franciscan priests. The legislation further redistributed mission property including 7 to 28 acres of land to "neophytes" or converted-native heads of household. Missions only retained ownership of their churches, gardens, and priests' housing. Mission San Juan Capistrano was the first to have land taken away under Mexico's Alta California Governor José Figueroa's Decree of Confiscation in 1834.

"Two Years Before the Mast" by Richard Henry Dana, Jr. is a memoir published in 1840 from journals Dana wrote during a two-year commercial voyage up and down the California coast starting in 1834. Although Dana wrote

the bestseller to expose the plight of common sailors, he also fueled east coast interest in the previously little-known west coast of North America. Dana's praise for the promontory where San Juan Creek empties into the Pacific Ocean was so laudatory that Dana Point was named after him. Among Dana's anecdotes of local interest are descriptions of how droghers twirled heavy cowhides off cliffs onto beaches for seamen to lug through surf to waiting rowboats from ships anchored offshore. Dana's vivid imagery is reflected in the bronze statue, "Hide Drogher," at Dana Point where there is also a bronze statue of Dana to greet boats entering the harbor. Ranchos depended financially on coastal trade with such ships.

In 1842, Governor Juan Bautista Valentín Alvarado y Vallejo granted three leagues square or 13,316 acres of former Mission San Juan Capistrano land to Don Juan Ávila, his widowed sister, Concepción Ávila Sanchez, and Tomas Sanchez (relationship unknown), who established Rancho Niguel to raise cattle and sheep. Concepción was the first woman to be named on a local land grant. Their land included the site on Los Alisos Creek (later Aliso Creek) where Acjachemen a/k/a Juaneño natives built their village named Nawil (also

spelled Nigüilli and Nigüil) from which Spanish word Niguel was derived. A later attempt to anglicize the word into Newell failed. Among other present-day communities, this land grant included Laguna Woods.

With his land grant, the honorific title Don was added to Juan Ávila's name by Spanish tradition indicating his social prominence, community leadership, and individual wealth. Don Juan Ávila had the nickname El Rico (The Rich One) among underlings around San Juan Capistrano where he had been Juez de Campo (Field Judge) under jurisdiction of Los Angeles. Service in this capacity led directly to his Mexican land grant.

Ávila constructed an adobe hacienda as headquarters for Rancho Niguel on the south bank of Aliso Creek on the west side of El Camino Real (now Santa Ana Freeway or Interstate 5). On the opposite or east side of El Camino Real also on the south side the Aliso Creek, Don José Serrano built an adobe hacienda for his Rancho Cañada de los Alisos (Sycamore Glen) on a spring that fed Aliso Creek downstream to the Ávila Hacienda visible from the Serrano Hacienda. Don José Serrano also had served as Juez de Campo in San Juan

Capistrano, which also was rewarded with land grants of 10,668 acres.

Just outside the gates of Laguna Woods Village off of Paseo De Valencia, both hacienda sites sans their adobes are accessible today via hiking/biking trails following Aliso Creek under and around the freeway, which includes related historical markers placed by the City of Laguna Hills and the City of Mission Viejo.

Much has been written about Don Juan Ávila and his illustrious family. His grandfather, Don Cornelio Ávila (1745-1800), sailed from Spain to Mexico in 1771, served as a Spanish soldier, and moved his family to Los Angeles in 1783. The Ávilas were among the first fifteen families to live in the pueblo of Los Angeles.

Don Cornelio's son and father of Don Juan Ávila, Don Antonio Ygnacio Ávila (1781-1858), as Juez de Campo of Los Angeles, led reinforcements against the plundering of San Juan Capistrano in 1818 by Hippolyte Bouchard's Santa Catalina-based privateers or pirates commissioned by the government of Argentina. Don Antonio also rode to Mission San Gabriel Arcángel to welcome explorer, cartographer and author Jedidiah Smith to Los Angeles

in 1826. Smith and the trappers he was guiding were the first white men to travel overland from the United States to Alta California.

Don Juan Ávila (1812–1888) was born in Los Angeles so he was a Californio, or Spanish-speaking native of hispanic decent, with perhaps more allegiance to Alta California than either Mexico or Spain as you will see.

Although he later built and retired to “a great house” in San Juan Capistrano on what was subsequently and officially named Juan Ávila Highway (now Pacific Coast Highway or Coast Highway or California State Route 1), Don Juan Ávila’s hospitality was legendary at El Hacienda de Rancho Niguel. The Ávilas famously hosted fiestas, feasts and rodeos. Written personal accounts confirm luminaries traveling El Camino Real often enjoyed staying with the Ávilas.

Anglo-Americans, who had entered Mexico’s Alta California without permission, felt entitled to rights of legal citizens. Intending to establish their own republican government, a small group of illegal-alien Americans in Northern California rebelled against the Mexican government for a few weeks in 1846. This

became known as the Bear Flag Revolt because the rebels' flag included the words California Republic, a grizzly bear, a star, and stripes, which are elements in the design of today's State of California flag.

The steady flow of Anglo-American immigrants into Mexico's Alta California inevitably did lead to war with the United States of America later in 1846. Americans usually call this the Mexican-American War but Mexicans still call it, among other names, *Invasión Estadounidense a México* (United States' Invasion of Mexico). Frontiersman and guide, Kit Carson famously carried dispatches between leaders of the American forces and Washington D.C. The United States' victory in 1847 included the capture of Mexico City. In 1848, The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo formally ended the war and forced Mexico to cede, in exchange for \$15 million, Alta California and other Mexican territories north of today's border between Mexico and the U.S.A.

Perhaps you are wondering, besides government, how was Laguna Woods involved?

Commodore Robert Field Stockton, then commander of the U.S. Navy's Pacific fleet, turned his sailors into

soldiers in late 1846. While advancing north from San Diego toward Los Angeles on land, Commodore Stockton's troops camped near San Juan Capistrano. There Stockton persuaded Don Juan Ávila that Alta California becoming a protectorate of the U.S.A. served the Californios' best interests longterm.

After the death of an uncle and concerned about two of his brothers with the Californios' armed resistance in Los Angeles, Don Juan Ávila accompanied Commodore Stockton and served as his intermediary. The last shots of the Mexican American War were fired in the ninety-minute Battle of Río San Gabriel near the site of Mission San Gabriel Arcángel. Without further bloodshed, Los Angeles was surrendered by the Californios via a white flag delivered personally by Don Juan Ávila to Commodore Stockton, who then declared California taken by the U.S.A.

Commodore Stockton subsequently set up his Los Angeles headquarters in what today is the registered landmark Ávila Adobe built by Don Juan Ávila's Tio (Uncle) Francisco in 1818 on now touristy Olvera Street where today it is the oldest standing residence in city. It is said a young boy, dashing off to hear Stockton's

Marine Band playing in the plaza, inadvertently left a door standing open at the Ávila Adobe revealing opulent spacious interiors to belie a less auspicious exterior. Seeing this, American forces immediately appropriated the home perhaps to the dismay of the Ávilas as you might imagine.

In 1848, a nugget of gold was discovered by James Marshall while constructing a sawmill for Sacramento agriculturalist, John Sutter. The California Gold Rush triggered massive emigration not only from the eastern United States but from Chile, China, France, Germany, Ireland, Mexico and Turkey. In two years, San Francisco's population grew from 1,000 to 20,000.

After the Mexican-American War, U.S. military governors had been ill-suited to cope with such dramatic growth so California was admitted quickly to the union as the 31st state in 1850. To expedite statehood, California's Constitutional Convention set the state's borders rather than waiting for the U.S. Congress as usual. California's new constitution also allowed women to own property in their own names, and banned slavery. The change to American law using the English language was difficult for Californios and contributed

to a decline of the rancho-based economy of Mexican/Spanish rule.

In 1856, a criminal gang called Las Manillas (the handcuffs) secured a hideout in Dripping Cave today accessible via trails in Aliso & Wood Canyons Wilderness Park. Led by infamous Juan Flores and Pancho Daniel, Las Manillas plundered and murdered in San Juan Capistrano and beyond. Although regarded by Americans as an outlaw and thief, Juan Flores became a romanticized folk hero (akin to Jesse James) among Mexicans of the era. As such, Flores was thought to be a defender against vigilantes among insurgent American settlers and America's seizure of (Alta) California. Relentless in their pursuit of Las Manillas, sheriff's posses caught and lynched the bandits one by one. Juan Flores was cornered and surrendered, was convicted and hanged. The hardships of frontier life always included lawlessness no matter which country was governing.

Southern Californians keenly followed the Civil War between 1861 and 1865 despite being far from the action and without timely news. Although there was a lively secessionist movement in Los Angeles, nearby German winemakers in Annaheim (original spelling of Anaheim)

supported the Union. Rumors of Confederate privateers pillaging the California Coast did lead to unneeded installation of defenses around Anaheim Landing on Alamitos Bay in present-day Seal Beach. Despite the gravity and implications of the war between the states, more pressing local issues included flood, disease and drought. The Civil War's lasting local effect was made by hundreds of veterans from both sides, who relocated here afterwards from midwest and southern states. As you will read, wars are to influence immigration again.

Commencing on Christmas Eve 1861, four weeks of almost continuous rain caused the Santa Ana River to flood from Coyote Hills in north Orange County to the Santa Ana Valley along the Santa Ana Mountains. Starting later in 1862, smallpox began to spread throughout southern California, most notably virulent among Native Americans, killing 129 Juaneños in San Juan Capistrano alone. Orange County's first physician, Dr. John A. F. Heyermann, arrived in Anaheim in 1863, which helped hold smallpox at bay there. But the pandemic raged on even killing Don Juan Ávila's wife, Maria Soledad Thomasa Capistrano Yorba, at Rancho Niguel in 1867.

In 1865, after two years of devastating drought that decimated his herd of cattle from 8,000 to 800, Don Juan Ávila reportedly sold his ownership in Rancho Niguel. But clear titles to land-grant ranchos required verification by American courts that had jurisdiction after statehood. The Mexican Land Grant to "Juan Ávila et al." was verified but not until 1873. What happened in the interim is unclear.

Some accounts state Don Juan Ávila sold his interest in Rancho Niguel to Domingo Yorba, who sold it to Baruch Marks, who sold it to Hiram H. Rawson all in the 1860s. Documents recorded in 1871 show Domingo Yorba, Dolores Yorba Aguilar, and Maria Ríos sold their portion of Rancho Niguel to Hiram H. Rawson and Cyrus B. Rawson. Then several deeds related to Rancho Niguel were recorded in 1873 by Cyrus Rawson perhaps after U.S. courts verified the originating Mexican Land Grant. Regardless, researchers agree Rancho Niguel unified under ownership of the Rawsons, who sold it to Moulton & Company in 1884. L. F. Moulton & Company was owned by Lewis Moulton & Pierre Daguerre as explained later.

Don Juan Ávila's children had married into the family of John "Don Juan" Forster, an English émigré and

naturalized Mexican citizen, who married Ysidora Pico, sister of Mexico's Alta California Governor Pío de Jesus Pico. As governor, Pío de Jesus Pico made several land grants to Forster during the 1840s including Rancho Trabuco and Rancho Misión Vieja. Forster later took over the Pico family's Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores and eventually controlled hundreds of thousands of acres, which made his ranch, combined from several land-grant ranchos, the largest in California.

In 1844, under Mexico's secularization law, Don Juan Forster had purchased at auction 44 acres that included Mission San Juan Capistrano for \$710, which became his family's home until American President Abraham Lincoln returned all the missions to the Roman Catholic Church. As Mexico's final Alta California Governor by loss of the Mexican-American War in 1847, Pío de Jesus Pico fled for his life and hid for months among the family of his sister and brother-in-law, Don Juan Forster. Later, when Juan Flores and his gang terrorized San Juan Capistrano, townsfolk also took refuge within the Mission walls at the Forsters' home.

Beginning with the first steam locomotive in 1830, the United States had laid 9,000 miles of track east of the Missouri River by 1850. Then suddenly, with the discovery of gold in California a couple years earlier, masses of people sought transport westward. But their only means to get to California were either to sail "around the Horn" for six months or cross the disease-ridden Isthmus of Panama from one ship to another.

Started in 1862 and completed in 1869, the 1,928-mile transcontinental railroad connected eastern railways for the first time to the west coast when Chinese laborers torturously tunneled by hand through and around the Sierra Madre Mountains to link with tracks laid in the Great Basin and plains beyond. More importantly for your purposes here, this was the basis for a network of railroads, which finally would make its way to Orange County in the 1880s causing an unprecedented boom of land speculation.

Even then, some landowners found themselves on the wrong side of the tracks. Native-born Modesta Ávila had inherited land from her mother just north of where the railroad station still is in San Juan Capistrano. When the Southern Pacific Railroad laid tracks across

Modesta's land and within fifteen feet of her front door, steam-engine locomotives' cacophony adversely effected her chicken-farming livelihood as stressed hens lay fewer eggs. To protest, Modesta famously hung laundry to dry on a line across the railroad tracks to force trains to stop. After she drove a wooden fence post between the tracks with a note demanding \$10,000 compensation for use of her land, Modesta was arrested. Her first trial ended in a hung jury but her second trial made her Orange County's first convicted felon as well as the cautionary example for others. In 1891, after serving less than three years of her sentence, Modesta, still in her twenties, died of pneumonia in San Quentin State Prison. Modesta's protest and martyrdom made her a folk heroine among Mexican-Americans, who were openly discriminated against with impunity at the time. Local lore asserts Modesta Ávila is the "White Lady" ghost seen walking along the tracks since the 1930s in today's touristy Los Rios Historic District of San Juan Capistrano.

The Santa Fe Railroad began laying tracks in Southern California in 1885, which eliminated a Southern Pacific Railroad monopoly. Competition sharply reduced ticket prices and land speculators advertised heavily to draw

buyers to towns that existed only on paper plats filed in then Los Angeles County. This land boom quickly went bust so "paper towns" like San Juan-By-The-Sea were never built while others like El Toro were.

El Toro became the town's name after the U.S. Post Office declared Los Alisos, derived from Don José Serrano's Rancho Cañada de los Alisos, too similar to Alviso in San Jose County. Legend says El Toro (Spanish for "the bull") was proffered by Dwight Whiting's wife, Emily, after a bull fell into a local water well and drowned. Whiting was from England and hoped to establish an English colony here on land purchased in 1884 from Los Angeles financiers, J.S. Slauson & Associates, who had foreclosed on the Serranos' rancho after the Great Drought.

Whiting's new Santa Fe Railroad spur would facilitate timely shipment of perishable agricultural products so he planned to subdivide and sell suitable acreages to British "gentlemen fruit farmers." When vagaries of weather, soil and pestilence forestalled his original plan, Whiting envisaged a lumbering operation and planted 400 acres of hardwood Eucalyptus trees for which the town of El Toro was renamed Lake Forest when

incorporated in 1991. Heritage Hill Historical Park in Lake Forest offers tours of the Serrano Adobe (1863), El Toro Grammar School (1890), St. George Episcopal Mission (1891), and Bennett Ranch House (1908).

The land boom of the 1880s also led to subdivisions of "Laguna" (north Laguna Beach today) and "Arch Beach" or "Three Arches" (south Laguna Beach's Three Arch Bay today). Although this Pacific Ocean coastal area mostly remained government land, the northern-most portion was part of Rancho San Joaquin's 48,803 acres combined from two Mexican land-grants to José Antonio Andres Sepúlveda, who sold it all to James Irvine in 1864. Today you can enjoy this as Crystal Cove State Park, thanks to Joan Irvine Smith of Irvine Company and Laura Davick, founder of Crystal Cove Alliance.

Since 1878, plein-air artists supported themselves by sales to tourists along the uniquely beautiful coast in Laguna Beach that was known as an artists' colony by the early 1900s. The village of 300 residents founded the Laguna Art Association to nurture the fine arts in 1918. The only access was difficult along narrow winding Laguna Canyon Road until completion of Coast Highway in 1926, which connected beach communities for

the first time. Artists struggled with economic issues during the Great Depression so the Laguna Beach Art Association held its first arts festival the week after the Los Angeles Olympic Games of 1932 in hopes visitors would attend before returning home.

At this first festival, artist and vaudevillian, Lolita Perine, dressed residents in costumes and seated them behind makeshift frames to create "Living Pictures" or paintings that came to life, which fascinated visitors. In 1935, local realtor, artist and carpenter, Roy Ropp, expanded Perine's concept into today's format naming it "The Spirit of the Masters" and renaming it "Pageant of the Masters" the following year. The latter continues as the centerpiece of the annual Laguna Beach Festival of the Arts, California's longest-running outdoor fine art exhibition. This success led to other coinciding arts and crafts venues in Laguna Beach.

To relive early beach culture, you may tour the Murphy Smith Bungalow, a 1923 beach-cottage museum, preserved by The Laguna Beach Historical Society.

So far in this narrative Orange County has been used as geographic reference for you. But, when California was

admitted to the United States in 1850, there was no Orange County. Although secession efforts began as early as 1870, the County of Orange did not separate from the County of Los Angeles until 1889. Sacramento chose Santa Ana as the county seat based on a book circulated among legislators touting infrastructure not built until after Santa Ana was chosen. Anaheim was the presumed choice based on existing facilities so Anaheim's city fathers were shocked when Santa Ana's politicians succeeded instead.

The Orange County secession documents were drafted by lawyer, Victor Montgomery, and were shepherded through the California State Assembly by Dr. Henry Head. Ironically, both Montgomery and Head had been soldiers unsuccessful with the Confederate States of America's secession from the United States of America yet they were successful with Orange County's secession from Los Angeles County two decades later.

In 1854, Lewis Fenno Moulton was born in Chicago where his father, J. Tilden Moulton, a Harvard Law School graduate, was a prominent lawyer. Eminent associates who frequented the Moulton home included Abraham Lincoln with whom Lewis fondly recounted chatting as a

child. When Lewis was ten years old, his parents separated so he and his younger brother, Irving, were raised by their mother, Charlotte Harding Fenno, among her patrician family in Boston. From ages fifteen to eighteen, Lewis worked on the farm in South Marshfield, Massachusetts once owned by Daniel Webster and family.

With the financial backing of an uncle, Lewis Moulton decided to seek his fortune in California ranching. In 1874, twenty-year-old Lewis Moulton took a Pacific Mail steamship from Boston, crossed the Isthmus of Panama by train, and took another Pacific Mail steamer to San Francisco. Then, from a San Diego-bound ship, Moulton disembarked in Wilmington near the present-day Port of Los Angeles and took a stage coach to Santa Ana.

The next day, a letter of introduction to James Irvine landed Lewis Moulton a job on Rancho San Joaquin in the San Joaquin Hills abutting Rancho Niguel to the north. Irvine's 48,803-acre Rancho San Joaquin actually combined two 1842 Mexican Land Grants, Rancho Bolsa de San Joaquin and Rancho Cienega de las Ranas. Moulton worked under Irvine's General Manager, Charles French. Within a few months Moulton and French bought a flock of sheep together although Moulton bought out French's

interest within a year. Moulton soon ran flocks of sheep on rented parcels of land ranging from Oceanside to Wilmington.

In 1876, Moulton sold his flocks of sheep and joined Don Juan Forster's men in herding 3,000 wild horses overland to Chicago where horse-drawn streetcars had started operating in 1859. Forster won the contract because the local wild horses, hardened in the hills and mountains around Saddleback Valley, could withstand the cobblestone streets in Chicago.

To keep the wild horses sufficiently broken for acceptance by Forster's customer in Chicago, the drovers including Moulton each had to ride six different horses every day. It took two drives of 1,500 horses each to complete the contract between 1876 and 1878. After each herd of horses was delivered, the men and their personal horses traveled by train to Texas and drove herds of cattle back to California. Each round trip took a year and a half due in part to hardships of elements, terrains and circumstances.

Back in the Saddleback Valley in 1881, Lewis Moulton bought a flock of sheep and rented 1,600 acres of

pasture on Rancho Niguel. Moulton needed more pasture by 1884 so he rented the rest of Rancho Niguel from Cyrus B. Rawson. Then, in 1894, Moulton bought all 17,000 acres of Rancho Niguel from Rawson. With additional land acquisitions, Moulton's Rancho Niguel eventually totaled 21,732 acres.

According to family sources, Moulton sold a one third interest in his ranch in 1895 to Jean Pierre Daguerre, a French Basque shepherd, who had been working in southern Orange County since arriving from France in the 1870s. However, Daguerre's interest in the Moulton Ranch was not recorded until 1908. By the time Jean Pierre Daguerre partnered with Lewis Fenno Moulton, Daguerre was a recognized authority on raising sheep.

Jean Pierre Daguerre (1856-1911) was born in Hasparren, France and met his wife, Maria Eugenia Duguet, also French Basque yet a stranger, on the steamship from Havre, France to New York City in 1874. In 1882, Jean Pierre Daguerre formed a partnership with Marco Forster, son of Don Juan Forster, to raise sheep in the Saddleback Valley. With success from that, Jean Paul Daguerre had sufficient means to marry Maria Eugenia Duguet in 1886.

In 1911, Daguerre was driving a wagon when an automobile frightened his team of horses that bolted overturning the wagon. Jean Pierre Daguerre died from his injuries leaving his widow, a son, Domingo Joseph (1887-1919), and three daughters, Juanita (1888-1970), Grace (1890-1966), and Josephine (1892-1957), to oversee the family's investment in Rancho Niguel. Two other Daguerre children had died in infancy as sadly was common in those days.

Then, in January 1919, Domingo Daguerre, a "hale and hearty" 31-year-old bachelor, died of Spanish Flu. Also commonly called La Grippe, the Influenza Pandemic of 1918 killed an estimated 50 million people worldwide or twenty percent of the world's population then. Within months, the virus had killed more people than any other illness in recorded history. From July 1914 to November 1918, The Great War (now World War I) had taken 16 million lives and most of the attention in world history as still taught in America. For further comparison, The Bubonic Plague or Black Death killed 25 million over a five-years period in the 14th century.

If the Dagerres' surname seems familiar, it's likely due to Jean Pierre Daguerre's famous relative, French romantic painter and printmaker, Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, whose early experiments with photographic images on copper plates led him to invent the daguerreotype. The invention's importance prompted the French government to reward Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre with a life-long pension that facilitated publication of the daguerreotype process as an almost unrestricted gift to the world from France in 1839.

After Jean Pierre Daguerre died, Lewis Moulton went from raising sheep to raising cattle because Orange County was getting too developed to drive sheep across unfenced land to summer pasture in mountains as far away as a meadow now underwater in Big Bear Lake. The Moulton Ranch acreage not used for pasture was used by up to fifteen tenants to grow hay, barley and wheat.

Emma P. Moore divorced O. P. Moore, her husband of seven years, in Santa Barbara County. Twenty-five days later in 1885, Lewis Moulton, 31, married divorcée Emma Moore, 28, in Santa Ana. Emma had been born in Los Angeles in 1857. After fourteen years of marriage, Lewis sued Emma for divorce in 1899. A few years after

that, a Los Angeles Times headline read "Sensational Breach-of-Promise" stating a Mrs. Fannie Mansfield of Los Angeles was suing Lewis F. Moulton of El Toro for \$150,000 citing "about 200 letters written to her by Moulton" during their supposed engagement. With no further related newspaper stories, you can only imagine how all this may have turned out.

Most histories of the Moulton family never mention Lewis and Emma's marriage. However, in a 1990s oral history, Louise Moulton is quoted as saying, "My father was married once before he married my mother, but in those days divorce wasn't cool, so nothing much was said about my father's first marriage."

John Lockwood Gail, a Civil War veteran and widower, was proprietor of the grocery store in El Toro when his comely daughter, a schoolteacher in Washington state, would come to visit him during her school's summer breaks in the early 1900s. Nellie Maud Gail was born in 1878 in Irving, Kansas and was raised in Nebraska. During one of her summer visits from Washington, Nellie met Lewis Moulton, who was nearly 25 years older than she was. After a five-year courtship, Lewis and Nellie were married in 1908. Lewis and Nellie eventually had

three children, two of whom survived. Charlotte (1910-2006) and Louise (1914-2014) came to be closely identified with the operation and disposition of Rancho Niguel.

The Daguerres and the Moultons maintained impressive homes with expansive lawns on the Moulton Ranch as Niguel Ranch or Rancho Niguel finally had come to be called. The men, their wives, and children were close friends by all accounts. There are idyllic stories about the Moulton sisters driving their pony cart over to visit the Daguerre sisters. The Moultons' home was located where Oakbrook Village Shopping Center sits on Avenida de la Carlotta, so named for Charlotte Moulton. Louise Moulton's namesake street on the other side of Laguna Hills Mall is Calle de la Louisa.

With an abiding affection for horses even after he was too old to ride astride, Lewis Moulton would drive a buggy pulled by his favorite mare, Lady, to El Toro to pick up their mail. However, Nellie Moulton, ever modern, preferred to drive her automobile. Regardless, it seems fitting that the word "moulton" is Olde English for a "mule enclosure or settlement."

After Lewis Fenno Moulton died in 1938, Nellie Moulton (née Gail) ran the Moulton Ranch until 1950 when the Moulton-Daguerre partnership was dissolved and the acreage was divided according to ownership percentages. Accordingly, the three Daguerre daughters held title to one-third of the acreage that they sold during the 1950s, which became Laguna Niguel. The Daguerre sisters had managed their portion of the ranch since their mother, Eugenia Daguerre, died in 1931.

After the partnership dissolution, Nellie and her two daughters held title to two-thirds of the acreage and oversaw it's management until the 1960s when they sold to various developers including 3,500 acres to Ross Cortese's Rossmoor Corporation that built Leisure World - Laguna Hills. Today this portion of the ranch includes Laguna Woods and Laguna Hills, where one neighborhood is called Nellie Gail Ranch, as well as parts of Aliso Viejo and Mission Viejo.

When she and her daughters liquidated the ranch, Nellie Maud Moulton (née Gail) moved to Three Arch Bay in south Laguna Beach within the narrow Pacific Ocean access of the the original triangle-shaped Rancho Niguel's Mexican Land Grant. Later Nellie, who was

renown for her gracious manner and philanthropic work with the arts, moved to Leisure World (Laguna Woods Village) where she lived until she passed away in 1972.

Portions of the Moultons' property had been traded for ranch lands in other parts of California. Since 2007, The Moulton Company has managed the real estate holdings for heirs of Charlotte Moulton and her husband Glenn Mathis as well as those of Louise Moulton and her husband Ivar Hanson.

The City of Laguna Hills Civic Center has permanent exhibits in City Hall of personal items from the Moulton Family, history timeline, and ranchos' cattle brands plus three history murals in the Council Chambers.

Although oil was first discovered in north Orange County in 1882, commercial production did not begin until 1898 in the Brea and Olinda fields. The "Black Gold Rush" flourished then waned until revived by deeper "gushers" in 1919. Shell Beach, founded in 1889 during the railroads' "land boom," was renamed Pacific City in 1901 to emulate Atlantic City. In 1909, the hamlet again was renamed as Huntington Beach for Henry

E. Huntington, owner/builder of Pacific Electric Railway's "Red Car" system. Standard Oil's wells in Huntington Beach had dried up by 1905 but deeper wells drilled in the 1920s have been producing massively ever since. Coastal ecology, housing development, and tourist access are at odds with petroleum production, which remain contentious ongoing political issues. Regardless, southern California's oil reserves are a direct benefit from once having been an ancient seabed.

The Great War, as contemporaries called World War I, erupted in 1914 in Europe pitting the Allies (Britain, France and Russia) against the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary and Turkey). The United States entered the war in 1917 when President Woodrow Wilson called on Americans to "make the world safe for democracy."

During this war to end all wars, about 1,600 men from Orange County served in the armed forces. California National Guard Company L stationed in Santa Ana was called to active service shortly before the formal declaration of war. In Europe, the commander of Company L, Captain Nelson M. Holderman was reassigned to front-line action where he was wounded six times while rescuing his men. For his valor, Holderman was

awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, Distinguished Service Cross and two Croix de Guerre.

From Bouchard's pirates guzzling from wine barrels at the Franciscans' vineyards in San Juan Capistrano to Flores' gang's benders on stolen "hootch" at Dripping Cave, Orange County's lore about alcohol abounds. In a rural area like Saddleback Valley, illicitly distilled or smuggled liquor was a cottage industry. Clandestine booze sources, whether hidden or posing as a legitimate businesses, were called "blind pigs" and were frequented by reprobates. Around 1910, "Gimpy" Williams sold firewood out the front and beer out the back of his woodshed near El Toro. So the District Attorney dressed honorable citizens in ragged clothing to catch and jail "Gimpy." Although this was common throughout the county, these were minor problems as you will see.

The National Prohibition Act, commonly called the Volstead Act, was passed to implement the Eighteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. This federal law, although aimed at completely eliminating saloons, prohibited the production, sale and transport of "intoxicating liquors" which created the business model for a new industry - organized crime. From 1919

to 1933, "Drys" were law-abiding, "Wets" were not, and "blind piggers" were history.

Orange County's 42-mile coast has numerous hidden coves that were perfect for "rumrunners" or small boats that smuggled Canadian and British liquor for local consumption as well as national distribution. In the dead of night, blinker lights signaled when the coast was clear for offshore vessels to land and offload their contraband. Crescent Bay in Laguna Beach revisited the days of Bouchard's pirates although the Orange County sheriff and deputies often were waiting to confiscate the illicit cargo as evidence to be stored in the basement of the Old County Courthouse in Santa Ana where, today, you can access the Orange County Archives. After smugglers' trials, their liquor was dumped ceremoniously into storm drains under the watchful eyes of photojournalists and ladies who belonged to the local chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. In 1931, the largest single liquor seizure made during Prohibition occurred when a boat named "Daylight" was intercepted in south Laguna Beach.

Although the United States legalized alcoholic beverages again in 1933, gambling remained illegal in

California. Nonetheless, ships exclusively refitted as gambling casinos, anchored offshore just outside the state's three-mile coastal jurisdiction and accessed by water taxis, were seen off Orange County's coast throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

In 1930, Nobel Prize winning physicist, Albert A. Michelson (pronounced "Michaelson"), first calculated the speed of light (186,282.3960 miles per second) using a mile-long three-foot-diameter tube built on a flat bean field on the James Irvine family's Irvine Ranch just north of Eddie Martin Field (adjacent to Orange County's John Wayne Airport). Michelson's experiment drew worldwide attention and visits from such luminaries as Albert Einstein and Edwin Hubble.

The Irvine Ranch also had been used by pioneer aviator, Eddie Martin, for barnstorming aerobatics and biplane joy rides for \$5, which drew attention and crowds to the site. Martin's use-without-permission ended in 1923 when he started renting 80 acres for \$35.00 per month from James Irvine, Jr. The sod field, advertised as open 24 hours, eventually sported lighted runways and a control tower. Here, in 1935, Amelia Earhart among others saw Howard Hughes set an airspeed record

at 352.46 mph in a single-wing metal aircraft. Eddie Martin's Airport, as was lettered on a hangar roof, became publicly owned in 1939 when Orange County did a land swap with the Irvine Company. About one mile south, the Santa Ana Army Airfield was built in the 1940s, which is the site of today's John Wayne Airport.

In 1933, 17-year-old Howard Wilson and his friend, Ed Marriner, used a screwdriver to explore an embankment created when Saint Ann's Drive initially was graded five-feet deep to meet Coast Highway in Laguna Beach. When the soft sandy soil yielded solid rock, Wilson went and got a pickax. The fossilized skull and bone that the boys chipped out of the rock brought prominence to Wilson as well as speculation among archeologists. After the bones were radiocarbon dated in 1968, initial readings of 17,150 years old were revised to 11,700, which still makes "Laguna Woman" among the oldest known human remains found on the North American continent.

Other earthshaking events actually came in the aftermath of the momentous Long Beach Earthquake of 1933. Although the epicenter of the 6.4 magnitude temblor was offshore from Newport Beach on the Newport-

Inglewood Fault, Long Beach sustained catastrophic destruction along with damage from Laguna Beach north to Los Angeles to unreinforced masonry structures on landfill. Although 115 people were killed, the timing at 5:54 p.m. PST saved thousands of schoolchildren who were safely at home when hundreds of their schools collapsed. The resulting public outcry over child safety caused the California legislature to act within a month to pass the Field Act that set seismic safety standards for schools as well as California earthquake preparedness policy for decades.

Despite these events moving society forward, one overriding event had been holding it back: The Great Depression. The Saddleback Valley was distressed as all rural areas were throughout the United States. When Oklahoma further suffered the Dust Bowl, 250,000 "Okies" came to California reportedly looking for migrant jobs in the San Joaquin Valley. Commonly and insensitively disparaged, Okies were seen as taking jobs away from Californians. California even legislated to keep them out and police infamously stopped them at the Arizona border until the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the law. Okies were often portrayed as union and New-Deal opportunists who simply

demanded better wages and housing. More recently, sociologists agree that most Okies were actually urban white-collar workers who held well-paid jobs during the 1940s in southern California's war industries.

As The Great Depression abated and the United States was drawn into World War II, able-bodied American men were called to serve in the armed forces. Accordingly, rural Saddleback Valley experienced a shortage of manual laborers. Although Mexican labor had been used in agriculture since the 1900s, those migrants did seasonal work and returned to Mexico each winter. To secure workers throughout the manpower shortages of World War II, the U.S. signed the Mexican Farm Labor Agreement with Mexico. Commonly called the "bracero program" after the Spanish word meaning "one who works with his arms," the first braceros began working in Orange County in 1942. Even after the war ended in 1945, the U.S. Congress periodically extended expirations of the bracero program through 1963.

Throughout the natural history of the Saddleback Valley, you find droughts and floods. Green-winter and brown-summer landscapes reverse normal four-season climates. If there are fewer winter rains, there is

drought because rains always are infrequent in spring, summer and autumn. Yet the winter rainy season easily overwhelmed the otherwise dry natural watershed.

In the winter of 1938, several days of heavy rains brought mountain debris down the Santa Ana River, which caught on and dammed at a bridge in Santa Ana Canyon. The resulting flood covered 68,400 acres, left 2,000 families homeless, and killed 19 people. It was a flood of the magnitude to be expected once every century. However, in 1927, only eleven years earlier, there had been another "hundred-year flood." U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt visited this disaster area and resolved something needed to be done to control such flooding.

The 1938 flood is the reason some of your natural washes, creeks and rivers are banked high with concrete to create flood-control channels with engineered capacities to forestall massive flooding. They are not pretty but they have been effective. When visitors joke about dry cement ditches named creeks and rivers, you too may laugh but in the face of nature's wrath.

Another natural phenomenon came to national prominence in 1939 when NBC's live radio broadcast drew attention to the legend of the Cliff Swallows' annual spring return from their winter home in Argentina to Mission San Juan Capistrano on Saint Joseph's Day. Although true when the area was predominantly rural, post-World War II housing developments around the mission reduced natural habitat that historically had drawn flocks of swallows to build concentrations of mud nests on the Great Stone Church's ruins at the mission. Those nests were removed during stabilization of the ruins in the 1970s so today nesting swallows are less concentrated at the mission and more dispersed throughout the area under eaves and bridges.

On December 7, 1941, Japan bombed the U.S. Navy's Pacific Fleet at anchor in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, which forced the United States into World War II. Risk of invasion by Japan caused the buildup of military defenses along the west coast of the United States. In the Saddleback Valley, local civilian men and women volunteered for the Civil Air Patrol as lookouts searching the skies day and night for enemy aircraft profiles from strategic sites like water towers.

What happened next begins one of the darkest periods of modern American history. Although Americans of German and Italian descent certainly suffered repercussions of war hatred for their motherlands being among the enemy Axis countries, the worst prejudice and consequences were suffered by Japanese-Americans.

As with other ethnicities, rural Saddleback Valley has a history of segregated Japanese communities supported by truck farming that marketed fresh produce through their own distribution channels. Some towns in Orange County had deservedly harsh reputations among Japanese-Americans yet no one was prepared for the immediate forced "evacuation" of American-born Japanese into "internment" camps at the start of World War II. Japanese removal from the west coast by the federal government included 2,000 people of Japanese ancestry from Orange County, many of whom were held in the Poston War Relocation Camp in southwestern Arizona. At 17,000 residents, Poston was the largest of ten such concentration camps making it the third largest city in Arizona at the time.

Temporarily housed into local stables, moved by rail in livestock cars, and held against their will in fenced

compounds, these Americans were supposedly interned for their own protection from Pearl Harbor-backlash. However, guards' guns routinely were pointed at rather than away from internees whose land, homes, businesses, and personal property were confiscated and given to caucasians. Stories of Japanese-Americans farming within the confines of internment camps certainly indicated their true allegiance by calling their fields "Victory Gardens." Although most Japanese-Americans endured internment, few talk about it. Among them are your former or current neighbors in Laguna Woods Village, who may even have been children at the time.

The ongoing contributions of Japanese-Americans to local history are presented in the Orange County Agricultural & Nikkei Heritage Museum at the Arboretum of California State University - Fullerton. The Japanese School from their farming community in El Moro Canyon on Irvine Ranch was moved and restored for visitors to The Crystal Cove Historic District in Crystal Cove State Park on Coast Highway just north of Laguna Beach.

When opened in Costa Mesa in 1942, the Santa Ana Army Air Base was a combat training facility without

runways, airplanes or hangars, which grew to house 26,000 military personnel. As an adjunct, Camp Irvine on Irvine Ranch, site of today's Irvine Park, was used under the name Camp Rathke where troops were trained further in field and command-post exercises including mock battles. Although the army did not build any permanent structures there, an existing soda-fountain building was used as the Post Exchange (PX). By the end of the war in 1945, 149,000 troops had completed training there. The United States Army Air Corps was renamed the United States Army Air Forces in 1941 and the United States Air Force in 1947.

In 1942, the U.S. Marine Corps paid James Irvine, Sr. \$100,000 for 4,000 acres to construct U.S. Marine Corps Air Station El Toro. Forty percent of that area was designated for a blimp base. The same site once was considered for a U.S. Naval installation. Irvine had resisted construction on this site because it was the largest lima bean field in North America and was Irvine Company's primary source of income at the time.

The layout of the U.S. Marine Corps Air Station El Toro was to have longterm consequences as flight patterns dictated the location of Laguna Woods' golf courses,

resident gardens and reservoirs rather than build residences under risky airways. Nonetheless, in 1967, two Marine Corps jets collided and crashed into Laguna Woods housing killing four residents and one pilot.

When U.S.M.C.A.S. El Toro opened in 1943, the base had a civilian fire department that was the first with paid personnel in Orange County thus ending the preceding all-volunteer era. The base patch for the Marines' uniforms, "The Flying Bull" was designed by Walt Disney Studios in 1944. For all the attention the base drew to the town of El Toro, the 1940 census shows the namesake community had a population of 130 people.

U.S.M.C.A.S. El Toro was the site of the popular El Toro Air Show from the 1950s until the final show in 1997 that drew an estimated two million visitors. After the base closed in 1999, use planning included 3,724 acres for commercial, residential, educational, and recreational developments. The remaining 1,375 acres is today's site of Orange County's Great Park where an F-18 airplane hangar was sealed from light in 2006 to turn it into a massive pinhole camera that recorded the world's largest photographic image, "The Great Picture" (a 111 ft. wide by 32 ft. high panoramic

print of the air station), as part of the Legacy Project, an historical record of U.S.M.C.A.S. El Toro.

In 1948, geologist E. S. Larsen identified the Bedford Canyon Formation as the oldest in Orange County at 180 million years of age. This layered rock formation was deposited as sediments of an ancient seabed and revealed by upheaval erosion on the eastern slope of the Santa Ana Mountains near Lake Matthews. Then in 1949, it snowed in Saddleback Valley for the first time since 1881. And the last time since then. Every now and then, nature reminds you of the forces truly in charge of history.

That year, Joseph E. Prentice donated nineteen acres of land to the City of Santa Ana for a municipal park stipulating at least fifty monkeys be kept there. The stipulation defined its future so the Santa Ana Zoo now with various species is still located in Prentice Park.

El Camino Real evolved from linking the missions for the Spanish colonials in the 1700s. The same route was used when construction began on the "Santa Ana Parkway" in 1950, but its design reflected the first freeway in the United States, the Pasadena Freeway, built in 1939

and now known as the Arroyo Seco Parkway. The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 created the Interstate Highway System that interlaced the 48-contiguous states with superhighways to facilitate Cold War Era defenses and that theoretically allowed you to drive coast to coast without stopping. Originally conceived as part of U.S. Highway 101 linking Saddleback Valley with the Los Angeles basin when completed in 1954, Interstate 5 now links the entire west coast of the United States.

The post-World War II G.I. Bill and baby boom fueled greater demand for higher education than any prior period in history. In 1959, 450 students opened Orange County State College that combined with other state colleges into a system that quickly changed the name to California State University - Fullerton. The Laguna Beach College of Art + Design was founded amid the town's famous art colony and festivals in 1961 as the Laguna Beach School of Art. The University of California system added the campus of U.C. Irvine with its dedication in 1964 by then U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson. Although a bit beyond the timeline of this history, Saddleback College was founded as a community college in Mission Viejo and proclaimed the "Sweetheart of South Orange County" on - yes, you guessed it -

Valentine's Day in 1967. Today Saddleback College Emeritus Institute is a continuing-education adjunct that thrives within Laguna Woods Village.

Orange County's population reached one million people in 1963. A year later, the first ten families moved to Leisure World-Laguna Hills, your unique progressive community that grew to include 12,736 "manors" built by visionary Ross Cortese's Rossmoor Corporation.

So there you have it in broad strokes, warts and all. These historical highlights before your manor or even your village was built do not profess to be complete. They simply let you know that there are deep roots and local venues for you to explore further.

Okay. But why stop exactly where your neighbors think Laguna Woods' history starts? Laguna Woods' saga since 1964 is well documented and readily available at the Laguna Woods History Center, in its publications, and on its website LagunaWoodsHistory.org. This was just written to let you know there's much more to the story.

Once upon Laguna Woods, there were centuries of vibrant hues, soaring souls, and transcendent experiences. And, best of all, it is your place in local history.