

Once Upon Laguna Woods

by Dean O. Dixon

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

Fiction? No. These are stories and lore about the land right under your feet in and around Laguna Woods. So, what happened *Once Upon Laguna Woods*? Well, get ready to travel through time.

The beloved natural vistas from Laguna Woods reflect decades of conservation efforts that preserved tens of thousands of pristine acres from 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 even changing your area 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 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 repeatedly, it's now slowly inching beside northern California along the San Andreas Fault. At the current pace, Laguna Woods could arrive next to and west of San Francisco in about 20 million years.

Maybe. But, as you will read, past events and current facts can be fickle predictors of future occurrences despite popular aphorisms. Mark Twain reputedly said, "History doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes."

With pressure from 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 joins 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 many centuries 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 nearby resident. She owned Bay Island in Newport Beach's marina where she built the house she died in plus 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 intermittently 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 venue with bas-relief fossils in the walls and a paleontology sandbox for children to dig up fossils.

Approximately 25,000 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 connected to present-day Russia and Alaska. Long-term migration southward along the Pacific Ocean coastline led to the establishment of Native-

American tribes in and around Laguna Woods 15,000 years ago.

The Acjachemen Nation ranged from the San Gabriel River in north Orange County south to the Santa Margarita River in north San Diego County. The Tongva Nation, who spoke a similar language to the Acjachemen, had a few villages intermingled among the Acjachemen. The Acjachemen lived in hundreds of villages from the Santa Ana Mountains through foothill canyons, alongside freshwater springs, creeks, rivers, and atop ocean bluffs. Today the City of San Juan Capistrano maintains a municipal park replicating an Acjachemen settlement with interpretive signage and the tribe's thatched dome dwellings. It is named Putuidem Village.

The Acjachemen gathered fruit and nuts, hunted game, fished waterways, and cultivated natural food sources with expertise that improved yields. Their trade network with other tribes extended east to the Colorado River and northwest to the Channel Islands, a coastal archipelago of eight in Santa Barbara, Ventura, and Los Angeles counties. This archipelago includes Santa Catalina Island, visible from the Orange County coast.

In Laguna Woods, the Acjachemen's water source was named Los Alisos Creek by Spanish conquistadors but is

today 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. Hence, it even flows during your three dry seasons (winter was historically rainy) including the picturesque mile or so within Laguna Woods Village.

Los Alisos (Spanish for Alders) or, more specifically, California Sycamores lined the creek's banks, 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.

Upstream (northeasterly) on Aliso Creek, a shallow crossing place evolved into a sacred area for the Acjachemen people. They named this ford and their village there Nawil (also spelled Nigüili and Nigüil), which translates to "maiden" meaning adolescent girl in their language. The site was used for ceremonies to mark 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 the 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.

In November 1542 to begin winter repairs, Cabrillo's fleet returned south to Santa Catalina Island, which he had already claimed 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 became infected and turned gangrenous, and he died within a fortnight.

Ironically, Cabrillo had accumulated his wealth via Spanish viceroyalty laws that enslaved Indigenous peoples, which may indicate Tongva warriors were incited to attack him and his men. As the more aggressive local tribe, the Tongva used armed

resistance against Spanish rule. Regardless, Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo, the European discoverer of California, was buried on Santa Catalina Island within sight of coastal Orange County.

Over the following two centuries, Spain established four viceroyalties in the New World with three in South America alone. Locally, España Nueva (New Spain) 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. Sailing around South America's Cape Horn meant Spain administered enormous South American viceroyalties. Dedicated explorations of Alta and Baja California were further delayed because the official records of Cabrillo's voyage were lost in a fire. Subsequent summaries were not based on firsthand observations, so little attention was paid 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 come 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 to justify enslaving them. The subsequent success of Spain's colonies depended on this free labor.

Specifically, Portolá was to route El Camino Real (The Royal or King's Road) and site mission settlements from San Diego to Monterey with presidios or military bases at both termini. Over the next 54 years, Spaniards founded 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 and settlement goods such as furniture, seeds, plants, and domesticated animals. Under Captain Fernando Rivera y Moncada, the lead group left two months before the second contingent to 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 Crespi (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 the natives' arrows, the soldiers wore leather jackets or sleeveless jerkins made of six layers of deerskin and they carried bull-hide shields, lances, broadswords, and blunderbusses (flared-muzzle flintlock muskets, precursors to today's shotguns).

Progress was slow at two to four leguas or Spanish leagues (5.2 to 10.4 miles) daily. 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 eventually was 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 in today's Saddleback Valley.

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 camped along the longest river in Southern California across from a friendly Tongva village. Here they experienced an earthquake and three aftershocks. Father Juan Crespi 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." Instead, Crespi's journal further notes that the soldiers 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 several Acjachemen villages and a few Tongva villages. The proximity of Spanish missions eventually caused Europeans to rename tribes for their closest mission. Hence, Acjachemen became known as Juaneño due to their enslavement at 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).

Since 1905, the original route of El Camino Real has been marked by symbolic scaled-down mission bells hanging on arched poles. Fewer markers are seen in your area since Interstate 5 a/k/a San Diego Freeway was built on the original route.

The Spaniards and Franciscans strewn 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 removed local grizzly bears with strychnine and bullets. Before that, however, Californios used legendary horsemanship and reata (lasso) skills in groups to 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 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, soldiers assigned as guards became contentious with government, military, and church officials resulting in compromises that 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 choosing a site subsequently called Misión Vieja near native villages in hills about five miles northeast of the Mission San Juan Capistrano's final 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 the Acjachemen and Tongva.

But a few days later news arrived about other tribes who had attacked and burned the San Diego mission killing a priest. When the native workers 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 as 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 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 Acjachemen lived, worked, and worshiped in this settlement. They raised cattle, sheep, and horses and cultivated wheat, barley, corn, beans, grapes, olives, pomegranates, peaches, and apricots. Although they had never seen a horse before the Spaniards brought them, the Acjachemen became skilled horsemen

earning the moniker vaquero or cowboy. By claiming conversion to Roman Catholicism, Acjachemen were promised food for life, yet most secretly held to their own 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 for mortar mined by Acjachemen from limestone at Pecten Ridge in Laguna Woods, 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 challenging frontiers.

New Spain's government intended for Spanish citizens to colonize Las Californias provinces permanently, so seemingly minor participants in the Portolá Expedition were rewarded with massive land grants by Spanish governors. The earliest of these included 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 long-term, a story is too involved to expand on here.

The Mexican War of Independence (Guerra de Independencia de México) was an armed insurrection culminating from years of political and social upheaval, which ended the rule of the Viceroyalty of New Spain by Imperial Spain in 1821. Alta California including Laguna Woods became an estado or state in Mexico. Concern over the 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, in 1833, the Mexican Congress passed the Act for Secularization of the California Missions, 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 Nigüili and Nigüil) from which the 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 the jurisdiction of Los Angeles. Service in this capacity led 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 San Diego Freeway or Interstate 5). On the opposite or east side of El Camino Real also on the south side of 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 served as Juez de Campo in San Juan Capistrano, which was rewarded with a land grant 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 descent, 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 (variously known now as 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, acted entitled to the rights of legal citizens. Intending to establish their 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 imperialistic belief in Manifest Destiny for the U.S.A. to extend from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean led Anglo-Americans to continue illegally entering Mexico's Alta California, which inevitably caused war 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. In exchange for \$15 million, it forced Mexico to cede, Alta California and other Mexican territories north of today's border between Mexico and the U.S.A.

Perhaps you are wondering, besides the change of country and 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, where Stockton persuaded Don Juan Ávila that Alta California becoming a protectorate of the U.S.A. served the Californios' best interests long-term.

Don Juan Ávila's uncle's death had increased his concern about two of his brothers with the Californios' armed resistance in Los Angeles, so he 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 the city. A young boy, dashing off to hear Stockton's Marine Band playing in the plaza, inadvertently left standing open a door at the Ávila Adobe revealing opulent spacious interiors to belie a less auspicious exterior. Seeing

this, American forces appropriated the home perhaps to the dismay of the Ávila family as you might imagine.

In 1848, James Marshall discovered a nugget of gold while constructing a sawmill for Sacramento agriculturalist, John Sutter. The California Gold Rush triggered massive emigration not only from the eastern United States but also 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. California's Constitutional Convention was allowed to set the state's borders to expedite statehood rather than waiting for the U.S. Congress as was the accepted practice. California's new constitution also allowed women to own property in their 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 and Spanish rule. Californios, who were landowners, financially struggled with the new government's taxation of their land, which was not done under the

authority of Mexico or Spain, and the landowners' usury borrowing to pay taxes on time. Due to a lack of consistent cash flow, most land-rich Californios eventually became impoverished as lenders foreclosed opportunistically on their secured assets, mainly land. Racial prejudices of the time contributed to this.

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 the 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 the U.S. Midwest's Jesse James) among Californios of the era. As such, Flores was revered as a defender against vigilantes among insurgent American settlers and the U.S.A.'s seizure of (Alta) California.

On January 23, 1857, Juan Flores and Las Manillas killed Los Angeles County Sheriff James Barton and three deputies in a shoot-out at Barton Mound, now an accessible historic site in Irvine. Relentless in their pursuit of Las Manillas, subsequent sheriff's posses caught and lynched the bandits one by one. Juan Flores was cornered and surrendered, convicted, and

hanged on February 14, 1857. The hardships of frontier life always included lawlessness no matter which country governed the area.

A white ruling class that came with U.S.A. statehood in 1850 was concentrated in Northern California due to business and political power opportunities provided by the Gold Rush. They looked down on the "Mexicans" (correctly Californios) of Southern California and derogatorily called the sparsely populated area South of the 36th Parallel "Cow Counties." They wanted to "be well rid of these undesirables" and the Californios were equally eager to separate for self-governance.

In 1859, the Pico Act (introduced by Assemblyman Andrés Pico, brother of Pío de Jesus Pico, Mexico's last Alta California governor) was approved by local voters and the state legislature, signed by state Governor John B. Weller, and went to the U.S. Congress to approve Southern California seceding and creating the new Territory of Colorado so named for its eastern boundary, the Colorado River. This final approval never happened because the U.S. Congress was dealing with the impending secession of the Confederate States of America. This was the closest California ever came to separating into two states, but it is only one of over two hundred attempts to date.

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, the German winemakers in Annaheim (the original spelling of Anaheim) supported the Union. Rumors of Confederate privateers pillaging the California Coast did lead to the 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 that hundreds of veterans from both sides relocated here afterward from the Midwest and Southern states. As you will read, wars are to influence immigration again.

On Christmas Eve 1861, four weeks of almost continuous rain began causing 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 Acjachemen (a/k/a 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; however, clear titles to land-grant ranchos required verification by U.S. courts that had jurisdiction after American 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 that 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 that 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 as certified by the formal document signed by United States President Ulysses S. Grant and preserved locally in the archives of the Moulton Museum. Regardless, researchers agree that Rancho

Niguel unified under the ownership of the Rawson brothers, who sold it to Moulton & Company in 1884. Lewis Fenno Moulton owned two-thirds of L. F. Moulton & Company and Jean Pierre Daguerre owned one-third.

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 last 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 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 of years earlier, the masses sought transport westward. But, their only way to get to California was either to sail "around the Horn" of South America for six months or to cross the disease-ridden Isthmus of Panama from a ship in the Caribbean Sea to another in the Pacific Ocean.

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 affected 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. Modesta was arrested after she drove a wooden fence post between the tracks with a note demanding \$10,000 compensation to use her land. Her first trial ended in a hung jury, but her second trial made her Orange County's first convicted felon, a 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 in the City of San Juan Capistrano.

The Santa Fe Railroad began laying tracks in Southern California in 1885 eliminating a Southern Pacific Railroad monopoly. Competition sharply reduced ticket

prices and land speculators advertised heavily to draw buyers to towns that existed only as paper plats filed in what was 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 enclave 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 the 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 reenvisioned 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 some of this land as Crystal Cove State Park, thanks to Joan Irvine Smith of Irvine Company and Laura Davick, founder of Crystal Cove Alliance known today as Crystal Cove Conservancy.

Since 1878, plein-air artists supported themselves by selling to tourists along the uniquely beautiful coast in Laguna Beach 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 the narrow winding Laguna Canyon Road until the completion of Coast Highway in 1926, which connected beach

communities for the first time. Artists struggled with economic issues during the Great Depression. Hence, the Laguna Beach Art Association held its first arts festival the week after the Los Angeles Olympic Games of 1932, hoping those visitors would stay in the area.

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 a 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.

Lawyer Victor Montgomery drafted the Orange County secession documents shepherded through the California State Assembly by Dr. Henry Head. Ironically, Montgomery and Head had been soldiers unsuccessful with the Confederate States of America's secession from the United States of America but 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 his family.

With the financial backing of an uncle in the woolens business, Lewis Moulton decided to seek his fortune ranching in California. 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 near the present-day Port of Los Angeles in Wilmington and took a stagecoach to Santa Ana.

The next day, a letter of introduction to James Irvine landed Lewis Moulton a job at Rancho San Joaquin in the San Joaquin Hills abutting Rancho Niguel to the north. Irvine's 48,803-acre Rancho San Joaquin 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, drovers including Moulton had to ride six different horses daily. 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 horses they owned traveled by train to Texas and drove herds of cattle back to California. Each round trip took a year and a half due to hardships of elements, terrains, and circumstances. This was during an era of open-range land with no fences.

Home 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 Niguel Ranch 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 worked in southern Orange County since arriving from France in the 1870s. However, Daguerre's interest in the Moulton Ranch was not recorded until 1908. Jean Pierre Daguerre was the area's foremost sheep-husbandry expert when Lewis Fenno Moulton partnered with him.

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 partnered with Marco Forster, son of Don Juan Forster, to raise sheep in the Saddleback Valley. With that success, Jean Pierre Daguerre had sufficient means to marry Maria Eugenia Duguet in 1886.

In 1911, Daguerre was driving a wagon when a horse-less carriage (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 Niguel Ranch. 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 20 percent of the world's population. 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) took 16 million lives and got most of the attention for that period of world history as taught in the U.S.A. For further comparison, The Bubonic Plague or Black Death killed 25 million over five years in the 14th century.

If the Dagerres' surname seems familiar, it's likely due to Jean Pierre Daguerre's famous cousin, French romantic painter and printmaker, Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, whose early experiments with photographic images on copper plates led him to invent the daguerréotype. The invention's importance prompted the French government to reward Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre with a life-long pension that facilitated the publication of the daguerréotype 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 mountain pastures as far away as a meadow now underwater in Big Bear Lake. Aside from the Moulton Ranch pasture, up to fifteen tenant farmers grew hay, barley, and wheat on the ranch's acreage.

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 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 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 Niguel Ranch.

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 outside the families. The men, their wives, and children were close friends. There are idyllic stories about the Moulton sisters driving their pony cart to visit the Daguerre sisters nearby. 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 in front of

Saddleback Memorial Hospital is Calle de la Louisa. The Daguerres' home sat on the Northeast corner where Los Alisos ends at Paseo de Valencia.

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, who was ever modern, preferred to drive her auto, a Cadillac. Regardless, it seems fitting that the word "moulton" is Old English for a "mule enclosure or settlement."

After Lewis Fenno Moulton died in 1938, Nellie Moulton (née Gail) ran the Moulton Ranch with daughters Charlotte and Louise until 1950 when the Moulton-Daguerre partnership was dissolved. Acreage was valued by use and divided by ownership percentages. The three Daguerre daughters got title to acreage equal to one-third of the total valuation. After they sold this in the 1950s, it 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 the acreage of two-thirds valuation, which they managed until the 1960s when they sold to various developers including 3,600 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, and parts of Aliso Viejo and Mission Viejo. In Laguna Hills, there is a housing development called Nellie Gail Ranch although there never was a historic precursor.

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 original triangle-shaped Rancho Niguel's Mexican Land Grant. Later Nellie, renowned 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 Moulton Ranch were traded for ranchland in other parts of California including Louise Moulton's ranch in Santa Barbara County, California where she kept original records and equipment from her parents' ranch. When Louise Moulton Hanson died at age 99 in 2014, her extensive archives and collections became the core of the Moulton Museum that the heirs opened in Laguna Hills in 2022. Since 2007, Lewis and Nellie's great-grandsons, Jared Mathis, and Scott Barnes, have run Moulton heirs' local real estate holdings as MMB Management, LLC now next door to the Moulton Museum.

The City of Laguna Hills Civic Center exhibits personal items from the Moulton family, a complete human history timeline, and historical branding irons from local ranchos. The Laguna Hills Council Chambers feature three large historical murals where Jared Mathis began serving on the city council after his election in 2024. The murals include an Acjachemen village scene depicting their daily lives, the Portolá Expedition overlooking the Saddleback Valley, and Commodore Stockton and Don Juan Ávila on Rancho Niguel as the U.S.A. takes the area from Mexico.

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 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 directly benefit from once being 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 saw front-line action where he was wounded six times while rescuing his men. Holderman was awarded, for his valor, 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 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 Laguna Woods. 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 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 as 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 very 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. Prohibition's largest single liquor seizure occurred when a boat named "Daylight" was intercepted in south Laguna Beach at night in 1931.

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 luminaries like Albert Einstein and Edwin Hubble.

Pioneer aviator, Eddie Martin, used Irvine Ranch for \$5 barnstorming aerobatics and biplane joy rides that 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 where, 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, 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 was graded five feet deep to intersect Coast Highway in Laguna Beach. When the soft sandy soil yielded solid rock, Wilson got a pickax. The fossilized skull and bone that the boys chipped out of the rock brought prominence to Wilson and speculation among archeologists. After the bones

were radiocarbon dated in 1968, initial readings of 17,150 years old were revised to 11,700, making "Laguna Woman" among the oldest known human remains ever found on the North American continent.

Other earthshaking events came after 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 one month to pass the Field Act that set seismic safety standards for schools and the State of 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 assumed to be 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. Although untrue, Okies were often portrayed as union and New Deal opportunists who felt entitled to better wages and housing. More recently, sociologists agree most Okies were urban white-collar workers who held well-paid jobs in southern California's war industries in the 1940s.

As The Great Depression eased 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 citizens from Mexico 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 the usual four-season climates. When there is less rain in winter, drought ensues because rains are infrequent in spring, summer, and autumn. Yet the winter rainy season easily overwhelmed the otherwise dry natural watershed.

In the winter of 1938, heavy rain for several days carried 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 the 1938 disaster area and resolved something needed to be done to control such flooding.

The 1938 flood is why some 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 potential wrath.

Another natural phenomenon became nationally prominent 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 the 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. The 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 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 in local stables, moved by rail in livestock railcars, and held against their will in fenced compounds, these Americans were supposedly

interned for their 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 as they called 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 have been children then.

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 the Santa Ana Army Air Base opened in Costa Mesa in 1942, it was a combat training facility without runways, airplanes, or hangars, which grew to house 26,000 military personnel. Camp Irvine on Irvine Ranch is the site of today's Irvine Park and 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 originally the Post Exchange (PX). By the time the war ended 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 the U.S. Marine Corps Air Station El Toro (U.S.M.C.A.S. El Toro). Forty percent of that area was designated for a blimp base. The same site was once 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 long-term consequences as a court-mandated 4,000-foot-wide flyway determined the location of Laguna Woods' golf courses, resident gardens, and reservoirs so residences were not built under risky airways. Nonetheless, in 1967, two Marine Corps jets collided and crashed, one outside the village walls and

one into Laguna Woods' Cul-De-Sac #1 burning buildings #272 and #281 and 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 ending the all-volunteer era. In 1944, Walt Disney Studios designed "The Flying Bull" base patch for the Marines' uniforms. Although its namesake Marine base eventually drew attention to the town, El Toro only had a population of 130 people in the 1940 census.

U.S.M.C.A.S. El Toro became the site of the popular El Toro Air Show from the 1950s until the final 1997 show which 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, a 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. Sometimes natural forces remind us of their influence on history.

Also in 1949, Joseph E. Prentice donated 19.24 acres of land to the City of Santa Ana for a municipal park stipulating at least fifty monkeys be kept there. This defined its future, so the Santa Ana Zoo is still located in Prentice Park, but now there are many more species of animals.

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, a design reflecting 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 historic period. In 1959, the first 450 students opened Orange County State College, which 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 with the help of Nellie Moulton 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 1964 dedication 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 in 1963. A year later, the first ten families moved to Leisure

World - Laguna Hills, your world-changing community that grew to include 2,530 residential buildings of 12,736 "manors" built on 2,200 acres (3.4 square miles) by visionary Ross Cortese's Rossmoor Corporation. The 2020 U.S. Census recorded 16,034 residents in the City of Laguna Woods.

So, there you have it in broad strokes, warts and all. Although most of these historical highlights occurred before your manor or even your village was built, this history is far from complete. However, this does let you know there are deep roots and local venues for more exciting historical exploration.

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, however, was written to pique your curiosity since there is more to discover about the 16,000 years of human history on the land beneath your feet in and around Laguna Woods.

As for *Once Upon Laguna Woods*? You have visited centuries of vibrant hues, soaring souls, and transcendent experiences. And "happily ever after" is yours as Laguna Woods is *Your Place in Local History*.