

Cultural Landscape Report for Santa Margarita Ranch San Luis Obispo County, California



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Prepared By
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Fresno, California

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Santa Margarita Ranch, LLC has prepared a proposal for development and a concept for the future development of the Santa Margarita Ranch in San Luis Obispo County, California (Figure 1-1). The active development proposal is the Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision; the concept is a Future Development Program. The Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision includes 111 home sites and one ranch headquarters unit on 145 acres, with 3,633 acres placed in agricultural conservation easements. The location for this proposed subdivision is southeast of the town of Santa Margarita, west of Pozo Road. The Future Development Program plans for a total build-out of ranch lands.

As part of the Environmental Impact Report on the proposed developments, the County of San Luis Obispo retained Applied EarthWorks, Inc. (Æ) to perform a cultural landscape study that focuses on the impacts of the project on the historical integrity of the ranch. Such analysis examines the existing ranch property within the context of the settlement of the valley and its historical development. This Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) is the product of that study. It is a “primary report that documents the history, significance and treatment of a cultural landscape. A CLR evaluates the history and integrity of the landscape including any changes to its geographical context, features, materials, and use” (Birnbaum 1994:3). This report thus describes the historical landscape of the Santa Margarita Ranch, identifies its significant features and character-defining elements, and assesses the potential effects of the proposed and envisioned development on the significant qualities of the historical landscape. It provides a detailed historical context within which these evaluations are made, and offers recommendations to mitigate potentially significant impacts.

1.2 THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE DEFINED

In 1925 Carl Sauer, a professor of geography at the University of California, Berkeley, originally and succinctly defined the term cultural landscape: “culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape the result” (Sauer 1965:343). In a specific geographical area, a given cultural group influences the landscape by using natural features and by establishing trails and roads, settlements, and other cultural features. Cultural traditions are developed by continued use. Other cultural groups moving into a new area bring their own patterns of use and traditions; these can destroy the original cultural landscape, or the two can mix and completely new traditions can arise. Even if the original landscape is destroyed, some remnants can survive in outlying areas or be preserved in stories, written accounts, paintings, and photographs.

Expanding on Sauer’s original definition, the National Park Service has further refined the definition of cultural landscape as: “a geographic area, including both cultural and natural resources and the wildlife or domestic animals therein, associated with a historic event, activity, or person or exhibiting other cultural or aesthetic values” (Birnbaum 1994:1). The National Park Service has delineated four types of cultural landscapes: historic sites, historic designed landscapes, historic vernacular landscapes, and ethnographic landscapes (Birnbaum 1994:1).

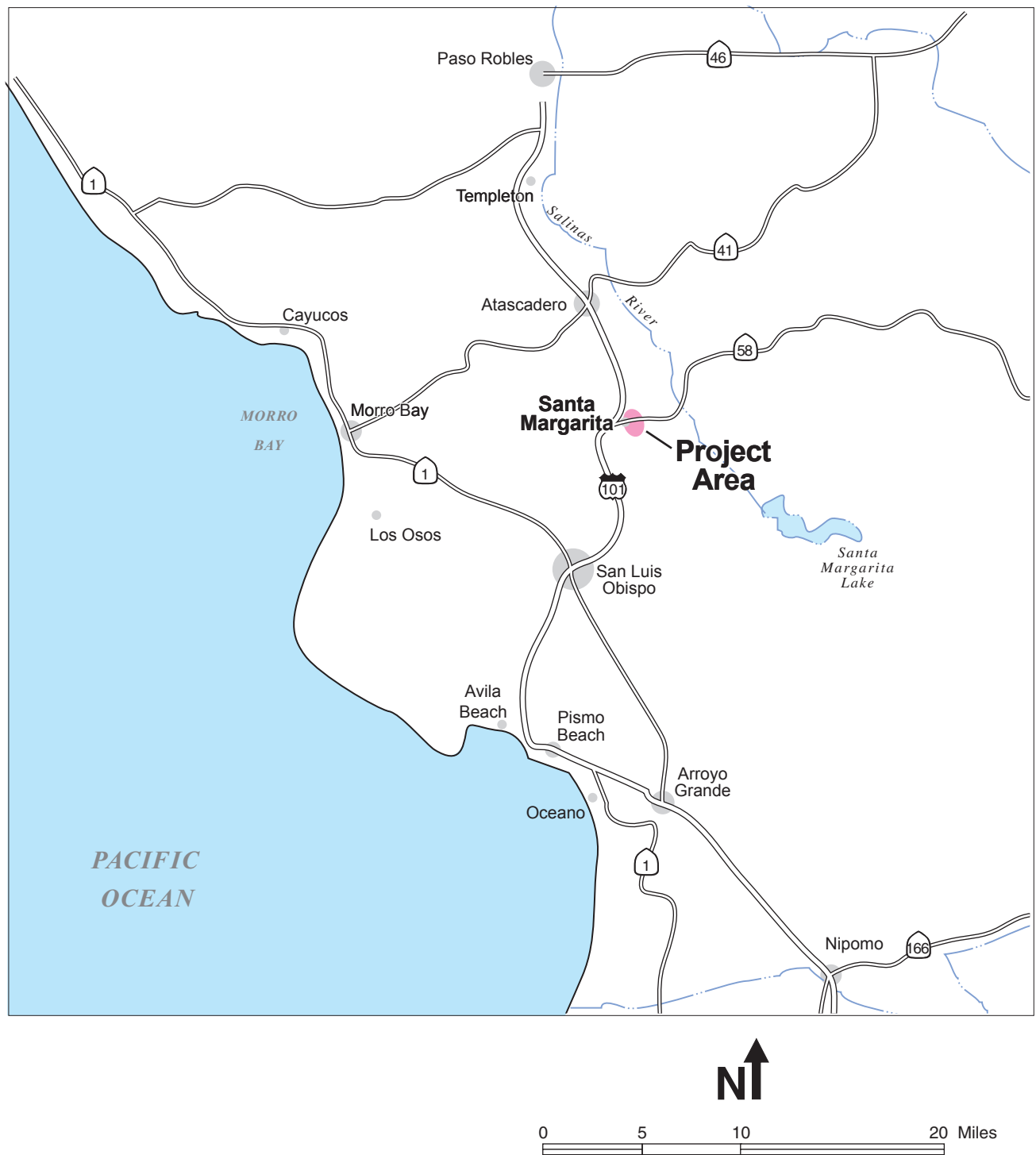
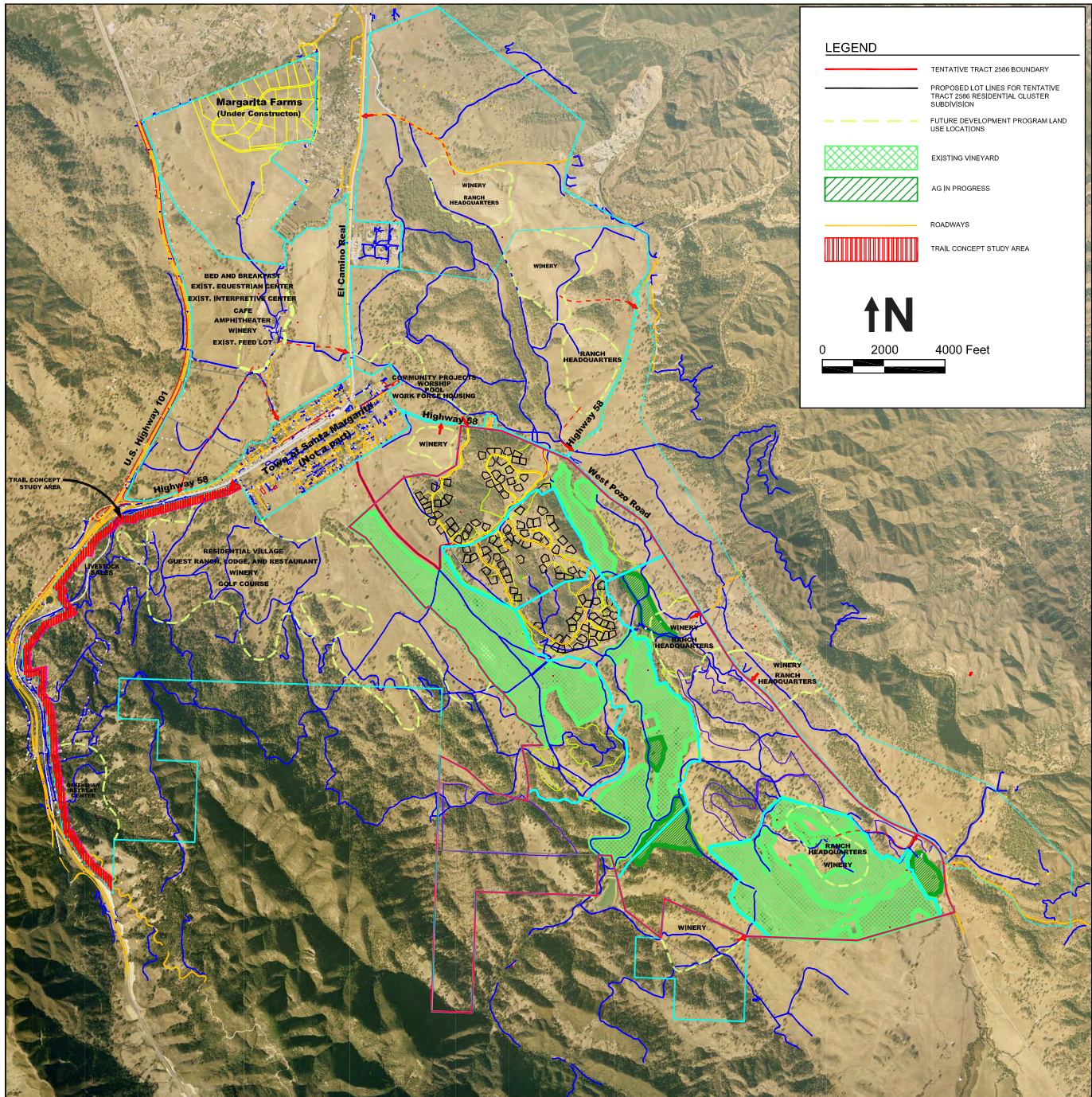


Figure 1-1 Location of Santa Margarita Ranch.



Santa Margarita Ranch Agricultural Cluster Subdivision Project and Future Development Program EIR
 Section 2.0 Project Description

Figure 1-2 Existing Santa Margarita Ranch and proposed development.

1.3 THE EXISTING SETTING

The Santa Margarita Ranch is a palimpsest, a landscape that contains remnants of many eras and of the lives of the people who lived and worked on the ranch. The 13,800-acre ranch grew up around the Santa Margarita de Cortona Asistencia, an outpost of Mission San Luis Obispo de Tolosa founded sometime before 1790 as an agricultural satellite of the mission. The asistencia itself had been established at the site of a native Chumash ranchería, which may have existed at that location for many centuries.

An 1858 description of the ranch, which then encompassed 17,734 acres, is included in the mortgage between Joaquin Estrada and Martin Murphy, Jr., and was taken from the original 1841 land grant petition of Estrada. It reads:

lying and being within the mountains of the Coast Range, and on the northern declivity thereof and at and about the pass through said mountains known by the name of the Santa Margarita pass bounded northerly by the “Arroyo and Cañada de Satagolla” and land known by the name of “Ataseadera.” Southerly by the “Tasajera” and lands known by the name of “San Jose.” Easterly by the “Bolsa del Rincon” and summits of the above mentioned range and westerly by various summits of said above mentioned range [Murphy Family Papers 1858:n.p.].

The Santa Margarita Ranch occupies the greater part of the Santa Margarita Valley, within the Southern Coast Ranges physiographic province. This area extends south from San Francisco Bay to the Santa Ynez River and lies west of the San Andreas Fault Zone. The southern Coast Ranges comprise a series of north-south trending valleys and ridges along a series of parallel faults and folds, an alignment that causes many rivers and streams in the area to run northward. Santa Margarita Valley is on the east side of this province and is enclosed on all sides by the foothills and mountains of the Santa Lucia and La Panza ranges. The ranch encompasses the hillslopes and bottomlands of the valley, which merges at its north end with the larger Salinas River valley.

This portion of the Coast Ranges is dominated by granitic crystalline and metamorphic rocks consisting of gneiss, schist, quartzite, and marble. Chert from the Monterey and Franciscan formations is common in the area and was used prehistorically for tool manufacture. Sandstone containing extensive beds of 5–7-million-year-old fossilized oysters, scallops, sea urchins, and sand dollars also occurs.

Evidence of past volcanic activity is evident in a nearby chain of 14 volcanic plugs extending northwest from San Luis Obispo to Morro Bay. The most notable of these is Morro Rock, a large dacite remnant likely associated with the West Huasna Fault. Of particular note at Santa Margarita Ranch are several strands of the Rinconada Fault that underlie the study area.

Numerous large and small streams drain the southern Coast Ranges. The Salinas River flows along the eastern edge of the Santa Margarita Valley on its route north to Monterey Bay; it is joined along the way by the San Antonio and Nacimiento rivers. The Santa Maria and Cuyama rivers snake across the southern end of the ranges carrying water from the large depression between the Caliente and Sierra Madre ranges. Numerous small streams around Santa Margarita drain into the Salinas River. Most notable are Santa Margarita, Yerba Buena, Rinconada, and Trout creeks (Flint et al. 2000).

2 METHODS

2.1 BACKGROUND RESEARCH AND FIELD VISIT

Following Preservation Brief 36, *Protecting Cultural Landscapes: Planning, Treatment, and Management of Historic Landscapes*, and National Register Bulletin 30, *Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Rural Historic Landscapes*, Æ conducted historical research in order to describe the history of land use and development of the entire rancho landscape from the before the mission period to the present day. Æ then performed a field reconnaissance of the property to document existing conditions, identify the character-defining elements of the landscape, and establish a baseline of historical landscape integrity and significance. This provided the context within which to consider the impacts of the proposed Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision, including dispersed versus clustered development, and the envisioned Future Development Program.

On October 24, 2005, personnel working on the project held an initial meeting at the Santa Margarita Ranch headquarters. Æ Principal Barry Price and Landscape Historian Peggy Beedle met with staff from Rincon Consultants, Althouse and Meade, and the ranch management. After the kickoff meeting, project personnel toured the ranch, stopping at several locations included in the proposed Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision and envisioned Future Development Program.

In January 2006, Leeann Haslouer of Æ conducted a records search at the Central Coastal Information Center of the California Historical Resources Information System at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Peggy Beedle conducted a field reconnaissance of the landscape from January 23 to 26, 2006, during which she located and examined historical sites and structures, road remnants, and other elements of the historical landscape. The purpose of the field reconnaissance was not to record individual sites formally, but to examine them within the larger context of landscape history. In addition, she obtained and examined photographs of the ranch depicting the historical landscape in many stages.

Historical archives and documentary materials from many sources were used to develop the historical context that serves as the basis for evaluation of the landscape. Background research was conducted at the following repositories:

- University of California, Riverside Special Collections;
- University of Southern California Special Collections;
- Santa Clara University Archives;
- The Huntington Library, San Marino, California;
- Claremont College Special Collections;

- Robert E. Kennedy Library, California State Polytechnic University, San Luis Obispo;
- San Luis Obispo County Historical Museum;
- San Luis Obispo City/County Library;
- Atascadero Public Library;
- Santa Margarita Public Library;
- California State Archives, Sacramento;
- Bureau of Land Management, California State Office, Sacramento; and
- Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

2.2 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The historical tradition of rancho hospitality continues today at the Santa Margarita Ranch. Kathy Loftus, who has lived on the ranch for 30 years, shared her knowledge about the ranch and its historical landscape, and identified the location of historic photographs. Aaron Lazanoff, the ranch manager, took time out of his busy schedule to locate historic homestead and mining sites, and imparted his knowledge of current ranching practices.

Jason Dart, biologist with Althouse and Meade, provided information on historic sites on the ranch. Betsy Bertrando delved into sources of Santa Margarita history at the San Luis Obispo County Historical Museum, researched county records, and shared her extensive knowledge of county history.

The Mission Inn Foundation & Museum, Riverside, California, provided a print of the Henry Chapman Ford painting of the Santa Margarita Asistencia.

3 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

3.1 CALIFORNIA HISTORY

California, set on the west coast of North America, on the shores of the Pacific Ocean, was originally claimed by Spain in the sixteenth century. In 1542, Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo, searching for the Northwest Passage, anchored at San Diego Bay. Cabrillo and his crew visited what are now San Pedro, Santa Monica Bay, and Catalina Island. The men went ashore for wood and water, but did not venture a great distance inland. In 1602, Spanish naval officer Sebastian Vizcaíno surveyed and recorded much of the California and Oregon coast. The expedition also visited San Diego Bay, San Pedro, and Catalina Island, giving each location its current name. Although there followed several smaller expeditions, the Spanish monarchy claimed the territory of California based mainly on the Cabrillo and Vizcaíno surveys (Bancroft 1886a:96–99).

The name California seems to have been derived from medieval Spanish romances, in which it was described as an island paradise. There is no definitive date of the first use of the name, or who chose it, but it was in use by 1542 during the Cabrillo explorations (Gudde 1998:60–61).

On the central California coast Native Americans lived in large villages, with as many as 1,000 residents occupying coastal villages east of Point Conception and less dense populations to the north and in the interior regions. At different times the Santa Margarita Valley was occupied by both Salinans and Northern Chumash. In general, lands south and west of Santa Margarita, encompassing San Luis Obispo County, have been ascribed to the Obispeño Chumash. It is generally known that the Salinans utilized lands along the coast and in the rugged mountains of the interior and may have occupied the area extending south from Soledad to a point north of San Luis Obispo. A recent study of Salinan and Northern Chumash linguistic and social geography (Milliken and Johnson 2003) concluded that the many villages around Santa Margarita were Northern Chumash during the mission era (and presumably before), but that Salinan speakers occupied the area during the middle and late nineteenth century. Although relations between the Chumash and Salinans are described as hostile, some level of trade occurred between the groups because the Chumash supplied shell ornaments and other wood and steatite materials to the Salinans (Flint et al. 2000:12–14).

Both groups appear to have lived in permanent villages along the coast and major inland drainages. However, task-specific sites likely occurred in the mountains and along minor seasonal creeks and streams. Chumash villages typically consisted of several dome-shaped houses built from poles and grass thatching, and one or more sweathouses with some evidence of subterranean construction. Likewise, Salinans built domed pole houses and communal structures (Flint et al. 2000:12–14).

Salinan subsistence was based on hunting and gathering. The primary vegetal food was acorns; hunting focused on large and small game such as deer, bear, and rabbit. However, before the arrival of the Spanish, the Salinans likely used a rich array of maritime resources, as evidenced

by C-shaped shell fishhooks, bone awls, notched pebble net sinkers, and other materials recovered from coastal Salinan sites (Flint et al. 2000:12–14).

The Chumash economy also focused on marine resources, although inland terrestrial goods played a greater role in Northern Chumash territory than among other Chumash groups. Balsa and plank canoes provided the channel Chumash with transportation to outlying resources, although no evidence of plank canoe use by the Obispeño has been encountered. Harvesting and fishing techniques were used to recover shoreline and tide pool fish species. Ground stone implements and projectile points indicate hunting and collecting also were important subsistence activities (Flint et al. 2000:12–14).

Both the Salinan and Chumash manufactured baskets for collecting, preparing, and serving food as well as others that were worn as hats. Techniques used by the Salinans included coiling and twining. The Chumash used beads to decorate baskets. Steatite (soapstone) apparently was an important material, especially along the coast; fewer steatite objects have been found in areas away from the coast. Additionally, both groups made use of bone or wooden musical instruments (Flint et al. 2000:12–14).

It was not until the eighteenth century that Spain looked in the direction of Alta California and saw encroachments from the Russians expanding their territory from the north and the English expanding from the east. The Spanish established a plan of settlement for Alta California based on the Laws of the Indies, a set of guidelines for Spanish settlement in the Americas. There were 148 ordinances prescribing the location of settlements, site alignment, and street layout, among a myriad of other details. The ideal settlement location was on high ground, open to the north and south winds, and close to an adequate supply of water. The basic layout was a grid pattern, with a central plaza, on which the main church was located (Crouch et al. 1982).

According to the Spanish plan, a capital was to be established at Monterey, a harbor described by Vizcaíno. Jesuit priests had been active in the colonization of Baja California, but in 1767 the King of Spain had expelled them from all his lands. Thus, the Franciscan Order of Friars, under Junípero Serra, took over the formerly Jesuit mission properties in Baja and traveled with the first expedition to Alta California in 1769 (Bancroft 1886a:112–125).

The expedition traveled by land and sea. Three ships set sail for San Diego. The Governor of Baja California, Gaspar de Portolá, captained the land expedition, which was divided into two in order to have sufficient water for all. The first ship reached San Diego on April 11, the two legs of the land expedition did not arrive until May 15 and July 1. On July 14, Portolá left for Monterey; two days later the first mission and presidio were founded at San Diego (Bancroft 1886a:126, 133–134, 140).

On this first land trek from San Diego to Monterey, the Spanish traveled along the coast and did not penetrate inland. The expedition members did not recognize the area of Monterey from Vizcaíno's description, but pushed on to San Francisco, then returned to San Diego. After the arrival of a supply ship Portolá and Serra made a second journey north in 1770 and did perceive the location of Monterey. Here a second mission and presidio were established on June 3, 1770. These two settlements were used as bases from which to colonize the rest of California (Bancroft 1886a:152, 168–170).

When Juan Bautista de Anza traveled from San Diego to Monterey in 1775, he followed a new route that took the Spanish farther inland than the route of Portolá. The Anza Trail traversed Cuesta Grade and the Santa Margarita Valley on its northward journey from San Luis Obispo. Known as El Camino Real, the King's Highway, it became the primary route from San Diego to Monterey. All of the missions were located along this highway, as was the Santa Margarita Asistencia. Travelers often stopped there and described it in their journals (Bancroft 1886a:268).

Although the Laws of the Indies were specifically geared toward the establishment of cities and towns, missions also followed the guidelines. A mission was “a congregation of convert Indians who make their homes in a village close by the church who under the eyes of one or two missionary priests learn and practice the Christian Religion, and for their own maintenance are taught mechanical and domestic arts, gardening, agriculture and stock-raising, in order to become useful citizens” (Engelhardt, in Weber 2003:4). The goal of this education was to enable the Indians to live independently, at which time the mission lands would be divided among the natives, and the mission would become a parish church.

Missions were laid out in a square, with the church the central feature of the square and a wall around it for protection. Indian converts, called neophytes, lived in dwellings located about 200 yards distant from the square; some of these were of adobe, but some were palisade and tule huts (Newcomb 1925:211–212).

As more Indians were converted and settled near the missions, more land was needed to raise food and teach agricultural skills. The missions developed outlying ranchos and asistencias, or extensions of the missions, to aid in this endeavor. Neophytes lived at the outposts; priests did not, but visited on a regular basis. By 1810 the missions produced a surplus of foodstuffs and materials, achieving an “economic independence” from Spain (Archibald 1978:183).

In 1810 Mexico declared its political independence from Spain. There was no immediate change at the missions—the building program continued, and new missions were established. However, California was relatively cut off from Mexico, which could not pay the soldiers garrisoned at the presidios. Part of the mission surplus was given to the unpaid soldiers; part was used for trade, mainly with Americans. When independence was achieved in 1821, California was still a frontier colony and very sparsely populated. In 1820 there were 3,270 Spanish and mixed-blood colonists; 13 American, African, and European foreigners; and approximately 20,500 Native American neophytes (Bancroft 1886b:392–393).

In 1821 Mexico opened the ports of San Diego and Monterey to foreign trade (Crouch et al. 1982:200). American ships continued to dock at California ports to purchase the tallow and hides, which were known as “California banknotes.” Americans associated with this trade settled in California, some of them becoming citizens and owners of large ranchos. In addition, American trappers, the first of which was Jedediah Smith, crossed the Rocky Mountains to visit the coast. Many Americans believed in Manifest Destiny, and that California was meant to become part of the United States (Starr 2005:64).

Mexico continued the Spanish policy of colonizing California; in 1833 the Secularization Act was enacted. This enforced the change from mission to parish church for the Franciscans, and although the mission lands were meant to be divided among the neophytes, the governor was given the power to grant large areas of former mission lands to private citizens. Some Indians

remained on the lands, working as vaqueros. Approximately 700 petitions for land were granted between 1833 and the American takeover in 1846 (Cleland 1951:23).

The decade of the 1840s was the most successful time for the Mexican ranchos. For the most part the ranchers raised cattle on native grasses. In addition to cattle they raised horses, and excellent horsemanship was prized. The vaqueros could ride and rope, and developed distinctive riding accoutrements. They also roped grizzly bears, which were attracted to the carcasses of skinned cattle. Bear and bull fights were popular entertainments on the ranchos. This “pastoral, patriarchal, almost Arcadian existence” was also economically profitable; in 1845–1846 California exported 80,000 hides, 1.5 million pounds of tallow, 10,000 bushels of wheat, along with lumber, wine, skins, soap, and gold (Cleland 1951:31, 33).

With the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo on February 2, 1848, California formally became an American territory, and two years later, on September 9, 1850, California became the thirty-first state in the Union. In those two years (1848–1850) there was an influx of Americans seeking their fortunes, triggered by James Marshall’s 1848 discovery of gold at Sutter’s Mill (Works Progress Administration 1939:33–54).

The miners demanded beef; the result of this demand was a much higher price for cattle. Instead of selling hides and tallow, the cattle were driven to northern California and sold. While prices were high the ranchers could afford to pay the new property taxes that were established with statehood. However, the drought of the 1860s ended a decade of prosperity (Cleland 1951).

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo had guaranteed that Mexican landowners would be allowed to keep their holdings. In 1851, in opposition to the spirit of the law, the U.S. Congress established the Board of Land Commissioners to confirm the Spanish and Mexican land titles. The landowners had to provide proof of ownership to the commissioners, and all costs were paid by the applicants. It was often a very costly and time-consuming process—the average time for confirmation was 17 years. Furthermore, many of the decisions of the board were appealed (Perez 1982). Many of the original landowners were bankrupted by the process and forced to sell their lands to Americans.

In the new state most of the population and wealth was in the north; southern California landowners petitioned that their property taxes were unfair, but to no avail. In some respects the property tax was seen as a way to hasten the subdivision of the ranches into smaller agricultural tracts (Cleland 1951:122). The taxation issue was one of the conflicts between the northern and southern halves of the state. In the early 1860s there was a movement to divide the state; the north “assumed an apathetic attitude toward the loss of the five backward grazing counties, and both houses of the legislature approved the division bill” (Cleland 1951:125). As the secession of the southern states and the prospect of a national civil war became stronger, the bill was allowed to die.

Taxes and drought changed the landscape of southern California (Cleland 1951). The number of cattle in the state in 1870 was about half that of 1860. After the Civil War, California steadily became more American as new towns were founded and the large ranches were sold in small parcels to farmers. The prevalent attitude was that the land should be utilized for its highest and most productive use—agriculture. El Camino Real was used as a stage road, new roads were constructed, and the Union Pacific Railroad connected the state to points east. Wheat was a

popular crop, but other agricultural endeavors came to prominence in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Immigrant Swiss farmers gained a reputation as excellent dairymen in Marin and Sonoma counties, where large herds supplied milk to San Francisco and the Sacramento Valley. As more Swiss and Swiss-Italian families migrated to California, friends and relatives urged them toward the Central Coast with its moderate climate, rolling hills full of native grass, and ample water. By 1869, dairies had become an important part of the San Luis Obispo County economy (Flint et al. 2000:16). There were experiments with feeding various foods to dairy cattle; ultimately alfalfa produced the best results.

Alfalfa was first grown in California in 1851. As it emerged as the most popular feed for dairy cattle, more alfalfa was cultivated in the state. It grew well in the climate, and some farmers could get eight cuttings a year, but the crop required a high amount of water. As wells and irrigation became more common, more land was taken out of wheat production to go into alfalfa (Santos 1994). In 1909, alfalfa planted on 484,134 acres produced 1,639,707 bushels. Irrigated land also produced citrus and deciduous fruits along with vegetables.

At the same time as many of the large ranches were being subdivided, there was a growing nostalgia for the mission era. Artists and photographers traveled the chain of missions recording the buildings. In 1872 Edward Vischer's drawings of mission buildings were published in *Missions of Upper California*. In 1875 Henry Chapman Ford settled in Santa Barbara for health reasons. Originally from New York, then Chicago, he had studied art in Paris and Florence. Between 1881 and 1882 he traveled the California countryside, painting all 21 missions and five asistencias, including Santa Margarita. His collection was published in 1883 as *Etchings of the Franciscan Missions of California*; 10 years later it was exhibited at the Chicago World's Fair. Around 1915 Henry Miller purchased the entire set of 38 mission paintings for the Mission Inn, located in Riverside, California (Klotz 1989). Ford's work fostered interest in the missions, and was the beginning of the mission preservation movement (Hughes 2005).

The twentieth-century growth of California was astronomical, particularly after World War II, and this growth consumed agricultural areas close to the large cities. However, there were some areas, such as the Central Coast, where the traditional ranching and farming life continued. Despite the growth around Los Angeles and San Francisco, San Luis Obispo County, midway between the two metropolises, has remained predominantly rural.

3.2 MISSION SAN LUIS OBISPO DE TOLOSA

In the fall of 1772, San Luis Obispo de Tolosa became the fifth mission established in Alta California. It was located in the Valley of the Bears, so named because there had been a bear hunt there in the spring of that year, during which Spaniards killed many bears, equal to about 9,000 pounds of meat, which kept them from starving. More importantly, in spite of the fact that a native *ranchería* (village) was not close to the site, there was "good land, water, timber and pasture" (Archibald 1978:162).

Father Serra established the mission while on a journey south from Monterey. The altar was set up in an arbor on September 1, 1772; Serra celebrated the first mass and continued his journey the next day. Father José Cavaller administered the mission. The mission site was situated on a

low eminence with a stream on both sides (Blomquist 2003:7). The layout was a large quadrangle. The first temporary buildings were a chapel and dwelling for the priests. The soldiers constructed a barracks and stockade. All of the buildings were of the same construction materials: palisades (vertical stakes) set close together, tule roofing, and adobe infill (Engelhardt 1963:28).

Within a month after the founding, there had been one neophyte baptism. The natives were considered “indifferent” to the mission because there were ample local food sources. Gifts, particularly of clothing, were given to try to get the Indians to settle at the mission (Engelhardt 1963:22). After the Indians were baptized they were expected to live near the mission and learn a useful skill that would allow them to become economically independent. Under Franciscan supervision, the neophytes planted wheat—eight fanegas (bushels) in December of 1773. Corn and beans were also planted; stock included horses, cattle, mules, and pigs. In 1774, of the five established missions, San Luis Obispo had the highest production of wheat.

Each year the priest in charge of the mission compiled an annual report of mission events. These reports detail some of the construction activities at the mission, as well as crop and stock statistics. Although there were “tools for the carpentershop and for the stonemasons” at the mission in 1773 (Engelhardt 1963:23), it was 20 years before skilled artisans, including stonemasons, were sent to Alta California (Cameron 1957:6). The construction of permanent buildings at the mission began in 1794. Included were a “spacious house” for the missionaries, a workshop, and dwellings for the guards and their families (Engelhardt 1963:42). In 1800 an adobe granary and weaving room were added to the mission as well as a brick wall that finished the quadrangle. Each neophyte family had a small adobe house. A hospital was built in 1804, a grist mill in 1805 (Engelhardt 1963:43–44).

In 1805 Captain Joseph Shaler described the San Luis Obispo mission:

it has 1000 Indians attached to it, and its annual productions are 500 fanegos of wheat, 1500 fanegos of corn, with barley, oats, and pulse in proportion; it has also vineyards, and a plenty of fruit. The stock belonging to the mission exceeds 1000 head of horned cattle, besides horses, sheep, hogs, goats, etc.; its buildings are said to be excellent; even the habitations of the Indians are of stone and plaster [Shaler, in Cleland 1922:476].

The early 1800s were the time of greatest success for the San Luis Obispo missionaries. In 1805 there were 905 neophytes. After that there was a slow decline, and there were only 310 listed in 1829 (Blomquist 2003:20).

As the missions grew, it became necessary to establish outlying agricultural settlements—ranchos, estancias, and asistencias—to support the expanding populations. All three types of settlements were established to produce food for the missions; the difference was that an asistencia was expected to become a mission in the future (Honig 2006). It functioned essentially as a mission, but there was no resident priest. There were two outposts connected to San Luis Obispo. The Santa Margarita de Cortona Asistencia was on the northernmost lands of the mission. The other, Rancho de la Playa, was located “on the main road” about 2 kilometers from the beach (Duflot de Mofras 1937 [1844]:200).

At San Luis Obispo, the stone foundation for the church was constructed in 1816; there was no further construction until after 1820 (Blomquist 2003:10). In November 1818, Hippolyte Bouchard, in command of two ships, attacked the presidio at Monterey, then sailed down the coast to San Juan Capistrano (Webb 1952:93). This attack worried the Franciscans, who realized that they did not have protection from such depredations.

In 1829 Alfred Robinson, who spent eight years in California between 1829 and 1837, wrote:

The Mission, though formerly a wealthy establishment, is now of little importance. The buildings are in a decayed state and everything about them appears to have been much neglected. . . . The mission possesses excellent horses, and a great many mules; but owing to want of attention, many of them are permitted to stray away and mix with the wild cattle of the mountains [Robinson 1846:54].

An earthquake hit the mission in 1830. The damage was detailed in the annual report by Father Gil y Taboada, then head of Mission San Luis Obispo. Even though the mission was in decline, some essential repairs were still accomplished. In 1831 a masonry bell tower replaced the original (Blomquist 2003:20). In 1836, an inventory of Mission San Luis Obispo's assets was taken.

Mission San Luis Obispo de Tolosa Assets	Value (pesos)
Contents of the Warehouse	2,793.37 ½
Contents of the Larder	380.00
Contents of the Granary	6,124.37 ½
Contents of the Wine Cellar	1,653.00
Contents of the Soap House	740.75
Looms	376.00
Blacksmith Shop	537.25
Carpenter Shop	309.25
Household Goods	508.75
Livestock	19,109.50
<i>Total</i>	<u>32,568.25</u>
Accounts Owed to San Luis	5,527.37 ½
Mission Edifice	5,000.00
Orchard	6,858.00
Rancho Santa Margarita	4,039.00
9 <i>Sitios</i> of Land	9,000.00
Church and Furnishings	7,257.50
Library and Musical Instruments	519.00
<i>Total Assets</i>	<u>70,769.12</u>

From Blomquist (2003:28–29).

The pueblo of San Luis Obispo was officially created in 1844 after secularization of the mission. San Luis Obispo was one of the original California counties created with statehood in 1850. Ranching was the primary occupation of county residents.

In 1859 the San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors, sitting as the Board of Equalization, initiated a tax assessment rating system of county ranchos, based on soil quality and accessibility of location (Angel 1994 [1883]:173). The value of the land for first class ranches was \$1.25, second class \$1.00, third class \$0.75, and \$0.50 for fourth class. The board also set the values for various animals. Horses had the highest value at \$25, then oxen at \$20, and cattle at \$16 a head. Hogs, sheep and goats were valued at \$3, \$2, and \$1, respectively (Board of Equalization 1859).

San Luis Obispo County suffered through the 1860s drought years. The high beef prices caused by the gold rush could not be maintained; the cattle died on the range for lack of water. There was an “immense decline in the valuations as reported for the year[s] subsequent to 1860. This decline is significant of the highly unfavorable seasons of 1862 and 1864. During those depressing seasons agricultural affairs were at an exceedingly low ebb. Cattle perished in such numbers that the Assessor’s list bore hardly anything of value in the nature of live-stock” (Angel 1994 [1883]:174). The land east of the Santa Lucia Range did not suffer the drought as much as the western part of the county, or as it did farther east near Paso Robles (Angel 1994 [1883]:222). However, there was a general devaluation of the land; in 1863 San Luis Obispo County assessments of land value ranged from \$0.25 to \$1.00 per acre (Angel 1994 [1883]:174).

In 1861 a traveler commented that San Luis Obispo was “a small, miserable place” (Brewer 2003:83). Seven years later, the local newspaper agreed and provided the following description of San Luis Obispo County in 1867:

Land was not cultivated because there was no fencing stuff to be had; the large ranchos were dedicated to the use of bronco stock or lay idle, because their holders scorned to part with an acre of them; wheat was not raised because there was no mill to grind it; fences were all of the ribbon order, and composed of mere willow-poles; . . . the town was of an old tumble-down mission building, constructed of stone and adobe [*San Luis Obispo Pioneer* 1868].

The author of the article then contrasted the past with 1868, when there was a saw mill, providing lumber for fences “of a lasting character, constructed of sawed and split lumber” (*San Luis Obispo Pioneer* 1868). These fences were a sign of progress, indicating that there were farmers coming into the region. There were also new buildings and a growing Anglo-American population.

In 1879 land values in San Luis Obispo County averaged \$2.23 per acre (Angel 1994 [1883]:179). Roads were improved: “For the construction of the Cuesta Road, crossing the Santa Lucia Range between San Luis Obispo and Santa Margarita, \$20,000 of bonds were issued in 1876” (Angel 1994 [1883]:185). San Luis Obispo followed the general pattern in the 1870s and 1880s: population growth brought new businesses, and town boosters wanted to see the growth continue. One of the most important needs for a progressive town was a railroad connection. The Southern Pacific Railroad Coastal Line reached Templeton, north of San Luis Obispo, in 1886, and San Luis Obispo in 1894, ensuring the prosperity of the town. At the turn of the century, it became the home of the California Polytechnical Institute.

In 1930 there were 1,923 farms in San Luis Obispo County, producing crops valued at \$4,486,944, including cereals, grains and seeds, hay and other forage, vegetables, fruits and nuts, and forest products. The value of domestic animals—cattle, chicken, and bees—and dairy

products was \$6,263,080. In the Paso Robles area, which included Santa Margarita, dry farming was prevalent, while alfalfa was raised on irrigated alluvial soils. Herefords were the favored cattle breed (Carpenter and Storie 1933:6–11).

3.3 THE SANTA MARGARITA ASISTENCIA

An asistencia was a “mission on a small scale with all the requisites for a mission, and with Divine Service held regularly on days of obligations, except that it lacked a resident priest” (Weber 2003:4).

The Santa Margarita Asistencia was on El Camino Real, north of San Luis Obispo on the way to Monterey; this route was established by 1775 (Engelhardt 1963:26). The first mention of the site is in the journals of the Anza expedition of 1775–1776. Anza led a party of colonists from Tubac, Arizona, to San Francisco. One of the Franciscans in the party was Father Pedro Font, who served as chaplain. He kept a diary of the journey, as did Anza. From Font’s diary comes this description of the journey north; the party left San Luis Obispo on March 4:

Then we descended among some hills and very green meadows with their arroyos, which form the Santa Margarita River, where we arrived after going five leagues, there being a small village at this place [Bolton 1931:274].

Anza describes the return journey, on Friday April 19, starting at a camp located between Atascadero and Santa Margarita:

At a quarter past six we continued our route up the valley of Santa Margarita to the east-southeast for two and one-half leagues, coming at the end of this distance to its village. Then we ascended to the southeast a range of not very high hills, over which we traveled two and one-half more leagues, and, continuing to the south for another league, at half past ten we came to the mission of San Luis [Bolton 1930:160].

Sometime in the next decade the Franciscans established an agricultural outpost in the Santa Margarita Valley. In 1790 there was a request for a land grant at Santa Margarita. Governor Pedro Fages initially acceded to the request. However, Fermín de Lasuén, president of the Franciscan missions, wrote to Don Pedro Fages:

This will acknowledge Your Lordship’s worthy official letter of the thirteenth of the present month. In it you graciously inform me that it has been decided to grant the district of Santa Margarita to the retired corporal, Francisco Cayuelas, in accordance with the instructions of the authorities and the right of the wife of the above, herself a neophyte of San Luis Mission. No doubt this information is not sent in the hope that I may give my assent, because it has already been decided on. And in any case if my consent were necessary, I would not be able to give it.

If Your Lordship sends me this information so that I may know it, well and good. But if it is a request for my opinion, here it is: Your honor, as soon as Cayuelas married this neophyte, which happened very shortly after she was baptized, he took her away from that community and made her much more independent of the mission and of the direction of the missionaries than she should be. He separated her from her people and ceased to contribute in the slightest degree to the improving and cultivating their land.

Her predecessors, too, have no claim whatever to any benefits or advantages of this kind; consequently, those who have undertaken such tasks and devoted their lives and constant labor to the common good will now be at a disadvantage by reason of this concession; and so will their descendants after them, when, some day, the problem arises of dividing up these lands. It is at a cost of indescribable labor that these lands have been brought to the stage at which they are useful and productive so as to meet the needs of a civilized community; and by reason of what they produce they have become means towards a better living for all classes. . . .

Apart from this, the Mission of San Luis is using the region of Santa Margarita for many purposes, and one of them is to breed swine which are kept in pasture there. In that particular place there is a *ranchería* of natives, and in San Luis there are many Christians who are natives of that place [Kenneally 1965:205–207].

This translation uses the terms district and region, but does not call Santa Margarita a rancho, estancia, or asistencia. Because the land was producing well by 1790, it would have been cultivated for several years previously to reach the “useful and productive” stage. Swine were pastured there, but there is no indication if there was an enclosure for them. The mission presence in the valley gradually expanded until permanent structures were required.

In 1817 Father Martinez, head of Mission San Luis Obispo, wrote that he was constructing an asistencia in stone (Geiger 1965). The 1822 *Informe* (annual report) stated that Santa Margarita was established to raise wheat (corn and beans were raised at Rancho de la Playa [Webb 1952:93]) and as a *retirada* (refuge) in case there were further attacks from the sea (Webb 1952:93).

During the 1820s control over the Santa Margarita Valley gradually shifted from Mission San Luis Obispo to Mission San Miguel to the north. As a result, Salinan Indians from the San Miguel area gradually replaced the Chumash as workers on the asistencia. The asistencia would have suffered the same general decline as all mission properties in the early 1800s, although the first Anglo-American chronicler in the area, Alfred Robinson, does not specifically mention this, as he did about Mission San Luis Obispo. In 1829 he provided the much-quoted description of the asistencia:

Further on, some three or four leagues, we reached “el rancho de Santa Margarita,” a place used for the cultivation of grain, where, on an eminence that overlooked the grounds, an extensive building was erected. It was divided into store-rooms for different kinds of grain, and apartments for the accommodation of the mayor-domo, servants, and wayfarers. At one end was a chapel, and snug lodging-rooms for the priest, who, I was informed, frequently came and passed some weeks at the place during the time of harvest; and the holy friars of the two missions occasionally met there to acknowledge to each other their sins. Here our horses were changed, and a smart gallop through forests of pine and oak, brought us soon to the ascent of a rough-looking hill, called “la cuesta de St. Luis [Robinson 1846:53].

In 1830 Father Gil reported that the walls of the “house at Santa Margarita” had been cracked by the same earthquake that damaged the mission (Webb 1952:93). He also listed the “enemies” that prevented “Santa Margarita . . . from ever becoming a complete mission: earthquakes, decline of the Indian population and secularization” (Gil in Weber 2003:25). Gil died at the

asistencia 2 years later when he visited in December during the planting time for winter wheat (Engelhardt 1963:200). In 1836 Rancho Santa Margarita was valued at 4,039 pesos. This was less than the San Luis Obispo mission building, the contents of the mission granary, the church, or the livestock (Blomquist 2003:28–29).

The next foreign traveler who visited the rancho was Eugène Duflot de Mofras, attaché to the French legation in Mexico. He took part in explorations along the Pacific Coast in 1841, 1842, and 1843. He left no description, only that the rancho was then privately owned by Joaquin Estrada.

3.4 JOAQUIN ESTRADA: THE LIFE OF A DON

In 1841 Joaquin Estrada presented his *diseño* and petition for the then vacant Santa Margarita lands (Figure 3-1). In his petition Estrada stated that there was a “house” (the *asistencia*) belonging to the San Luis Obispo mission; he also stated that he would not use this building, or prevent the Indians from cultivating “what lands they may desire” (Los Californios 1841).

One of the ranch stories is that Estrada so feared the church would take back the land because of the *asistencia* building, that he tried to burn it down. This has been denied by the Estrada heirs, who state that it was the ranch *mayor domo*, Innocente Garcia, who tried to burn it. Later Garcia was so sorry for what he attempted that he purchased a coffin and slept in it for penitence. His house was the first adobe south of the ranch house, which is still called the morgue room (Loftus 2006).

The Bear Flag Revolt brought the Santa Margarita rancho onto the state political stage for a short time. Governor Pio Pico and General José Castro met on the ranch to plan a strategy that would prevent an American takeover of California. However, nothing came of the meeting. Colonel John Fremont had Estrada arrested, but he was later released (Flint et al. 2000:17).

The American troops came through the region in 1846 and stopped at the ranch. As Edwin Bryant recalled it, on December 12:

We encamped near the rancho of a friendly Californian—the man who was taken prisoner the other day and set at large. . . . My servant obtained, with some difficulty, from the Indians at the rancho, a pint cup of *pinole*, or parched corn-meal, and a quart or two of wheat, which being boiled, furnished some variety in our viands at supper, fresh beef having been our only subsistence since the commencement of the march from San Juan [Bryant 1967 (1849):372].

On Fremont’s return journey, on February 6, 1847 troops again stopped at the ranch:

Continuing our journey, we halted about nine o’clock at a rancho near the ruins of Santa Margarita. A solitary Indian was the only occupant of the house, and the only inhabitant of the place; and he could furnish us with no food [Bryant 1967 (1849):424].

There are many stories about the lavish and extravagant Estrada hospitality, how he had fiestas that lasted for a month, and that he brought a circus to the ranch to perform for his guests:



Figure 3-1 Diseño of Joaquin Estrada, 1841 (Land Case Map B-1160, courtesy Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley).

At Santa Margarita, on a knoll near the road, are the remains of a *corral*, built of such stout material that one is surprised at its having fallen at all. By the people the place is aptly called “Estrada’s Folly;” for here this prodigal Spaniard entertained his friends and followers with bull-fight and circus, bringing bands of musicians and swarms of retainers to his *rancho*, gambling and carousing till the heritage of his fathers had been squandered, and he reduced to a state of comparative poverty [Clifford 1993 (1871):300].

While Estrada’s reputation is based on his elaborate and long-lasting festivities at his rancho, he also held elected and nonelected county offices after statehood. He was on the first county Board of Supervisors, serving as treasurer in 1854. He was also a *juez de campo*, an official that “presided over each rodeo, settled disagreements involving the ownership of cattle or the interpretation of rules and customs, and had authority to order the arrest of cattle thieves” (Cleland 1951:55). In 1850 the value of Estrada’s land was assessed for taxes at \$296.50, the fourth highest in the county, after John Wilson, Francisco Z. Branch, and William G. Dana. In 1851 his property was listed as the 17,760-acre ranch and improvements, along with lots in San Luis Obispo for a total value of \$7,865, and personal property worth \$10,710. In the same year Estrada obtained a county license to engage in “merchandising” (Angel 1994 [1883]:167–169).

On April 4, 1854 Estrada’s claim to the ranch was confirmed by the land commission in Land Case 501; on October 3, 1855 the district court of northern California also confirmed his claim. An appeal was dismissed in 1857 (Cameron 1957:13). The official Land Office survey of the ranch was completed in February 1858 (Figure 3-2). The accompanying map clearly established the boundaries of the ranch. The map depicts El Camino Real, the “old mission buildings” the ranch house, and a cattle trail running east-west on the eastern boundary line (Brice 1858).

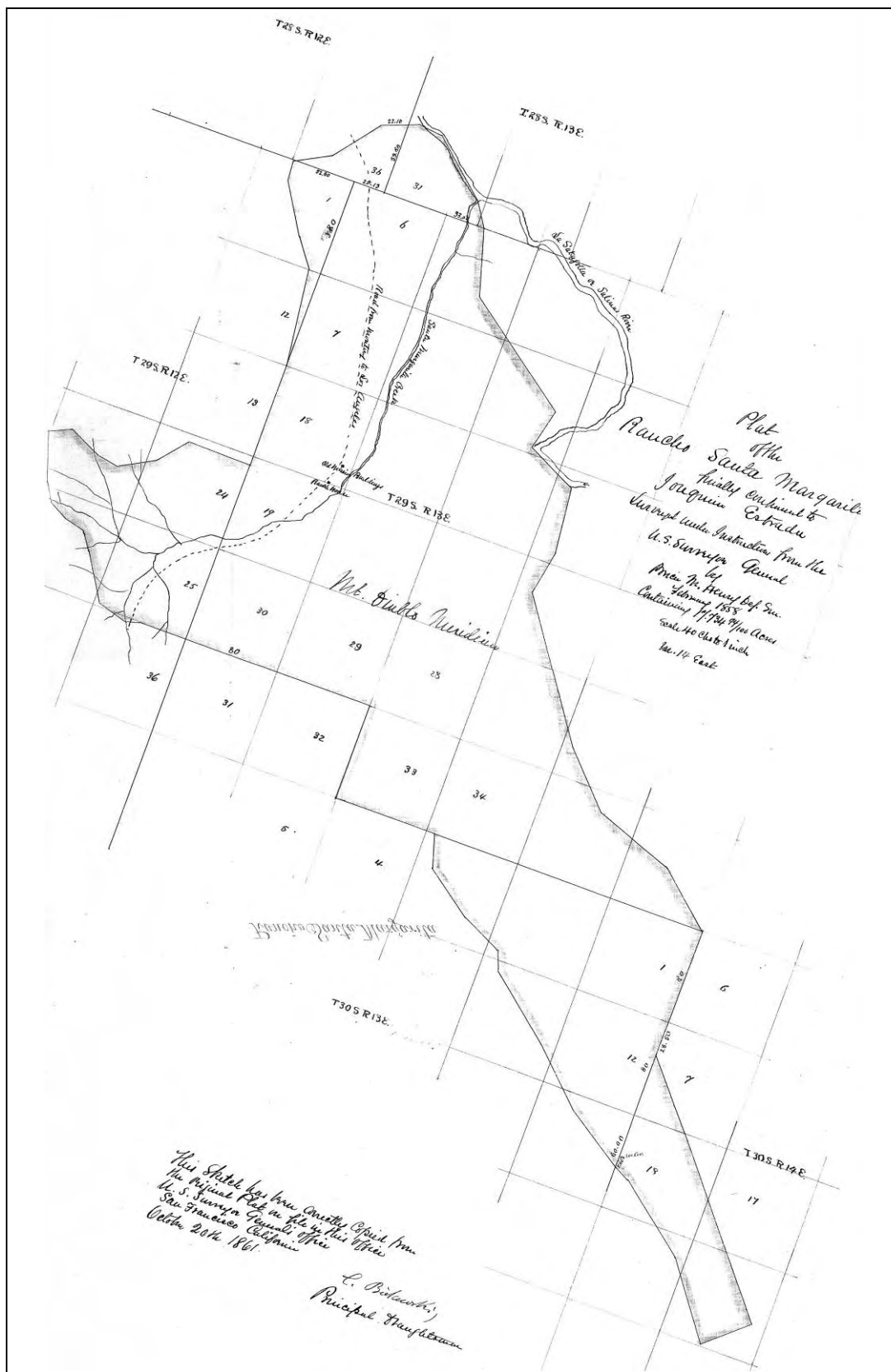
Dr. Thomas Antisell was part of an expedition of U.S. Army topographical engineers who were surveying from San Francisco south to San Diego, then to the Rio Grande (Angel 1994 [1883]:233). In 1854 he described the Santa Margarita Valley:

... fine grass, with abundance of running streams in the bottom, the side hills clothed with live-oaks and cotton-wood and covered with a luxuriant crop of wild oats (*avena fatua*) which was naturally preserved, and at the time of visit [January] served as food for the multitude of deer and horned cattle, which found abundant sustenance here [Antisell, in Angel 1994 (1883):235].

The old mission establishment stands on a terrace raised about sixteen feet above the plain, on its western side; at the base of the terrace lies one of the forks of the Salinas. ... the terrace is not more than one-fourth of a mile wide, and stretches northwest for one and one-half miles [Antisell, in Angel 1994 (1883):236].

In 1856 Henry Miller traveled south along El Camino Real through the ranch:

hills and valleys were covered with wild oats and timber and offered a most refreshing aspect, till I arrived in the vicinity of the Santa Margarita Rancho, where I found the road strewn with petrified shells. I ascertained that the ground over which I rode and the hills to both sides of it, is composed of these seashells, some of which are of large size. A large and well preserved one, I picked up from amongst thousands, which weighed about 15 pounds.



Santa Margarita is located in a fertile valley, well watered, and served formerly as a storehouse of the missionaries of San Luis Obispo. This house is about 200 feet long with an adobe wall around it. There are a few houses of adobe scattered round, amongst which I observed still those petrified shells, which the natives burn and use for mortar and white wash. Leaving Santa Margarita, I descended a very picturesque Canada, full of oak, pine and other trees on which were climbing wild grapevines. All the hills on both sides were covered with wild oats [Miller 1952:27–28].

The Santa Margarita Ranch was one of the first-class ranches in San Luis Obispo County. The 1860 assessment for the Estrada property was \$48,995, which included both the Santa Margarita and Atascadero ranches (Angel 1994 [1883]:173). In that year Joaquin Estrada was listed as a stock raiser on the federal census; his real property was valued at \$18,000, his personal property at \$20,000. He lived on the ranch with his wife Jesusa and five children. In the margin at the bottom of the enumeration page “14 Indians” were noted, but not counted (U.S. Census Bureau 1860).

Estrada went the way of so many of the Mexican ranchers who could not pay property taxes on their extensive holdings. In 1861 Estrada sold the ranch to Martin Murphy, Jr., who had loaned him \$20,000 in 1858. The note was repaid before Murphy, who prided himself on never foreclosing on a mortgage, purchased the ranch (Sullivan 1974:19). Estrada then purchased 160 acres on the south side of Cuesta Grade and lived there with his family for the rest of his life.

3.5 PATRICK MURPHY: THE IRISH CALIFORNIO

The sale of the Santa Margarita Ranch was patented April 9, 1861. In that year, the asistencia was “in ruins.” However, it was “the seat of a fine ranch which was sold a few days ago for \$45,000” (Brewer 2003:93).

The Murphys were an Irish family, first immigrating from Wexford to Canada, then to Missouri. In 1844 they traveled overland to California, ultimately settling in the Santa Clara Valley. Martin Murphy, Jr. became a large landowner, known for his public-spiritedness and generosity (Sullivan 1974). He had five sons, one of whom, Patrick, managed the San Luis Obispo ranches for his father; later he became the owner of the Santa Margarita, Asuncion, and Atascadero ranches in San Luis Obispo County, and the Cojo Ranch near Lompoc in Santa Barbara County. Patrick Murphy continued his father’s tradition of generosity, was elected to state office, and took an active part in the growth of San Luis Obispo County. He became General Murphy after being appointed Brigadier General of the Second Brigade of the National Guard of California. In 1875 the San Luis Obispo Agricultural Society was formed, but it languished until it was reorganized in 1883 when Murphy was elected president. He worked to start an agricultural fair, the first of which was held in 1887. He was also president of the Irish Land League (Angel 1994 [1883]:208–209).

The early years of Murphy ownership were plagued by drought; the ranch survived this intact. In 1867 the ranch tax assessment was \$8,867, which was at \$0.50 an acre, along with \$1,500 for improvements (Murphy Family Papers 1867:n.p.). In 1870 Murphy and his wife Mary Kate lived on the ranch. His real property was valued at \$100,000, his personal property at \$21,850 (U.S. Census Bureau 1870).

Josephine Clifford, who traveled through the area in 1871, lauded Murphy's management:

But Nemesis, as though in righteous anger over the neglect which fair Nature had suffered at the hands of idle, thriftless men, seems purposely to have given this treasure into better keeping; and the whole-souled hospitality and systematic management of the present owner, form a refreshing contrast to the reckless folly of the graceless Spaniard [Clifford 1993 (1871):300].

Although contrasted with Estrada, Murphy followed his pattern of rancho hospitality. He continued the gracious living of the dons, and kept the Californio traditions. He was lenient on squatters on his ranch (Loftus 2006). Although it was said that he never allowed a tree to be cut, any brushwood could be freely collected (Loftus 2006; U.S. War Department 1902:46).

The May 22, 1875 *San Luis Obispo Tribune* describes a rodeo on the ranch. This article states that the Santa Margarita Ranch included three land grant ranchos—Santa Margarita, Atascadero, and Asuncion—for a total of 62,132 acres. The corral was along the creek, and there was a balcony or kiosk on the ranch side. During the time of Estrada, bullfights were conducted in the corral; on the kiosk there was space for an orchestra:

The corral is an enclosure of about two hundred by four hundred feet, divided in the center with a gateway communication between the two. The fence is ten feet high, built of heavy rails supported between strong posts. . . . It is immediately upon the bank of the creek, and overlooked by an ancient balcony or rather kiosk, of two stories in height, with a flight of stairs to reach the upper or balcony portion, where the proprietor and his majordomo overlook and direct the operations [*San Luis Obispo Tribune* 1875].

The ranch was resurveyed in 1880 (Figure 3-3). In addition to El Camino Real, the asistencia, ranch house, stage stop, and corral near the headquarters are depicted on the map, as is a county road. There were three other buildings on ranch land: a house to the north, near the tule lakes, possibly inhabited by ranch employees; an old dairy to the west; and a school in the Rinconada, indicating that there were enough settlers in the area to establish one. In 1880 Murphy was a widower, living on the ranch with his nephew William, a Chinese cook, and one laborer (U.S. Census Bureau 1880) (Figure 3-4). The ranch was prosperous, employing several vaqueros (Figure 3-5).

In 1887 there was a fire at the ranch headquarters:

A destructive fire occurred at the Santa Margarita last evening, involving the loss of the buildings at the ranch excepting the main residence of Gen. Murphy. The cook house, dining hall, store room and sleeping rooms of the men, in a large building 80 feet in length was burned, including all the provisions, furniture, etc. How the fire originated is not known but is supposed to have come from the Chinese apartment. There being a large threshing crew present all worked with energy in saving the private residence of Murphy, and were successful. So complete was the destruction of everything that it was necessary to send a team into town early this morning for provisions and means to get breakfast [*Daily Republic* 1887a].

The fire did not stop the tradition of ranch hospitality. Just six weeks later:

Yesterday Gen. P. W. Murphy gave a grand party in true baronial style at his great Santa Margarita ranch in honor of Mrs. E. G. Dana, daughter of the late Wm. Graves, his old-time friend and councillor [*sic*]. A large number of invited guests went over from this

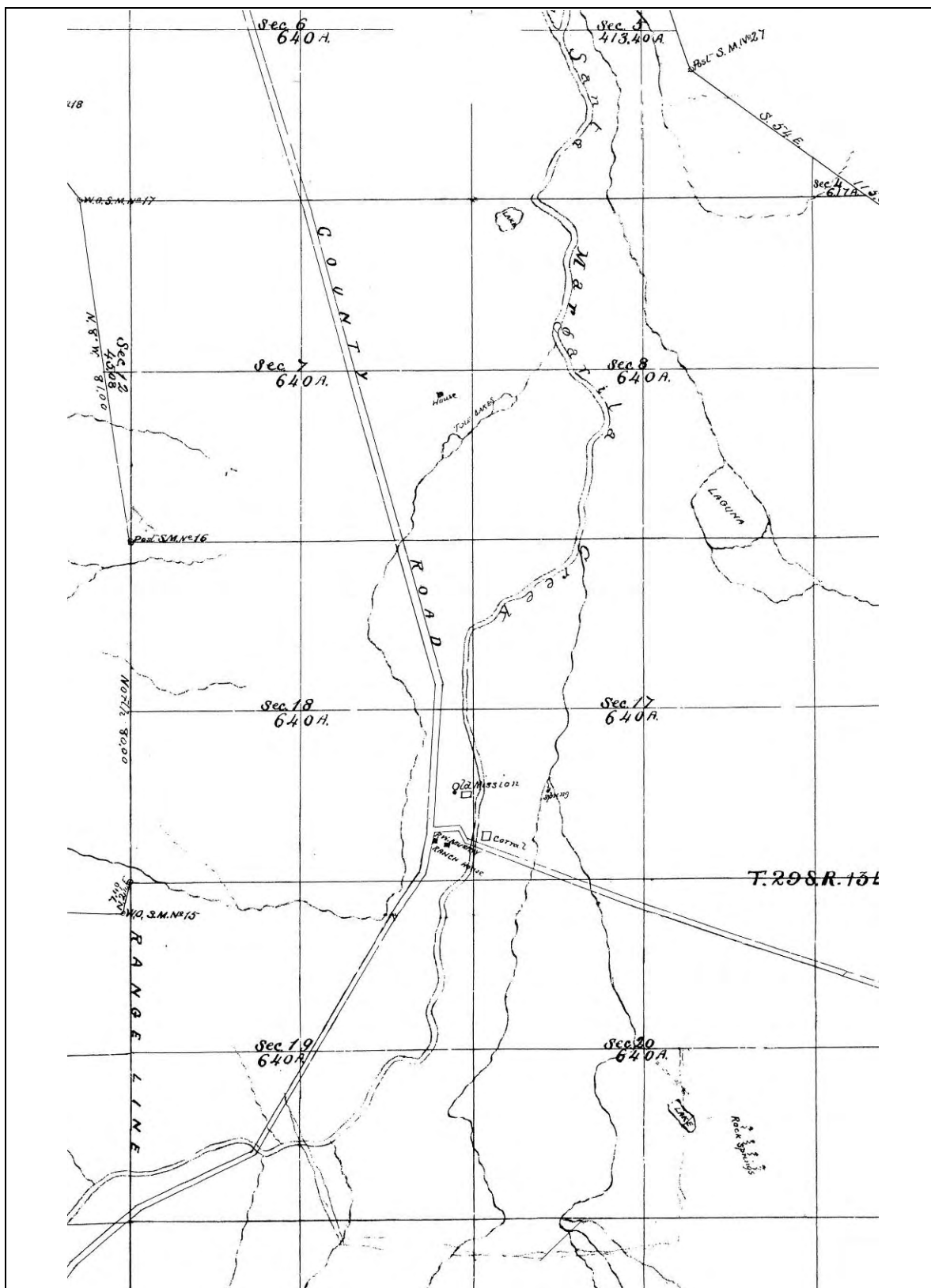


Figure 3-3 Headquarters area, map of the Santa Margarita Ranch, 1880 (San Luis Obispo County Recorder).



Figure 3-4 Santa Margarita Ranch, 1882 (photograph by Dr. John Gallway, courtesy San Luis Obispo County Historical Society).



Figure 3-5 Santa Margarita vaqueros, 1882 (photograph by Dr. John Gallway, courtesy San Luis Obispo County Historical Society).

city, requiring about all the conveyances the livery stables could supply. Such a party was not the formal one of city life, calling and leaving cards, but was an all day affair, with house and grounds and ranch with elaborate preparations given over to the guests with all that great wealth and unbounded hospitality could supply. The details are beyond our space to give. A barbecue a la California was given with all the accompaniments in the afternoon, after which there were races over the excellent mile track Gen. Murphy maintains on his ranch. The chief race was between Ernest Graves Patchen and an O'Donoghue horse, the race being won by the mare in 2.50. The day was very warm, the thermometer showing 100 in the shade, and the track a little heavy, therefore the time was thought good without special training. During the evening there was dancing, and at midnight there was a spread for the one hundred and fifty guests one of the most elegant suppers ever given in the county. This luxurious feast was continued into the small hours, enlivened with sparkling wine accompanying sparkling toasts and repartee, and after rising from the table those who desired resumed the dancing and some returned to the city [*Daily Republic* 1887b].

3.6 THE FIRST SLICE CUT OUT OF THE BIG RANCH

“Whenever anything is said about the great advantage which would accrue to the county if its great ranches were cut up and allowed to get into the hands of small holders, that consummation so devoutly prayed for by all well wishers for the county, very naturally, the first thought of every one is the Santa Margarita rancho” (Tognazzini 1992:108). Even in 1875, there had been an expectancy that the ranch would be divided into small parcels for farming (*San Luis Obispo Tribune* 1875:1). This expectancy grew as the possibility of a rail line that would connect San Luis Obispo to the coast became a reality. Along with a right-of-way through his ranch, Murphy donated 640 acres for a town to the Pacific Improvement Company, a subsidy of the Southern Pacific Railroad. The railroad established a stop there with depot, roundhouse, warehouse, spur lines, and wells for water. Town lot size was 25 feet by 150 feet, with 32 lots to a block. The major streets were 100 feet wide, the cross streets 75 feet. The lots were sold at auction, and Murphy received a share in the profits of the sale of town lots (Nicholson 2002:71; Tognazzini 1989:212–213).

Mr. James Watson came over the Cuesta yesterday from the new town of Santa Margarita bringing with him something entirely new under the sun—to wit the first deed ever issued to a lot in the future metropolis. He had it recorded and the records now show that James Watson is the absolute owner of Lot 5, Block 86, Santa Margarita—the first slice cut out of the big ranch [Tognazzini 1989:86].

The town boomed in its early years as a home for railroad construction workers. After the road was completed, it lost population. “Santa Margarita is deadlier than it was during my last visit, if possible” (Austin 1993). It has remained a small town.

The new town on ranch lands was the beginning of development on the ranch. In 1891, before the railroad had reached San Luis Obispo, Colonel Crocker of the Southern Pacific and General Murphy, among others, attended a dinner party at the Ramona:

Several colloquies followed between Col. Crocker and the gentlemen surrounding him, the more notable being the Colonel’s challenge to Gen. Murphy to cut up his Santa Margarita and Cojo ranches, that those splendid tracts might become the homes of

numerous and thriving populations, and the General's emphatic assurance that whenever the road was built the ranches should be so cut up [Tognazzini 1991:36].

In 1892, Murphy sold the southern corner of the ranch, known as the Rinconada or Rinconada Valley, for settlement. Newspaper reports of the sale reflected a mixture of glee and regret, and a strong feeling of inevitability about the development process. Two years later the *Tribune* described the ranch:

It is still the home of large bands of cattle and horses, but since the opening of the Southern Pacific Railroad and the laying out of town of Santa Margarita in the spring of 1889, considerable portions of the estate have been leased to farmers and immense crops of grain are now raised on the land. About 3000 acres are farmed to grain this year, and incredible almost as it may appear, one tenant took 60 bushels of wheat to the acre from his ground on the portion known as the Rinconada, on the easterly part of the grant. Another cut 4 tons of hay to the acre, which he sold at \$12.50 a ton. This is called a dry year, and it is true that all lands will not produce full crops during 1894, but the fertility of the soil on the Santa Margarita and its ability to retain moisture from the many streams that spring from the hillsides and course through the valley, made the danger from drought almost nil [*San Luis Obispo Tribune* 1994 (1894):57].

In the fall of 1895 it became known that further parts of the Santa Margarita Ranch were up for sale (Tognazzini 1994:92). In 1896 it was announced that Murphy had sold 53,100 acres, including the northern part of Rancho Santa Margarita, along with Atascadero and Asuncion, to an English syndicate that planned to settle the land and grow sugar beets and construct a refinery (Tognazzini 1996:25, 27). However, "Gen. Murphy will still retain his old home place and several thousand acres." Leasing of the pared-down ranch continued. In 1898 Lazaro Garcia leased 600 acres on the Murphy Ranch, adjoining the town, on which he raised wheat and barley (Morrison 1917:881–882). Some of the ranch employees owned land parcels north of the ranch. John McDonald was mayor domo of the ranch, but also had his own lands (Dittrich 1899).

In 1900, Claus Sprekels, the "Sugar King" from San Francisco, leased 300 acres of the ranch for experiments with raising sugar beets. The lease included 50 acres on the "flat below the house," 50 acres in the ciénaga, 50 acres in the Rinconada, and other locations (Tognazzini 2000:89–90). The objective of planting in multiple areas was to find the best soil and climate for sugar beets. This development resulted in a slight growth in the Santa Margarita population.

In 1899 oil fever hit San Luis Obispo County. The San Luis Oil Company located a rig on the ranch, about a mile northeast of town (*Los Angeles Times* 1899:12). It appears that these explorations were unsuccessful, as further oil exploration or development did not occur.

At the turn of the century Murphy sold the ranch to the Reis family and moved to San Francisco, where he died in the fall of 1901. His obituary stated "San Luis Obispo county will long remember this pioneer whose energy and wealth were factors in her early days. In politics he achieved success. In business he took a leading part. In every day life he won countless friends by his generosity" (*San Luis Obispo Tribune* 1901:3). He had served in the senate and state assembly, and was not only a rancher but also a businessman with property in San Luis Obispo. Even after the sale Murphy relatives continued to visit the ranch; Murphy's nephew stayed in the stage building in the 1940s (Loftus 2006).

3.7 THE SANTA MARGARITA LAND AND CATTLE COMPANY

The Reis family established the Santa Margarita Land and Cattle Company and continued ranching. In 1902, word was out that the ranch would be purchased by the government for a military camp (Tognazzini 2002:21). This caused great excitement in San Luis Obispo—another progressive development that would bring money and prosperity to the county. The ranch was surveyed by military personnel, but ultimately another site was chosen.

When George Wharton James visited the ranch in 1903, the main asistencia building was being converted into a hay barn. This consisted of removing the interior walls, possibly laying the poured concrete floor, which is about eighteen inches lower than the original floor, and building a superstructure of corrugated metal around the stone walls. The roof was constructed of the same material. Flanking sheds were constructed outside the asistencia walls, giving the structure the appearance of a monitor barn. One of the ranch stories is that after the first batch of hay was stored in the structure, a fire of unknown origin burned all the bales. Nevertheless, it continued to be used for hay storage (Figure 3-6) (*Los Angeles Times* 1949).



Figure 3-6 The main asistencia building as hay barn, 1951 (reproduced by permission of The Huntington Library).

Sections of the ranch continued to be leased for crops. One such area was Miller Hill, where William Alfred Miller set out orchards on 160 acres. His father had also worked the land. “Probably on account of his father he located on Miller Hill, and improved a fifty-acre holding” (Morrison 1917:773). In 1913 Eskel E. Meyer, a Swedish immigrant, leased land on the ranch, on which he planted 300 acres in wheat and barley (Morrison 1917:886–887). In the 1910s, Angiolino Bassi, a Swiss immigrant, farmed on the ranch and also cut wood in the area: “cutting and clearing around both Santa Margarita and Atascadero” (Morrison 1917:1015–1016). This is the first mention of timber cutting on the property.

In the 1920s miners rediscovered the fossilized oyster shell deposits on the ranch:

Two miles across ranch trails . . . where men are at work under the direction of Charles M. Cospey and Clark Anthony, tossing tons of monster oyster shells into crushers, so hens of Southern California may lay more and better eggs. . . there is nothing but oyster shells—packed solidly. There is no sand or silt deposit. That means a good treasure to be had by mining, because the marl is exceptionally pure, with 92.2 percent carbonate of lime content [*Los Angeles Times* 1925a:H11].

Other nearby mining endeavors included a dredging operation to find gold in the Pozo area, south of Santa Margarita: “Gold has been found in this section for years but this is the first attempt to take it out in quantities” (*Los Angeles Times* 1925b). A quicksilver mine near Santa Margarita that had been closed since 1919 was reopened; it employed fifteen men and used a new extraction process successfully (*Los Angeles Times* 1925c).

The Reis family expanded the ranch by purchasing formerly public lands to the east and west of the original ranch boundaries. In 1929, when the ranch encompassed 22,000 acres, the Reis family raised cattle and sheep, and had constructed a sheep barn. Stock included 225 pure-bred Hereford cattle, 3,000 head of range stock, and 4,000 sheep. More land was being put into alfalfa as more wells were being dug; the ranch house water was piped from springs 2 miles away, which were said to never go dry (Berry 1929:I11–I12). Besides the asistencia building, ranch house, and stage stop, there was a horse barn, blacksmith shop, implement shed, granary, and cow barn on the ranch. Another structure mentioned from that time was a small adobe, then used as a pump house, although the original use was not known at that time (Hoover et al. 1948:307). The house in 1931 looked much as it does today (Figure 3-7). A 1941 aerial photograph of the ranch shows cultivated fields, most of them in alfalfa (Figure 3-8).



Figure 3-7 Santa Margarita Ranch House, circa 1931 (courtesy San Luis Obispo County Historical Society).



Aerial Photo: Fairchild Aerial Photography Collection, Whittier College, CA
Flight C-7178, Frame 117, Date 6/16/1941, Original Scale 1"=1500'

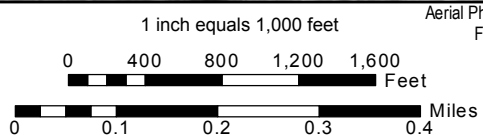


Figure 3-8 1941 aerial view of the northern part of Santa Margarita Ranch (Fairchild Collection, Whittier College).

In 1960 a fire started on the Santa Margarita Ranch during the wheat harvest; this spread to the Los Padres National Forest (*Los Angeles Times* 1960). In 1961, Reis sold 4,000 acres of the ranch (*San Luis Obispo Telegram-Tribune* 1961). By 1989 the ranch acreage was down to its current 13,800 acres (Caine 1989). Reis died in 1969, willing the ranch to Stanford University.

3.8 THE SANTA MARGARITA RANCH TODAY

The Robertson family from Texas purchased the ranch from Stanford University in 1979. The leasing of farmland continued, as did cattle ranching. The current owners purchased the ranch in 1999. Cattle ranching continues on the ranch, although no land is leased for farming. Three vineyards have been planted; these are the only agricultural pursuit currently on the ranch. One residential development, Margarita Farms, is being constructed on the northern edge of the ranch property.

4 LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

The Santa Margarita Ranch is a cultural landscape because it is a unique natural environment whose features have been distinctively shaped by historical activities reflecting American Indian, Spanish, Mexican, and Euro-American cultural traditions. The natural landscape of Santa Margarita Valley has been molded by the ranching, agricultural, and other activities that have occurred there over two hundred years. The ranch is further classified as a historic vernacular landscape, defined as a:

landscape that evolved through use by the people whose activities or occupancy shaped it. Through social or cultural attitudes of an individual, a family, or a community, the landscape reflects the physical, biological, and cultural character of everyday lives. Function plays a significant role in vernacular landscapes. This can be a farm complex or a district of historic farmsteads along a river valley. Examples include rural historic districts and agricultural landscapes [Birnbaum 1996:4].

A subset of the historic vernacular landscape which best describes the Santa Margarita Ranch is the rural historic landscape, defined as “a geographical area that historically has been used by people, or shaped or modified by human activity, occupancy, or intervention, and that possesses a significant concentration, linkage, or continuity of areas of land use, vegetation, buildings and structures, roads and waterways, and natural features” (McClelland et al. 1999:1–2). National Register Bulletin 30, *Guidelines for Evaluating Rural Historic Landscapes*, defines eleven elements of these landscapes. The first four elements are processes that are instrumental in shaping the land. The last seven are physical components of that shaping:

1. Land uses and activities;
2. Patterns of spatial organization;
3. Response to the natural environment;
4. Cultural traditions;
5. Circulation networks;
6. Boundary demarcations
7. Vegetation related to land use;
8. Buildings, structures, and objects;
9. Clusters;
10. Archaeological sites; and
11. Small-scale elements.

These eleven characteristics are “tangible evidence of the activities and habits of the people who occupied, developed, used, and shaped the land to serve human needs; they may reflect the beliefs, attitudes, traditions and values of these people” (McClelland et al. 1999:3). These elements have subsequently been described as character-defining features: “*Character* refers to all those visual aspects and physical features that comprise the landscape. Character-defining features include topography, vegetation, circulation, water features, structures and objects” (Birnbaum 1994:13–14).

Each of these elements is discussed below as it relates to the Santa Margarita Ranch, tracing the changes to them through the centuries as completely as possible.

4.1 LAND USES AND ACTIVITIES

These are human activities that shaped the Santa Margarita Valley. The Native Americans utilized and manipulated natural features of the landscape. Such land use is most evident in the numerous archaeological sites distributed across the landscape; these frequently include the classic and highly visible bedrock mortars on stone outcroppings. Additionally, plants and animals were harvested for food, building materials, and other uses.

California Indians also managed the native landscape in a variety of ways to increase productivity and control species distribution (Anderson 1990; Blackburn and Anderson 1993). In particular, controlled burning of grasslands, chaparral, and other environments enhanced the productivity of edible plants and expanded habitat for deer and other game.

The use of fire, through burning portions of the landscape, was one of the most effective management tools available to California peoples, and its application and careful control were particularly important to the manipulation of the oak/acorn resources. The record is clear that tribes up and down the state burned systematically and with purpose [McCarthy 1993:213].

The missionaries curtailed many of the native land-management practices. After the arrival of the Spanish, the major activities were agricultural: stock raising and the cultivation of wheat. This land-use focus has continued since statehood into the present day. While specific agricultural endeavors ebbed and flowed, there has been continuity of land use throughout the history of the ranch.

Other economic land uses and activities on the ranch not associated specifically with agriculture and ranching are mining and logging. It is possible that the petrified oyster shells were mined for temper in the mortar used in construction of the mission and asistencia, and to make lime for plaster and whitewash; there is no record of earlier native uses of this material. Oyster shell was mined again during the early twentieth century for use in the poultry industry. Gold and silver mines are depicted on the 1880 survey map of the ranch (see Figure 3-3). Documented logging did not begin until the twentieth century.

Presently the land is used for cattle ranching and vineyards. There are currently about 750 head of cattle raised on the ranch. Previously cultivated land is being replanted in native grasses, which are used to feed the cattle. The cattle are moved to different locations monthly to prevent overgrazing in the pastures. There are some fallow fields that are not grazed. Three separate

areas are now planted in grape vines. After harvest the grapes are transported to wineries off the ranch. Most of the land used for vineyards was previously planted.

4.2 PATTERNS OF SPATIAL ORGANIZATION

Patterns of spatial organization reflect the ways in which humans order their occupation of specific geographies. This ordering of the landscape is represented in road systems, field patterns, distance between settlements, relationships to water sources, and orientation of structures to sun and wind (McClelland et al. 1999:4). In the larger spatial organization of the California missions, Santa Margarita was a stop on El Camino Real, as it was approximately a day's walk between Mission San Luis Obispo and Mission San Miguel. Neither the large tracts of mission lands nor the secular ranchos that followed had definite boundaries based on formal surveys. The resulting irregularly shaped parcels of the large ranchos reflect an organic pattern of settlement based on available land, natural resources, and topography.

Native American spatial organization was dictated largely by the need for access to key resources that supplied food, water, and toolstone, and the lack of draught animals or vehicles to transport resources and people. Lowland settlements typically were located in sheltered locations near ecotones, where multiple sets of resources came together, or along key water sources such as springs and streams. The uplands were used for hunting and collecting other resources, while the highest peaks often held shrines or were used for particular ceremonies or religious rites. Key settlements and other locations were linked by trail systems.

Historical organization of the landscape began with the first mission agricultural efforts in the 1790s. During the time of the missions, bottomlands near Santa Margarita Creek would have been put into cultivation first, and more flat or gently rolling land used as needed; cattle and other stock grazed on the hillsides. More ordered settlement began with construction of the mission asistencia building, which was located on a northwest-aligned terrace west of Santa Margarita Creek, the major drainage through the valley. The main building is set perpendicular to the creek, and closer to the creek side of the terrace. The site was open to the north wind. All of these features were prescribed in the Laws of the Indies for a healthy site for settlement. Furthermore, illustrations of the small buildings around the asistencia indicate that the buildings were either at right angles or in line with the main building, further reinforcing the square concept. This was the “established landscape” of the missions, on which further settlement was based (Hornbeck 1984).

The square pattern was reinforced by later construction. The ranch house is located on the south end of the terrace, on an east/west axis that parallels the asistencia. The Wells Fargo building is set west and at a right angle to the house, along El Camino Real. As other ranch buildings were constructed, they were located along the sides of the terrace. Thus the mission pattern of spatial organization was followed in later building layout, and is still particularly visible at the ranch headquarters.

4.3 RESPONSE TO THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENTS

Natural features such as topography, climate, and the availability of water influence and pattern human activities. The ranch topography is central to defining the character of the historical landscape. The original Santa Margarita land grant encompassed most of the Santa Margarita

Valley, set between the Santa Lucia Range on the west and the Salinas River on the north and east. A low ridge in the center of the valley parallels the Santa Lucia Range. There are fertile bottomlands along the watercourses. The “exceptional topographical situation” of the ranch was noted and discussed in the military survey of the ranch conducted in 1902.

Because the valley is enclosed by mountains on both the east and the west, it is protected both from the fogs and chilling winds from the Pacific and from the hot and arid winds from the San Joaquin Valley. This unique microclimate assured both “sufficient rainfall and a storage of water for the numerous streams that thread the ranch” (U.S. War Department 1902:44). The same topography that ensured an adequate water supply also produced a sheltered microclimate and ensured a long growing season with generally milder temperatures than other locations in the county (Carpenter and Storie 1933). The advantageous microclimate is almost certainly a causal factor in the unusually high frequency and density of prehistoric archaeological sites in the valley, and clearly prompted the Franciscan missionaries to establish their agricultural and ranching enterprise here.

Santa Margarita Creek runs northerly on the east side of the ranch headquarters. This was the original source of water for the mission ranch. Yerba Buena Creek, Trout Creek, and several other drainages also traverse the ranch. Water Canyon is located to the west of the ranch. Several areas with natural springs are on the ranch. A marshy area north of the ranch headquarters still supports a considerable growth of tules. A wetland known as “la ciénaga” is to the southeast, and another marshy area is found along West Pozo Road. In addition, numerous wells have been dug to tap groundwater.

One of the most widespread traditions on the ranch is the belief that the Santa Margarita Valley has never lacked water. The story is that during times of drought, neighboring ranchers brought their prized horses to the Santa Margarita, where there was sufficient water for them (Loftus 2006). The field notes accompanying the 1858 General Land Office (GLO) survey located a spring near which were “a number of pools that never dry” (Brice 1858:239). Myron Angel, writing in living memory of the 1860s drought years, stated that the area east of the Santa Lucia Range did not suffer as much as other areas.

This contention was supported by the military survey. “In the entire history of Santa Margarita (covering more than a hundred years) it has never suffered seriously but once from drought. That was last year (1898) when a drought of exceptional severity visited the entire state. Yet the numerous streams that run through the ranch maintained their flow throughout the year” (U.S. War Department 1902:44). The reason for this is that the mountains that protect the valley also “assure perennial streams and a sufficient rainfall” but also “the soil is kept constantly moist by the steady percolation of water from the mountains on all sides. . . . well water is found on any part of the ranch at a depth of from 15 to 30 feet, and the drought had no effect upon the wells” (U.S. War Department 1902:44).

Historical landscape descriptions frequently note the white oaks and live oaks growing on the hills throughout the area. The 1858 GLO field notes describe stands of white oaks, oak openings, pine trees in the higher elevations, and chamisal brush (Brice 1858). Because Estrada, Murphy, and subsequent ranch owners have prohibited or severely limited logging, there remain large stands of mature trees on the ranch. Alfilaria, wild oats, and wild grapes were also mentioned in historical accounts, while tules grew in marshy areas; in the 1840s and 1850s both deer and wild

cattle fed on these grasses. It is interesting to note that both alfilaria and wild oats are invasive nonnative plants that had already become well established by the 1850s.

From the earliest times, local materials were used in economic pursuits and to build both permanent and temporary structures. The local Chumash used tules to build houses and sweat lodges, as well as for mats and other products. Sandstone outcrops from the Atascadero Formation are found throughout the valley (Fairbanks 1904:14) and frequently contain bedrock mortars used to process acorns and other foodstuffs. The Chumash also made use of local cherts, basalts, and other rocks and minerals for the manufacture of tools, ornaments, and other products used in daily life.

Blocks of sandstone were used to construct the asistencia, while the local adobe soil was used to make bricks for construction and for fired roof and floor tiles. There is also an “extensive and remarkable deposit of petrified oysters, on a ridge which is at least 1000 feet above the present sea level. The deposit is probably a mile in length by half a mile in width and of unknown depth” (*Los Angeles Times* 1887). The oyster shells were used to make mortar for the asistencia, and later were mined for use in the poultry industry (Cameron 1957:13).

4.4 CULTURAL TRADITIONS

Three distinct but connected cultural groups have influenced the landscape of the Santa Margarita Ranch. The first is the original Native American population. Archaeological evidence suggests that Native American traditions have developed and shaped the landscape for more than 8,000 years (Flint et al. 2000). Their influence is seen today in the distribution of plant and animal communities and the widespread remains of their settlements.

Spanish culture was brought directly to the project area with the founding of Mission San Luis Obispo de Tolosa in 1772. By 1775 the Anza Trail had linked the future ranch lands with Spanish colonial outposts throughout western North America, and many of the local Chumash had been converted to Christianity and become neophytes at the mission. While adopting the trappings of European religion, the Chumash initially continued to maintain their traditional foodways as well as some land-use practices and other cultural traditions until their reduced population could no longer resist the competing social pressures (Price 2005).

After 1822 the appellation Spanish changed to Mexican, but the cultural traditions continued. The Spanish brought and developed traditions of architecture, agriculture, animal husbandry, horsemanship, and other elements of culture that have persisted through time. Among the most persistent of their cultural traits is the vaquero tradition of horsemanship. Horses were trained to be ridden “straight up in the bridle,” and the ropes, bridles, saddles, and other accoutrements of the vaquero were manufactured locally (Jensen and Singer 2005). The tradition of horsemanship that began under the mission system was perfected during the rancho years. The American Patrick Murphy so admired the open hospitality and other traditions of his rancho predecessors that he continued them, even as he brought the ranch into the business models and development schemes of the late nineteenth century. More than 100 years later, terms such as vaquero, rodeo, and reata have taken their place in the English language, and the current ranch managers and operators continue to ride, rope, make tools, and manage the landscape in keeping with the historical patterns.

There is a strong folkloric component in the ranch history. Indeed, Webb (1952:93) stated that the Santa Margarita Ranch has been “the subject of more fantastic stories than has any other of the old mission ranch houses.” Whether or not this opinion stands, the stories are there, some more reliably based on fact than others. The folkloric element is found in any historical discussion or inquiry, and is imprinted in the psychological and cultural landscape of local residents. Stories of the Estrada and Murphy hospitality, the architecture of the ranch headquarters, secret tunnels under the asistencia, the belief that the ranch has never lacked for water, even in the worst droughts, and other legends and traditions help to create a strong sense of place.

One of the ways in which cultures organize and take control of a landscape is through naming conventions. By applying names to prominent landmarks and other environmental and cultural features, people establish their place within nature and define their relationship with the natural environment. Such place names come to document past occupations or events. Several areas of the ranch are named for prominent landmarks, important resources at that location, or persons who lived on the property in the past. Two of these names, Pozo and the Rinconada, appear on the 1841 diseño; they could have been in use as early as the mission era. Other landscape names reflect the growing amount of cultivation on the ranch; as farmers rented areas on the ranch for crops, these became known by their names: Miller, Knight, Remick, and so forth.

- **Rinconada:** Letter G on the diseño shows the location of the “Cañada en nombra Rincon de Sta Margarita,” or “glen called the corner of Santa Margarita,” located at the southeasternmost end of the ranch. This name probably evolved into the Rinconada, which referred to the southernmost part of the ranch. It is no longer ranch property.
- **Pozo:** Letter H on the diseño, north of the Rincon, is labeled “Poza q le haga en dho rincon,” a well constructed in the corner. It can be postulated that this might be the origin of the term Pozo, used in Pozo Road and other constructions.
- **La Ciénaga:** A ciénaga is a marshy area. This term is used for a cultivated area on the ranch, located between West Pozo Road and Miller Ridge.
- **Miller Hill, Miller Ridge, and Miller Flat:** Named after the Miller family, who leased the land for farming.
- **Knight Field:** William T. Knight leased a farm (U.S Census Bureau 1910).
- **Remick:** Nat Remick was a ranch hand who also farmed the area (Tognazzini 2002:21).
- **Portuguese Pasture:** A Portuguese family operated a large dairy farm in this location (U.S Census Bureau 1910).
- **Chinese Gardens:** Location of market gardens, possibly started after the completion of the Southern Pacific Railroad. In 1910 two Chinese farmers lived in Santa Margarita (U.S. Census Bureau 1910).

- **Estudillo:** Location of corrals owned by a family of this name. The family raised strawberries on their farm (U.S. Census Bureau 1910).

4.5 CIRCULATION NETWORKS

Circulation networks on the ranch articulate local, regional, and statewide transportation systems. There are two scales of circulation networks: one provides the ranch with access to the rest of the county, while another connects various activity locations within the ranch property.

4.5.1 El Camino Real

The King's Highway from San Diego to Monterey was the original Spanish landscape feature in the valley, before *asistencia* or *rancho*. The road possibly traveled past the native Chumash *ranchería*, where the *asistencia* was later located, and connected the valley to the larger Spanish world. One of the precepts of Spanish land use was to locate structures very close to the road, as both the *asistencia* building and ranch house were. El Camino Real is shown on the 1841 *diseño* (see Figure 3-1), the 1858 GLO survey map (see Figure 3-2), and the 1880 survey map (see Figure 3-3), traveling north to south; the buildings are located close to the road on its eastern side. Sometime before 1900, possibly when the railroad was constructed, the original alignment of El Camino Real was abandoned; the new alignment followed the railroad from Atascadero to the town of Santa Margarita. The old alignment is shown on the 1928 USGS quadrangle map of the area as a road no longer in use. One remnant of the route is still visible south of the ranch headquarters (Figure 4-1), and the road traveling north from the headquarters runs on the original alignment.



Figure 4-1 Modern view of route of El Camino Real, facing northeast.

4.5.2 Cattle Trail

The 1858 GLO map (Figure 3-2) marks a cattle trail on the eastern boundary of the ranch. This trail ran in an east-west direction and could have been used as a route to the Salinas River or as part of a trail to bring cattle to the coast for shipment to points north. How it traversed the ranch is not known.

4.5.3 Pozo Road

By 1880 a county road branched off from El Camino Real north of the ranch house, crossed Santa Margarita Creek, traveled southeast, then curved south along the eastern side of the valley. South of One Mile Bridge this road is now called West Pozo Road, which follows the original alignment along the east side of the valley (the eastern boundary of the ranch) to Five Mile Bridge.

4.5.4 Ranch Roads

Historical maps and aerial photographs show a progression of roads and trails on ranch property that have led to the current system of roads connecting the pastures, vineyards, reservoir, and the higher elevations. There are also remnants of older roads, such as the “wagon rut in the country road where it crosses the oyster ridge” (*Los Angeles Times* 1887). A new road has been constructed to access some modern hunting cabins.

4.5.5 Southern Pacific Coastal Railroad

The railroad travels through the ranch along the eastern side of the valley, through the town of Santa Margarita, then through the Santa Lucia Range to San Luis Obispo.

4.5.6 U.S. Highway 101 and Modern Transportation Elements

Highway 101 is a modern divided four-lane roadway that travels along the west side of the ranch. Modern access to the ranch off Highway 101 is on State Route 58, which travels from Highway 101 to the town of Santa Margarita, then continues southeast to One Mile Bridge, where it turns east and travels out of the valley. Yerba Buena Avenue runs north from Main Street to the ranch headquarters.

4.6 BOUNDARY DEMARCATIONS

Only vague boundaries of Rancho Santa Margarita appear on the 1841 diseño. When the land grant was confirmed and mapped in 1858, the boundary was marked off in the old metes and bounds system. In this, natural features such as trees were marked, then distance and bearing were measured to the next marker. If there was no natural feature, the surveyors constructed mounds of stone. Part of the current boundary still follows the original boundary on the east side of the ranch.

Because public roads travel through the ranch and the town of Santa Margarita is within the ranch boundaries, there are fences meant to keep town residents and intruders off ranch property. Many of these are traditional-style wire and barbed-wire fences with metal gates. Fences also separate the ranching and vineyard areas of the ranch.

4.7 VEGETATION RELATED TO LAND USE

Most of the Santa Margarita Ranch lies within an oak woodland zone, a mixed community of grasses and trees that is sometimes referred to as a savannah. Valley oak, interior live oak, blue oak, and coastal live oak grace the hillsides in the mid to lower elevations, while the higher elevations of the Santa Lucia Range are dominated by coniferous forests of Monterey and knobcone pine. Where the lower savannah and higher coniferous forests meet, there are piñon pine, coulter pine, and gray pine. Riparian vegetation along drainages includes willow, Fremont cottonwood, sycamore, bulrush, and sedge. Common understory species include curly dock, mustard, and durango root (Flint et al. 2000:5). Yellow star thistle is prolific. It is found in fields that are no longer cultivated and on the hillsides where the construction of underground gas or water pipelines required the removal of indigenous plants that were not restored at the conclusion of construction. Tule still grows in the low-lying area north of the ranch headquarters. Part of the current range management practices on the ranch include replanting native grasses in areas that were previously cultivated (Lazanoff 2006).

For most of its 230-year existence, the Santa Margarita Ranch was a mixed-use farming and ranching operation. As an outpost of the mission, there were cattle, hogs, and sheep on the land. An estimated amount of land in wheat production during the mission era is 440 acres during the years of highest production (Rossi 1979:128). The asistencia was in use for at least 45 years. It was productive by 1790, an accomplishment that had taken several years to achieve. In 1833, the neophytes were still planting crops. A change in land use occurred under Manuel Estrada, who focused on cattle ranching and only grew food crops for ranch use; at a minimum this was corn and wheat (Bryant 1967 [1849]:372). As fields were no longer planted, exotic species invaded the land (Lazanoff 2006). Both alfalfa and wild oats are exotics that had become well-established by the 1850s.

After Patrick Murphy purchased the ranch there was a gradual return to mixed uses. An estimate from 1889 gives the amount of cultivated ranch land as several hundred acres (Tognazzini 1989:207). Estimates rise to 3,000 acres at the turn of the century. Aerial photographs taken in 1941 show cultivated areas planted in alfalfa on both sides of Santa Margarita Creek north to the ranch boundary. South of the town of Santa Margarita, most of the ranch land was used for grazing.

Current agricultural uses of the ranch are limited to vineyards and cattle ranching. The current vineyards are not the first on the ranch. A photograph from the early 1900s illustrates a vineyard in the center of the ranch headquarters. Conifers, a palm tree, and other ornamentals also were planted around the ranch house. Homesteaders also planted ornamentals: periwinkle, or vinca, remains at three homestead sites.

The ranching operation includes a pasture management program, under which pastures are replanted with native grasses. Cattle feed on these both as green feed and as old feed, instead of hay. Therefore, natural grasses are now part of land-use vegetation, as they would have been during the mission and rancho eras. An added benefit of this program is the return of oak trees to the pastures, because the cows do not eat the seedlings or nibble the leaves on low-hanging branches. This further restores the oak openings of the historic landscape.

4.8 BUILDINGS, STRUCTURES, AND OBJECTS

The historical landscape includes numerous buildings, structures, and objects erected during the Mission Period and subsequent eras. Most of these are associated with the asistencia or the ranch headquarters.

4.8.1 Asistencia

The first known permanent structure on the ranch lands was the asistencia building, which combined the chapel, residences and store rooms. In addition to this building, various reports and graphic representations indicate that several other structures were present during mission times. James (1927) reported that the asistencia included three adobes with red roof tiles near the main building. Ranch folklore holds that 41 adobes were scattered around the asistencia property (Loftus 2006). If each neophyte family had a small house, as they did at the mission, this could be considered a reasonable number for those living at the asistencia. However, period descriptions usually mention only “a few” adobes; possibly some of the structures were the more traditional native tule huts.

The main building of the asistencia, also frequently referred to simply as the asistencia, was constructed of local stone with adobe mortar and tile infill; it had a tile roof. Approximately 50 feet wide and 140 feet long, the building contained a chapel on the west end and several other rooms used mainly for grain storage. One room served as a small residence for the visiting priest. After secularization the building was no longer used as a granary and was not kept in good repair. The inner walls were removed in the early 1900s prior to its rebirth as a barn. Now only the north and south walls, and part of the east wall, remain standing. The walls are approximately 3 feet thick and constructed of local sandstone. The north wall has four openings set at the eastern end; the western end would have been the back wall of the chapel, where the altar would have been situated. The north wall is semi-coursed, but the courses are not parallel with the ground (Figure 4-2).

At the west end of the south wall is the main entrance, which led into the chapel. The door is constructed with an arched opening of stones. This doorway is the most finely finished of all the openings in the structure (Figure 4-3). A niche in the interior wall to the right of the door was the location of the font; windows flank the door. Three more windows are located on the south wall (Figure 4-4), then one door (Figure 4-5), two windows, and a final door. The south wall has a random rubble pattern, with large boulders, and a high proportion of infill of flat tiles. It is possible that the walls were constructed at different times, or under different stonemasons. One final consideration is that the builders used the large boulders from an outcropping almost in place; as they needed more stone, stones from a distance were faced and shaped before moving, this would have made them easier to move, and kept construction and stone-cutting in separate work areas.

According to a letter written by Father Luis Martinez, the asistencia was being constructed during 1817. No specific dates of the beginning or end of the construction are known. Louisiana Clayton Dart compared the asistencia construction to that of the padre’s kitchen in Mission San Luis Obispo (Figure 4-6). The construction techniques of the kitchen and south wall are similar: large unworked stones with lots of tile used as infill.



Figure 4-2 Interior north wall of the main asistencia building, facing northeast.



Figure 4-3 Chapel door, circa 1900 (courtesy University of Southern California, on behalf of the USC Specialized Libraries and Archival Collections).



Figure 4-4 South wall of the asistencia, circa 1900 (courtesy University of Southern California, on behalf of the USC Specialized Libraries and Archival Collections).



Figure 4-5
Asistencia door, circa 1900
(courtesy University of Southern
California, on behalf of the USC
Specialized Libraries and
Archival Collections).



Figure 4-6 Padre's kitchen, Mission San Luis Obispo (courtesy Betsy Bertrando).

The drawing by Edward Vischer and painting by Henry Chapman Ford provide the earliest graphic representations of the asistencia. The date on the Vischer drawing is circa 1864. It shows the roofless stone building, with a smaller structure at right angles to one of the corners. This small structure still has its roof, which appears to be wood shakes. The text written on the drawing is the description of the asistencia from Robinson's visit in 1829.

Henry Chapman Ford painted the asistencia before 1883. His view is of the north wall of the main building and possibly one smaller structure to the east (Figure 4-7). This is similar to the one in the Vischer drawing, a gabled structure with a wood roof and one entrance. Thus, it appears there were smaller structures at the southwest and northeast corners of the main building. The drawing and painting corroborate the descriptions of the asistencia that state that there were small adobes scattered around the main building cluster. The Ford painting also shows the remnants of the adobe wall that surrounded the main building cluster. Ford also completed two drawings of the main structure; one of the south elevation depicts a partial roof at the eastern end, and some of the vigas (beams).

Two drawings of asistencia doors, attributed to artist Seth Jones, were completed in 1889. One drawing is of the chapel door from the interior; the second is of another door in the south wall. Both drawings highlight the use of stone and tile in the construction.

There are several series of photographs of the asistencia, with tentative dates from 1893 to 1906. These photographs show the roofless main building, with no whitewash or viga posts as shown in the Ford painting, and no structures near it or wall surrounding it. There is one photograph that shows the interior walls; there was a center wall through the interior, except for the chapel (Figure 4-8).



Figure 4-7 Santa Margarita de Cortona Asistencia, painted by Henry Chapman Ford, circa 1880s (courtesy Mission Inn Foundation & Museum, from the Collection of The Historic Mission Inn Corporation).



Figure 4-8 Photograph of interior walls of the asistencia, circa 1900 (courtesy University of Southern California, on behalf of the USC Specialized Libraries and Archival Collections).

According to Raymundo Pacheco, who was raised on the ranch, Patrick Murphy “liked the old building left as it was” (Webb 1952:93). During his tenure the building was not used for any function—there is noticeable vegetation inside in the photograph of the interior. This changed after Jacob Reis purchased the Santa Margarita Ranch.

It is now nearly frontless and utterly ruined, altogether roofless, and its interior has been willfully destroyed in the past few years. The work of destruction was still going on in 1904 and work is underway to convert it to a hay barn. . . . from the ruins of the partition walls it is easy to see that there were eight rooms of about equal size, one window to a room, leaving out the rooms that had door entrances [James 1927:287–288].

Pacheco told Webb that he had removed the inner walls himself with pick and crowbar, not with dynamite, which would have destroyed both inner and outer walls (Webb 1952:93). Pacheco also stated that there was a tunnel from the building to Santa Margarita Creek. This tunnel has never been found. However, there is a spot on the floor of the building where the concrete floor sinks, and cowboys riding along the creek have reported going over ground that had a hollow sound (Loftus 2006). The tunnel story was mentioned in the Van Harreveld article regarding a visit to the ranch in 1931.

The hay barn constructed by Reis in 1904 was a monitor roof barn, using the stone walls of the main building as the long walls. The interior floor was lowered at least 1 foot and covered with concrete. There were two sheds on the outside; the one on the south was used as a tack room, which remains its current use. Reis donated some of the old roof tiles to the San Luis Obispo County Historical Museum. Because of structural instability, the current owner of the ranch has reinforced the barn and replaced the original corrugated metal cladding with vertical wood siding.

4.8.2 Ranch Headquarters

The ranch headquarters is situated on the terrace west of Santa Margarita Creek south of the main building of the asistencia. It currently contains 15 buildings, structures, and other features—the main ranch house, tank house, garage, Wells Fargo building, and numerous sheds, outbuildings, and other features—that reflect the residential, agricultural, and commercial uses of the headquarters. Over the years some buildings at the headquarters have been removed or lost, while other structures have been added. For example, there was a dairy barn on the east side of the headquarters, and historical photographs (Figure 4-9) and aerial photographs depict several buildings and fences in the center of the headquarters that are no longer there. These include an adobe building located to the north of the ranch house (Figure 4-10). Buildings, structures, and other features currently standing at the headquarters are described below.

The main wing of the ranch house is constructed of adobe and sided with wood, a perfect example of the melding of Spanish, Mexican, and American architectural traditions typical until the late nineteenth century (Figure 4-11). In the Spanish tradition, it is set on an east-west axis perpendicular to the creek. An 1875 description of the house, before it was sided, states that:

The residence of the Hon. P. W. Murphy is a relic of the Padres, and the only habitable one of all the old mission buildings. It is a long, low and tile-covered adobe; remarkable only for its antiquity and coolness [*San Luis Obispo Tribune* 1875].

Two one-room adobes originally were set in a north-south alignment at the southwest corner of the main residence. Joaquin Estrada built the northern adobe for his overseer (Nicholson 2002:67). The second adobe also likely dates from the Estrada era, and was also used as a residence. Interior walls of the second adobe are covered with drawings and writings from the 1800s to the 1940s, including a profile of a vaquero; drawings of World War I soldiers and



Figure 4-9 Santa Margarita ranch yard from the asistencia, circa 1900 (courtesy University of Southern California, on behalf of the USC Specialized Libraries and Archival Collections).



Aerial Photo: Fairchild Aerial Photography Collection, Whittier College, CA
Flight C-7178, Frame 117, Date 6/16/1941, Original Scale 1"=1500'

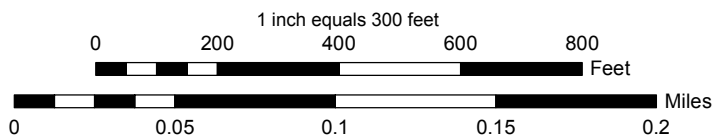


Figure 4-10 Santa Margarita Ranch Headquarters, 1941 (Fairchild Collection, Whittier College).



Figure 4-11 Ranch house, facing southeast.

women which are so detailed one can comprehend the dress style; and scratch markings from matches. There are also charred timbers. Wood paneling now covers the drawings (Loftus 2006).

Murphy joined the two adobes with wood, creating a room between that served as the original kitchen (no longer in use), and connected them with the main residence to create an “L” configuration. The northern adobe section is now referred to as the “morgue room,” while the southern was used as a bedroom. The adobe interiors are covered with lath and plaster, and both have six-over-six light, double-hung windows with deep-angled reveals. It is likely that Murphy connected the adobes, added the ell, and covered the entire structure with wood siding during that era.

The exterior of the ranch house now looks much the same as a photo from the 1930s. It is clad with shiplap siding, and the porch that wraps around the north and west elevations has Queen Anne decorative features. Part of the west porch has been enclosed and renovated; it now houses the kitchen. The roof of the porch is separate from the house roof. The windows are two-over-two light, double-hung windows. The brick chimney has been rebuilt. Written on the attic wall near the chimney is: “It’s a blue, blue Monday” with the date January 13, 1911 (Loftus 2006).

Two structures are associated directly with the house: the tank house and a small building to the southeast of the ranch house. The tank house is located directly south of the ranch house, inside the “L” (see Figure 4-11). It was likely erected by Murphy in the 1880s. Pitman (1976) produced a typology of California tank houses, and identified several regional concentrations; one such concentration is in the Salinas Valley. The Santa Margarita tank house most closely resembles

the Straight Box type. It has a square floor plan and shiplap siding, with a hipped roof clad with composition shingles (Figure 4-12). A shed roof delineates the tower and the tank. The tank house is a remnant of the wind-powered agricultural landscape and also represents a “time when the farmer could afford to demonstrate pride in the appearance of his farmstead. In style he covered up what he considered an unsightly though useful tower” (Pitman 1976:96–97).



Figure 4-12 Tank house, facing northeast.

A small one-story structure stands behind the ranch house. It is clad with shiplap siding and has a gabled roof covered with composition shingles. The front door faces north. A small shed roof covers the door on the south. It is not depicted in the 1941 aerial photograph of the ranch (see Figure 4-10), and so must postdate that time.

The Wells Fargo building is a one and one-half story, two-room adobe structure with six-over-six light, double-hung windows (Figure 4-13). It currently is clad with shiplap siding and

supports a gabled roof with composition shingles. Each room has a separate entrance on the east side. A porch with a separate shed roof surrounds the building. On the east side of the building the porch is supported by poured concrete; concrete piers support the porch on the west.



Figure 4-13 Wells Fargo building, also called the Alhambra and stage stop, facing northwest.

The building is located east of the alignment of the original El Camino Real. It is not shown on the 1858 map of the ranch but could have been built after Estrada obtained his merchandising license. The structure housed a store run by Billy Farrel until 1872, when Murphy terminated their agreement (Murphy 1872:n.p.), and also served as a stage stop and post office. It was called the Alhambra by Murphy and was also known as the hacienda, but is commonly referred to today as the Wells Fargo building.

Over the years several outbuildings have been erected in the headquarters area to support the ranching operation. The Reis family built a sheep barn east of the main asistencia building some time prior to 1941. It is a long, low, wood-framed structure clad with corrugated metal, as is the gabled roof. Doors are on the gable ends. A line of three small buildings on the east side of the ranch headquarters area also was built prior to 1941. The northernmost of these currently serves as the machine shop. This wood-framed structure is sided with corrugated metal and rests on a concrete foundation. It has a gabled roof clad with corrugated metal. The entrance is a wide sliding door on the west side. South of the machine shop is a small shed-roofed structure with corrugated metal walls and six-light fixed windows. Directly south of this is a gable-roofed structure sided with vertical wood boards. It has two six-light sliding windows on the front façade and one eight-light fixed window on the south elevation. The gabled roof is clad with corrugated metal. Farther to the south, another small shed built prior to 1941 has vertical wood

siding and a gabled roof clad with corrugated metal. Fixed six-light windows are on the west and south elevations.

Some time after 1941 a pole barn with a roof but no walls went up on a concrete foundation for use as a hay shed. Another small shed not depicted on the 1941 aerial photograph is located west of the main asistencia building. It has vertical wood walls and a gabled roof clad with corrugated metal. A two-car garage is located on the east side of the driveway across from the ranch house. It is wood-framed, shed-roofed, clad with corrugated metal, and open to the west.

The current ranch owners introduced a narrow-gauge railroad track into the headquarters landscape in recent years to display a collection of historical railroad rolling stock. A scale house is located west of the rail line in the center of the headquarters area. The scale house is a small wood-framed building, approximately 6 by 10 feet, with a shed roof and a six-over-six light, double-hung window on the north. The front window, which faces the scale, has three contiguous six-light fixed windows. The door is on the south. The scale is still inside the building. The weighing mechanism next to the scale house is contained in a pit with wood plank covering, approximately 34 feet long by 10 feet wide. The age and association of these features are unknown, but they are not depicted on the 1941 aerial photograph.

An earthen loading ramp west of the scale is supported by log supports on the north side. An airstrip is located west of the ranch headquarters. Originally a dirt strip, it is now paved.

4.8.3 Other Buildings and Structures

The former manager's housing is located off Pozo Road at the southern end of the ranch. The original buildings visible in a historical photograph have been replaced with modern structures. It is possible that one shed once served as a stage stop.

4.9 CLUSTERS

In addition to the main asistencia building and ranch headquarters described above, several activity clusters are located on the ranch. Cultivated fields were clustered along Santa Margarita Creek, in the ciénaga, and other irrigated areas. On the flat area east of the ranch headquarters, across Santa Margarita Creek, is the location of the Mission Period tallow vats. This later became the working area of the ranch, where the old corral was located and where rodeos, brandings, and matanzas (livestock slaughtering) took place. Many social aspects of ranch life, such as the bull and bear fights, also took place at this location. To the south was the location of the racetrack built by Patrick Murphy, which was also an important part of the social aspect of ranch life.

There are three homesteads located in a small cluster on the north slope of the hills to the south of the ranch headquarters. In the landscape photograph of 1906 there is a small clearing on the slope, with what could be one cabin on the right (west side). There are no standing structures remaining at these sites, although unrecorded archaeological remains include structural depressions, ceramics and other residential debris, and introduced plantings such as vinca and cypress. This cluster of homesteads might be associated with a small logging enterprise on the ranch in the early decades of the twentieth century.

The Santa Margarita townsite is a 640-acre parcel set aside by Patrick Murphy. Its development was contingent on the construction of the Southern Pacific Railroad Coastal Line. Although the town is not now part of the ranch, it is located within the ranch boundary, south of the headquarters. During construction it was a boomtown; however, continued prosperity was elusive, and it remains a small town.

4.10 ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

4.10.1 Prehistoric and Historical Native American Sites

Remnants of Native American land use are found throughout the study area and include midden deposits marking habitations sites, bedrock mortars where acorns and other foods were processed, scatters of stone tools and manufacturing debris, cemeteries where ancient populations are interred, and other tangible and intangible reminders of the American Indian presence. Santa Margarita Valley has an unusually rich and well-preserved archaeological record of considerable scientific and public value. These resources, as well as the surrounding natural landscape, also hold considerable value for contemporary Native Americans, who view the sites themselves as well as the natural setting, including plants, animals, water courses, and other natural resources, as sacred and irreplaceable (Collins 2006).

Historically, there were at least two named native *rancherías* (villages) on or near the ranch. Following McLendon and Johnson (1999), Milliken and Johnson (2003) locate the *rancherías* *Chetpu* and *Chotnegle* at Santa Margarita. Additionally, they place *Tchena* and *Tipu* in the region (Milliken and Johnson 2003:121). To date, these named settlements have not been clearly associated with any particular archaeological site or group of sites, although it is likely that at least one of these may name the *ranchería* at which the *asistencia* was established.

4.10.2 Historical Archaeological Sites

Historical archaeological sites date from the early Spanish travels through the valley to the twentieth century. These include the remnants of settlements and trash dumps, mines and mills, homesteads, kilns, roadways, and numerous other features. Notable among these are the homestead remnants described above; another homestead site near the hunting cabins that has remnants of a structure—a stone wall and a pile of stones that probably was a chimney (Figure 4-14); and homestead remnants east of Pozo Road identified by the state primary number P-40-041070 (Flint et al. 2000:93–94). The old cemetery along Yerba Buena Creek south of the townsite is recorded as CA-SLO-1681/H (Flint et al. 2000:39–42), while the oyster shell mine is recorded as CA-SLO-2510 (Lloyd 2006) (Figure 4-15).

Currently unrecorded historical sites include the mission tallow vats along the east bank of Santa Margarita Creek just south of the main *asistencia* building (Figure 4-16). There were two vats connected by a common center stone wall. Only the foundation remains, constructed of sandstone and measuring approximately 13 by 8 feet, lengthwise along creek. It is not situated on level land but slopes down to the creek. The site could have been chosen because of the large flat stone ledge that the creek flows along, giving easy access to water. A tile kiln also was located along the west bank of Santa Margarita Creek south of the *asistencia* (Loftus 2006). There are tile fragments located in a ravine leading to the creek at this location.



Figure 4-14 Stone wall remnants, facing southeast.



Figure 4-15 Oyster shell on remnant concrete, facing east.



Figure 4-16 Tallow vats, facing south.

4.11 SMALL-SCALE ELEMENTS

Small-scale features include fences, corrals, wells, and water troughs. None of these small-scale features have been documented formally. Fences delineate certain ranch areas and line the public roads that traverse the ranch. Most fencing is built of barbed or smooth wire and vertical wood posts with wood and barbed-wire gates. Some gates are modern metal devices with automatic openers. Corrals are found at the ranch headquarters and several other locations around the ranch. These typically are constructed with vertical wood posts and either wood or metal rails. Many of the metal rails are gates, which can be moved according to need.

Wells are also found throughout the ranch. The earliest known well was in the Rinconada area of the ranch and is indicated on the 1841 *diseño*. Some currently used well machinery is enclosed in wooden structures.

5 SIGNIFICANCE EVALUATION

Cultural forces have shaped the natural landscape of the Santa Margarita Ranch for many centuries. The resulting cultural landscape reflects Native American land use, ranching and agriculture under the mission system, and continued ranching, agriculture, mining, and other uses under private ownership until the present day. Stories of events and human experience add richness to this rural historic landscape.

For the purposes of CEQA, historical resources are evaluated for significance using the California Register of Historical Resources (CRHR) criteria of eligibility. A significant cultural resource is one that:

- (A) Is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of California's history and cultural heritage;
- (B) Is associated with the lives of persons important in our past;
- (C) Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region, or method of construction, or represents the work of an important creative individual, or possesses high artistic value; or
- (D) Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history [*CEQA Guidelines*, California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Chapter 3, Section 15064.5].

The significance of the Santa Margarita Asistencia was first recognized in 1941 when it was designated California Historic Landmark #364. The Santa Margarita Asistencia is individually eligible for the CRHR under Criteria A, C, and D. It is eligible under Criterion A because of its association with the development of the mission system of colonization of California. It is eligible under Criterion C because of its distinctive construction techniques and as an early example of stone construction in California. Criterion D eligibility reflects the site's archaeological potential to provide important new information on history and prehistory unavailable from the documentary record.

In addition to the asistencia, other contributing elements might also qualify individually for the CRHR. None of these elements within the boundaries of the proposed development have been formally evaluated for significance.

5.1 SANTA MARGARITA RANCH RURAL HISTORIC DISTRICT

Under the CRHR, a historic district possesses a significant concentration, linkage, or continuity of sites, buildings, structures or objects united historically or aesthetically by plan or physical development (see California Public Resources Code 5020.1[h]; National Park Service 1997:5). The Santa Margarita Ranch possesses such a concentration of buildings, structures, and sites that have been connected through their shared history and by the continuation of historical traditions

into modern times. Because many ranching traditions, lifeways, crafts, and social institutions have been carried out continuously on the ranch for well more than two centuries, the district may also qualify as a Traditional Cultural Property as defined in National Register Bulletin 38 (Parker and King 1998). It also qualifies as an ethnic landscape:

a landscape containing a variety of natural and cultural resources that associated people define as heritage resources. Examples are contemporary settlements, religious sacred sites and massive geological structures. Small plant communities, animals, subsistence and ceremonial grounds are often components [Birnbaum 1994:2].

The Santa Margarita Ranch Rural Historic District has local and regional importance. It is eligible under Criterion A because of its important association with broad patterns of California history, such as the establishment of missions as a means of colonizing California and the subsequent development of secular ranchos. Under Criterion A its period of significance begins with the Anza expedition's entry into the valley in 1775 and continues to the present day. It is eligible under Criterion B for its association with persons important to our past, in this case General Patrick W. Murphy, rancher, businessman, and state senator, whose family owned the ranch between 1860 and 1900. Under Criterion B its period of significance begins in 1860 and continues to 1900. The district is eligible under Criterion C because of the distinctive local methods and techniques of construction used in the stone and adobe buildings erected at the asistencia during the mission and rancho eras; for the unique melding of Hispanic and American construction methods when Murphy owned the ranch; and for the distinctive characteristics and physical qualities of its spatial organization and land-use patterns, which illustrate traditional practices associated with self-contained rural ranch life. Under Criterion C the period of significance begins circa 1780 and continues to 1900. The district is eligible under Criterion D for its potential to yield important information in history, notably the mission and ranch construction, and in prehistory for information on the lives of Native Americans who lived on the land before and after the arrival of the Spanish.

The boundary of a historic district is meant to "encompass but not exceed the extent of the significant resources and land areas comprising the property" (Seifert 1997:2). From the nebulous boundaries of the mission era and the Estrada diseño, the Santa Margarita Ranch has encompassed approximately 17,000 acres. In the late 1800s Patrick Murphy sold the northern and southern portions of the ranch, leaving an area of about 9,600 acres. Although the Reis family expanded the ranch to 22,000 acres, this was new land not associated with the original rancho. The significant qualities of the district are found within the original boundaries of the ranch as depicted on the 1858 and 1880 survey maps of the ranch (Figures 3-3 and 3-4). Areas of the ranch that were sold are not included within the historic district, nor are any current ranch parcels that lie outside of the historic boundaries. Therefore, the historic district encompasses the 9,600-acre historic ranch core, which has remained essentially intact for more than 200 years (Figure 5-1).

To be eligible for the CRHR, a property must be significant and it must retain integrity. Integrity is the ability of a property to convey its important historical associations and significant cultural values. There are seven components of integrity: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association (National Park Service 1997).

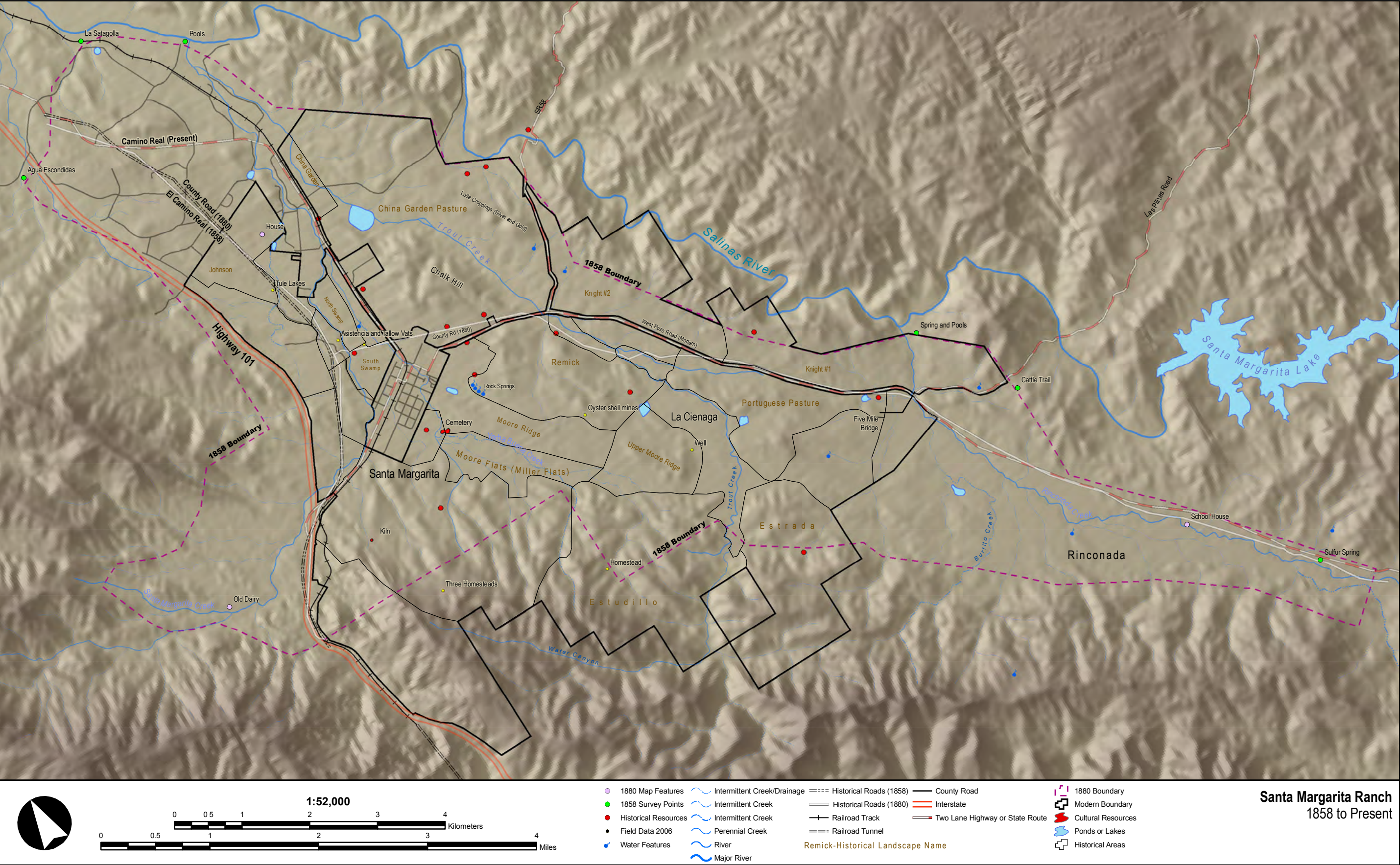


Figure 5-1 Topographic map of the Santa Margarita Ranch displaying features from 1858, 1880, and modern maps.

Location is the place where the historic property was constructed or historic events occurred (National Park Service 1997:44). The location of the Santa Margarita Ranch has not changed. The boundaries have shrunk over the years, but the ranch core, centered on the asistencia and ranch headquarters, has not changed. Over half of the original ranch acreage is still intact. Therefore the ranch has integrity of location.

Design is the combination of natural and cultural elements that create the form, plan, space, structure, and style of a property (National Park Service 1997:44). The ranch has vernacular design elements as well as those based on the Laws of the Indies. The mission elements of design are still extant in the layout and placement of remaining buildings, structures, and sites associated with the asistencia. The ranch headquarters layout evolved from that foundation, adding additional elements over the course of time. The current placement of buildings, agricultural fields, pastures, roadways, and other cultural elements in relationship to each other and to the natural environment reflects historical decisions about spatial organization and land use.

Some design elements of individual buildings within the asistencia and ranch headquarters area have been lost through demolition or replacement. Despite these losses and certain modern intrusions, such as placement of vineyards on lands formerly used for cattle grazing, the integrity of design within the district is only minimally impaired.

Setting is the physical environment of a historic property (National Park Service 1997:45). The Santa Margarita Valley, with its rangelands dotted by streams and numerous rock outcroppings and the surrounding mountains, hills, and forests, remains much the same as it was historically. Although new development is expanding from nearby towns and cities, these intrusions are not apparent on most of the ranch property. Therefore the Santa Margarita Ranch has retained integrity of setting.

Materials include natural elements such as soil, rocks and minerals, and vegetation as well as construction materials and other physical elements that were combined or deposited during a particular period of time and in a particular pattern or configuration to create the historic property (National Park Service 1997:45). The ranch’s natural material elements—soils, rock outcroppings, and vegetation—are largely unchanged from historic, and even prehistoric, times. Although vegetation is less static, with some species dying out or being replaced and their distributions changing with time, the current vegetation regime largely reflects historical conditions in scale, type, and visual effect. With regards to construction materials, the original Spanish stone and adobe structures were sided over with American materials as the ownership changed from Spanish to American. Much of the original construction material is preserved, and the changes themselves are historically significant, reflecting an important stylistic tradition melding Spanish and American architectural elements. Since much of the original construction materials and their later additions and replacements still remain, the Santa Margarita Ranch has retained integrity of materials.

Workmanship is the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular culture or people during any given period in history and reflects ways people fashion their environment for functional and decorative purposes (National Park Service 1997:45). The coursed stone walls and tiled arched doors and windows of the main asistencia building illustrate a high degree of workmanship and

are excellent representations of local mission architecture. The building has been partially demolished over the years, and thus the integrity of workmanship in this building is moderately impaired. Similarly, adobe structures have deteriorated over the years, and extant adobe buildings have been incorporated into subsequent structures. Much adobe work is nonetheless preserved within the wooden siding and interior lath and plaster of the ranch headquarters buildings, and the overprinted construction displays excellent Queen Anne and vernacular workmanship. Finally, the agricultural and ranching workmanship, although seasonal and impermanent in nature, reflects traditional historic practices and contributes to the integrity of workmanship within the district. Overall, therefore, integrity of workmanship within the Santa Margarita Ranch historic district is only minimally impaired.

Feeling is a property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time (National Park Service 1997:45). Although intangible, the historic past remains alive on the ranch, where one can walk in the footsteps of Chumash villagers, Franciscan friars, Spanish and Mexican ranchers, and General Murphy and his vaqueros. The Santa Margarita Ranch thus retains integrity of feeling.

Association is the direct link between a property and the important historic events or persons that shaped it (National Park Service 1997:45). Through uninterrupted use and occupation, continuation and revival of historic cultural traditions and ranching practices, and the cumulative effect of setting, design, materials, workmanship, and feeling, the Santa Margarita Ranch retains a strong sense of association with the historic personages and events of its past.

A series of photographs of the Santa Margarita Ranch illustrate the integrity of the historic landscape. These 3 by 11 inch photographs, in the possession of ranch resident Kathy Loftus, show the landscape of the ranch around the beginning of the twentieth century. Eight of these photographs are reproduced below, with current photographs taken from the same location. In all of the photographs the vegetation is very similar, with oak openings on the slopes and grass, pasture, or planted fields in the lowlands. The most notable changes are on lands no longer part of the ranch and not included in the proposed historic district.

5.2 CHARACTER DEFINING AREAS OF THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

Cultural landscapes can be considered in terms of their distinguishing character areas and contributing elements that define the significance of the landscape. Cultural landscape character areas include individual historic properties as well as other physical features and visual aspects that combine to create the historic landscape (National Park Service 2006:91). These landscape character areas and contributing elements are the starting point from which impacts of the proposed project can be assessed.

One of the most distinctive character areas within the Santa Margarita Ranch cultural landscape is the ranch headquarters area. Encompassing the bottomlands along Santa Margarita and Yerba Buena creeks and generally delimited by the townsite to the south, Garden Farms to the north, Highway 101 on the west, and the Southern Pacific Railroad on the east, this area was the focus of land use during the mission era and became the center of ranch operations during the Estrada and Murphy tenures. It is also the location of the principal historical structures on the ranch.



Figure 5-2 This landscape image was taken from the first hill south of the ranch headquarters, facing east. A large oak tree on the left and an outcropping covered with oaks are in the right of the foreground. The middle ground is the current road to the ranch, a track that travels west, the fenced pasture along the creek, and one portable feeder. The headquarters and hills are in the distance.



Figure 5-3 The current view is quite similar, with the addition of the railroad spur. The ranch house and tank house are the same, as are the clusters of trees in the foreground.



Figure 5-4 This landscape image was taken from the northwestern edge of the headquarters terrace, facing west. The view is of fields enclosed with a wood fence, and the hills in the distance.



Figure 5-5 The current view depicts the airstrip and the new alignment of Highway 101. The landscape west of the highway is no longer part of the ranch.



Figure 5-6 This historic landscape image shows the pasture southeast of the headquarters, facing east. Santa Margarita Creek is in the lower left corner; a wood fence encloses the pasture.



Figure 5-7 The fence is now barbed wire, but the view is still of cultivated fields.



Figure 5-8 This photograph is a view of Santa Margarita, facing east. The road is a dirt track; there are cultivated fields to the left of the road and a row of saplings on the right.



Figure 5-9 This landscape view illustrates the growth of Santa Margarita to the east, where the school is now located. This area is no longer part of the ranch.



Figure 5-10 This historic landscape is a view of West Pozo Road, just south of town, facing north. There are wide verges on both sides of the road. Hand-cut fence posts with four strands of barbed wire indicate cattle fencing.



Figure 5-11 In the current view the road is paved, with transmission lines along it. The wood fence posts have been replaced with metal posts.



Figure 5-12 This photograph is a view of Pozo Road facing south. It depicts barbed-wire fence with hand-cut posts on both sides of the road.

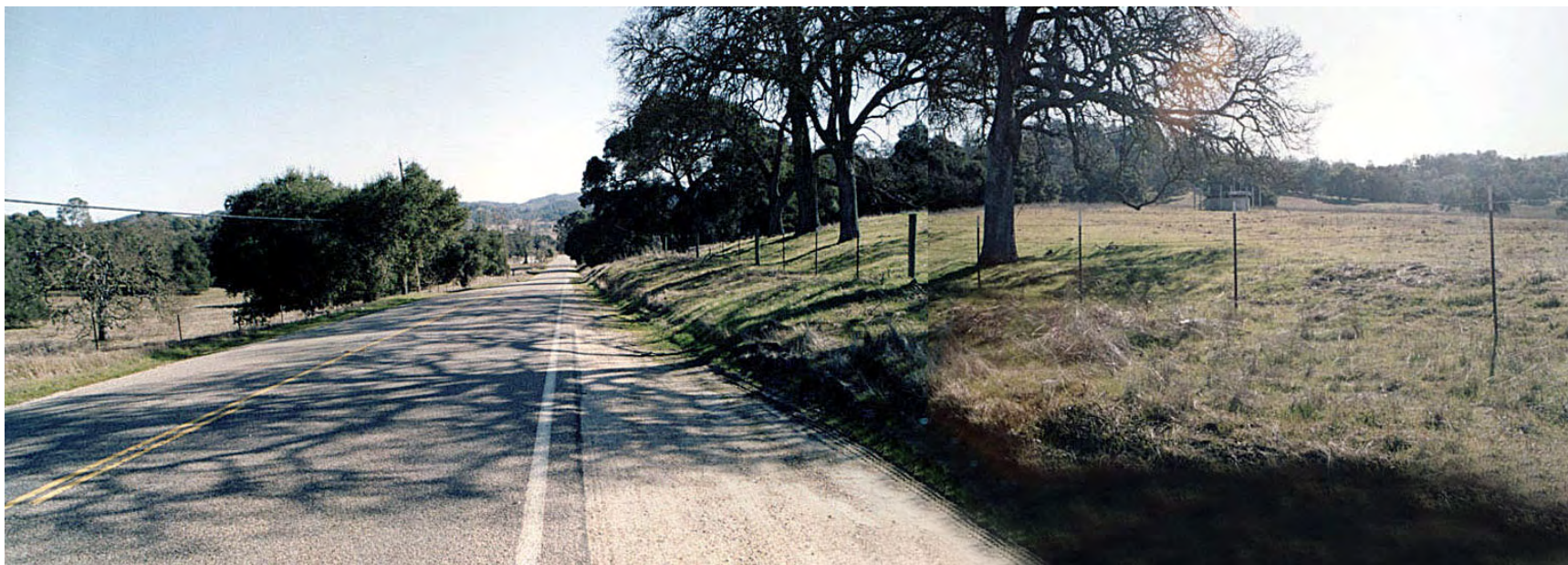


Figure 5-13 The current view is essentially the same as it was 100 years ago.

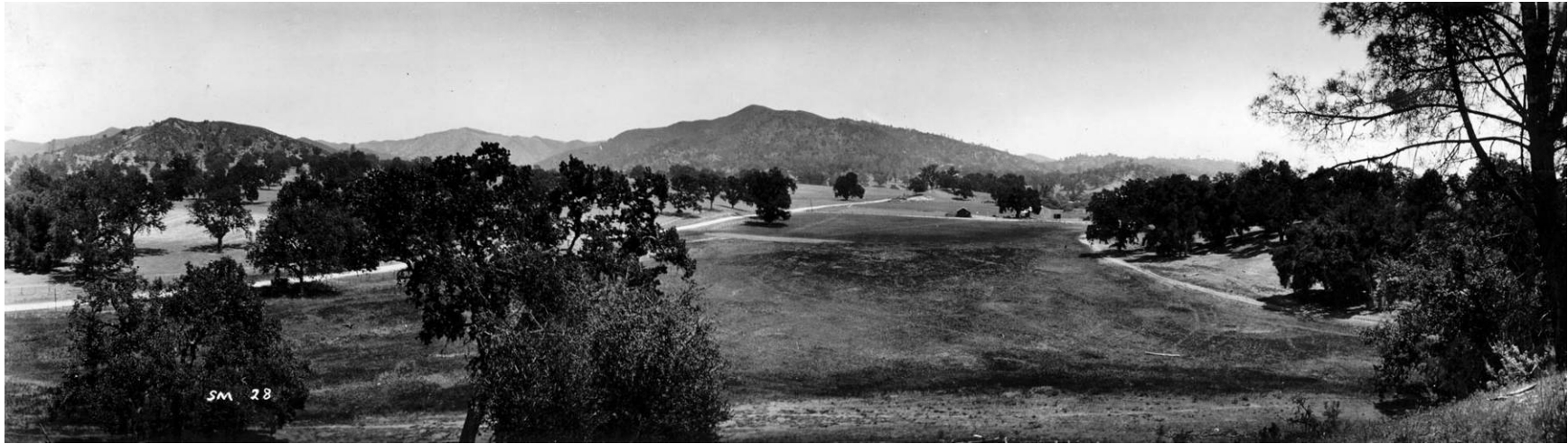


Figure 5-14 This is a view of the landscape near the old ranch manager's housing, facing south. West Pozo Road is at the far left of the image. Another road curves along the hill on the right. A slough is in the middle ground, with the buildings south of it.

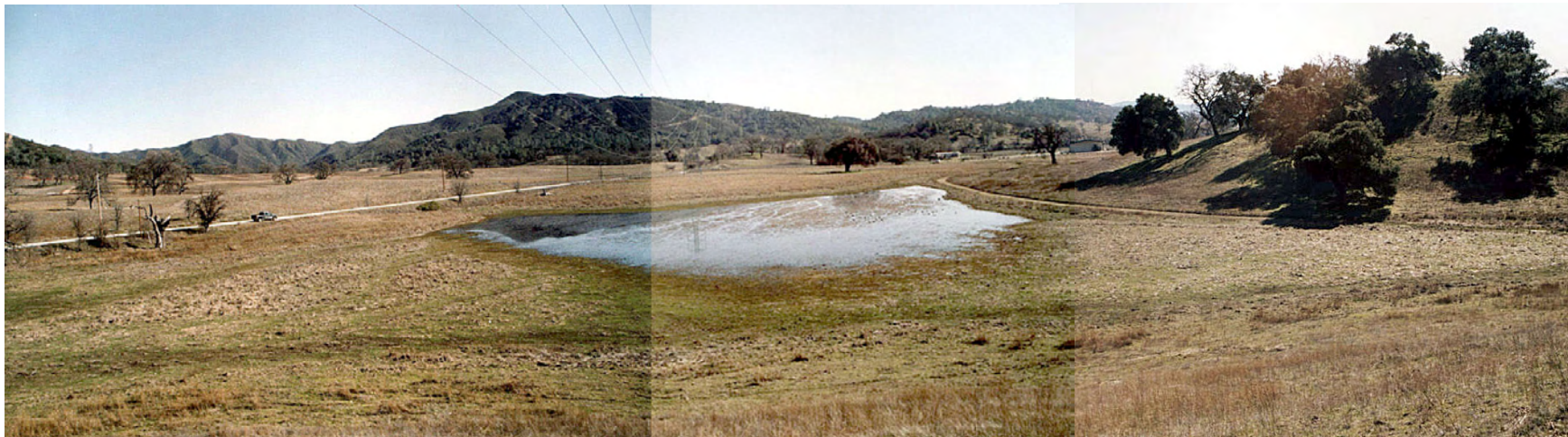


Figure 5-15 The slough and road to the right are still extant, as is Pozo Road. One of the trees is dead, but the trunk remains in the location. The historic buildings have been replaced.

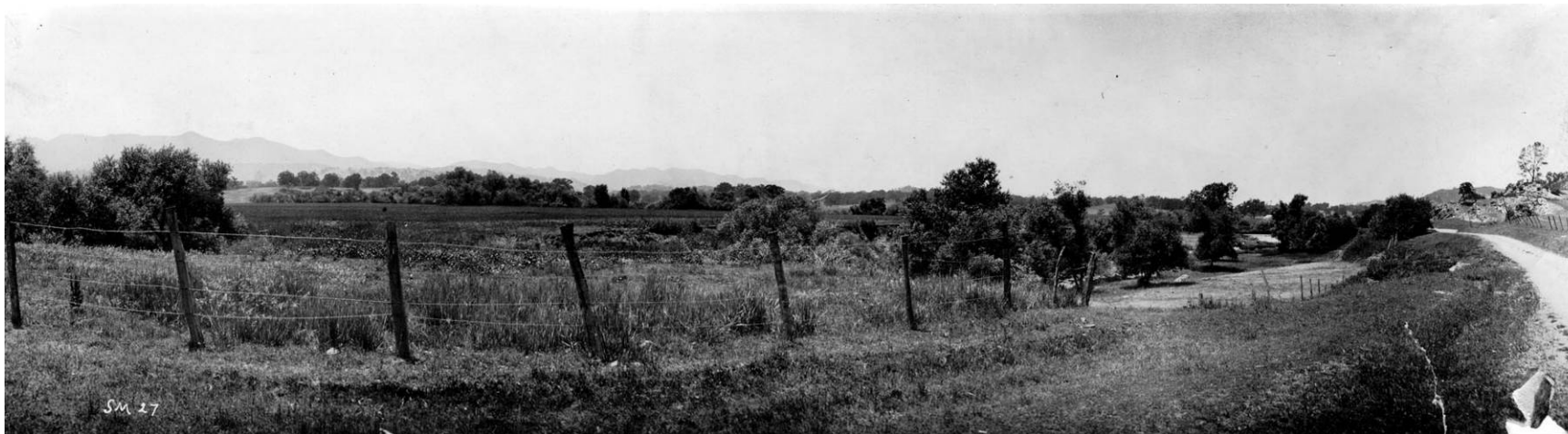


Figure 5-16 This historic landscape view was taken from West Pozo Road, facing north. An outcropping is located on the right side of the road, and cultivated land lies on the left side.



Figure 5-17 The current view of this area has remained essentially unchanged.

A second important cultural landscape character area encompasses all the historical water sources on the ranch. The creeks, springs, marshes, and pools sustained prehistoric and historic cultures, are viewed as sacred by modern Native American descendants, and gave life to the important cultural tradition that the ranch has never lacked for water. The stream courses, wetlands, other water sources, and their associated vegetation, play a key role in defining the setting, feeling, and historical associations of the ranch.

The views and vistas of the ranch help define the cultural landscape because they provide the backdrop for all of the cultural activities that have occurred in the valley. Views of mountains and hill slopes, fields and pastureland, rock outcroppings, oak woodlands and pine forests, crops and pasturelands, and similar visual elements have remained essentially the same as when described by the first travelers through the area, and have a very strong impact on the integrity of setting at the ranch. The photographs and paintings from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century confirm the integrity of the setting.

Archaeological sites, historical structures, and small-scale landscape elements, both prehistoric and historic, reflect the utilization of the landscape over time and are another key contributing element to the significance of the district. Bedrock mortar outcrops, the petrified oyster shell deposits and related mines, charcoal ovens, historic fences and roads, and areas used for cultivation are the most obvious and visible of these elements; however, midden deposits as well as smaller and less visible sites and features within this category also contribute to the significance of the district.

The associated place names and folklore are an important part of the cultural landscape and constitute a significant, though less tangible, character-defining element. These reflect the traditional cultural values that have sustained the community through the centuries and are strongly linked to the integrity of design, setting, feeling, and association within the district, and contribute to the sense of place on the Santa Margarita ranch.

6

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 AGRICULTURAL RESIDENTIAL CLUSTER SUBDIVISION

6.1.1 Impacts of the Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision

The Santa Margarita Ranch is a rural historic district eligible for the CRHR under all four significance criteria. The proposed residential cluster is located in one of the character-defining areas of the ranch—the ridge of petrified oyster shells that were used to temper the mortar for the asistencia (and perhaps mission) construction; as paving for El Camino Real; and possibly by local Native Americans for utilitarian tools, ornaments, and ritual objects. In addition, the ridge and its petrified shell deposits were a natural wonder for nineteenth- and twentieth-century travelers, many of whom remarked upon it in their journals and other writings. During the 1920s a small oyster-shell mining industry was developed in the area; its remnants also have become part of the historic landscape. The undisturbed vistas and views from these hills, the watercourses traversing the proposed site, the vegetation, and archaeological remains all contribute to the significance of this character-defining area.

Development of the proposed residential cluster in this area would substantially diminish the integrity of the design, setting, materials, feeling, and association of this important character-defining feature of the historical landscape by damaging or destroying the shell deposits themselves, damaging or destroying archaeological remains, introducing uncharacteristic visual design elements into the historic setting, and disrupting the feeling and associations of the historical landscape. This is considered a significant impact under CEQA.

6.1.2 Mitigation Recommendations for the Agricultural Residential Cluster Subdivision

The preferred mitigation measure under CEQA is avoidance of the impacts described above. This could be achieved through project redesign. Placement of the residential cluster in a different area, preferably outside of the historic ranch core, would mitigate the negative impacts on the landscape to a less than significant level. Other forms of mitigation, such as graphic documentation (photographs, drawings, etc.) and archaeological data recovery, would lessen the impacts but would not mitigate the loss of integrity to a less than significant level.

6.2 FUTURE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

6.2.1 Impacts of the Future Development Program

The Santa Margarita Ranch is a rural historic landscape that may be significantly impacted under the Future Development Program. Because no active application currently exists for the Future Development Program, the impact assessment can only be based on a reasonable worst-case scenario regarding the location of future land uses and anticipated development areas. In general, such impacts may result from any of the following actions:

- Demolition, damage, or further deterioration of historical buildings and structures;
- Modification of historical buildings and structures in ways that diminish their integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, or association;
- Damage, destruction, or replacement of prehistoric or historical archaeological sites and small-scale landscape elements;
- Development that diminishes the integrity of character-defining areas of the ranch;
- Introduction of design elements incompatible with the historic setting, feeling, and associations;
- Disruption of extant viewsheds; or
- Disruption of traditional agricultural, ranching, and other land-use practices and lifeways that have been carried on for generations.

6.2.2 Mitigation Recommendations for the Future Development Program

The following mitigations measures may avoid, minimize, reduce, or otherwise mitigate such potential impacts. Depending on the nature and severity of such impacts, recommended mitigations may not reduce them to less than significant levels.

1. The Santa Margarita Ranch should be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places as a Rural Historic District. At a minimum, the NRHP nomination should include the following elements:
 - documentation of all extant historical buildings and structures in the ranch headquarters area to the level of the Historic American Building Survey (HABS), particularly including measured drawings and large format photographs of the interior and exterior of the main asistencia building, ranch house, Wells Fargo building, and associated structures and features;
 - reconstruction of the asistencia layout and the placement of buildings, structures, walls, and other features utilizing historical photographs, artwork, and other documentary evidence; and
 - preparation of an ethnographic history of the ranch.
2. Stabilization, restoration, and repair of historic buildings and structures within the district, and particularly at the ranch headquarters. Such work should follow the *Secretary of Interior's Standards and Guidelines for the Treatment of Historic Properties*. Roof and floor tiles, mortar, and adobe bricks from the asistencia, ranch house, and demolished structures should be analyzed and compared with Mission San Luis Obispo de Tolosa and other mission architecture.

3. Any new buildings or structures erected within the district should follow the design principles, plans, and massing of historic ranch structures, including sandstone or adobe construction, one-story height, gable roofs, shiplap siding, and natural landscaping. Landscaping should be confined to local native plants that require little or no irrigation. Parking areas should be minimal.
4. A thorough archaeological and historical survey should be carried out at the ranch headquarters area, with particular attention to documentation and mapping of surface-visible prehistoric and historical features.
5. Additional archaeological and historical survey also should be carried out on other unsurveyed portions of the ranch, especially those subject to future development. Any documented cultural resources on the ranch should be avoided and protected during development. If resource avoidance is not feasible, then additional archival research and data recovery excavation should be carried out.
6. Historic roads and other landscape remnants should be recorded and mapped in greater detail. In particular, a survey of El Camino Real should be carried out using the location on the 1858 and 1880 maps as a guide. Any remnants or other physical evidence of these roads should be thoroughly documented, and no development of any kind should be located in the path of El Camino Real or other historical transportation elements.
7. Documentation and preservation of the drawings in the bunkhouse room at the ranch, not only for their value as folk art but also for their information on ranch history. A conservator should be consulted to ascertain the best method of preservation for the drawings. Documentation should include 8 by 10 inch large format photographs.
8. True cluster design should be used for housing. Parcels should be close together, not scattered in a large area that will interfere with agricultural land. Agricultural land should also be left in parcels large enough to be of use on the ranch. Development should be located outside the boundaries of the Santa Margarita Ranch Rural Historic District.
9. The current local historic place names indicate the history of the ranch and the people who impacted the landscape. These names should be retained and incorporated into future development. New place names should reflect the historical usage.
10. Intrusions on traditional vistas on the ranch should be avoided, and views of the ranch headquarters and other character-defining areas should not be disrupted. In particular, construction should not be permitted on mountain, hill, or ridge tops that would obstruct mountain views. Open space should be left in natural grasses, with native trees and other flora.
11. Transportation corridors should be gravel or dirt roads such as those that are currently on the ranch. New roads on the ranch should fit the topography; the roads should be narrow with no verges. Signage must be subdued, not mar or interfere with the views. Historic types of fencing should be used.

12. The traditional cattle ranching aspects of the ranch should be preserved through continuity of land use and preservation of agricultural lands. “CEQA includes a finding stating that the conversion of agricultural lands to nonagricultural uses threatens the long-term health of the state’s agricultural industry and the CEQA should play an important role in the preservation of agricultural land” (Bass et al. 2001:103). Agricultural lands on the Santa Margarita Ranch are defined as those on which there is cultivation of the ground, including harvesting of crops, and the rearing and management of livestock. The traditional Californio ranching practices should be allowed to flourish within the historic ranch core. Any new cultivation or development of future vineyards should be located in areas where cultivation occurred in the past. The current pasture management program should be continued to include the restoration of native grasses to hillsides that are now overgrown with yellow star thistle.

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APPENDIX A

Chronology of Travel Journals

- 1776: Juan Bautista de Anza, Pedro Font, Francisco Palóu
Anza's California Expeditions, Herbert Bolton, 1930.
- 1829: Alfred Robinson
Life in California.
Robinson was associated with the cattle hide trade.
- 1840–1842: Eugène Duflot de Mofras
Exploration du territoire de l'Orégon, des Californies et de la mer Vermeille, exécutée pendant les années 1840, 1841 et 1842. Translated in 1937 as *Duflot de Mofras' Travels on the Pacific Coast*.
Attaché of the French Legation to Mexico
- 1846–1847: Edwin Bryant
What I Saw in California.
Bryant was a member of Fremont's forces.
- 1849: J. Ross Browne
Harper's Monthly.
Traveler/writer.
- 1854–1855: Dr. Thomas Antisell
Geologist accompanying the Topographical Engineers of the United States Survey for transcontinental railroad.
- 1856: Henry J. Miller
An Account of a Tour of the California Missions.
Miller was an artist.
- 1861: William H. Brewer
Up and Down California in 1860–1864.
Brewer was a member of the first geological team to survey California.
- 1871: Josephine Clifford
"Tropical California" in the *Overland Monthly* for October 1871.
- 1904: George Wharton James
In and Out of the Old Missions.

APPENDIX B

Paintings, Drawings, and Photographs

- 1864: Edward Vischer
Drawing of the Asistencia and vaqueros.
Edward Vischer drawing (photograph) of Mexican vaqueros in the ruins of Mission Santa Margarita, with the Robinson quote on the drawing. University of Southern California Digital Archive.
- 1870: James Walker
Two paintings, supposedly of the Santa Margarita, although the two paintings do not look familiar to ranch residents. However, it must be remembered that during the time Walker visited the area, Santa Margarita was used to name three land grants: Santa Margarita, Asuncion, and Atascadero.
- 1882: Dr. John Galway of San Francisco
Mr. and Mrs. Frank Stockton of Bakersfield donated the collection to the San Luis Obispo County Historical Museum.
- 1883: Henry Chapman Ford
Painting of the Santa Margarita Asistencia.
Ford painted all of the California missions, as well as five asistencias in the early 1880s, the collection was purchased for the Mission Inn in Riverside, California, in the 1920s. He also completed two sketches. One is the view that he painted, the second is a view of the south wall, which depicts the tile roof on the far right side as still intact.
- 1884: Jules Tavernier
El Rodeo—Santa Margarita.
Commissioned by Patrick Murphy, this is a painting of a roundup on the Santa Margarita ranch, with General Murphy in the foreground. Now in a private collection.
- 1889: Seth Jones
Two drawings of the doors of the Asistencia are attributed to Jones, who also did doors at San Juan Capistrano.
Originals are at Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley in the Robert B. Honeyman Collection of Early Californian and Western American Pictorial Material.
- 1880s–1904: Unknown photographer
Photographs of the exterior and interior of the asistencia.
In three California Historical Society collections: Frances Rand Smith, Title Insurance & Trust, and C. C. Pierce.

- 1908: Aston
One image of rodeo at Santa Margarita.
Aston was a local photographer.
- 1920s: Unknown photographer
A series of landscape photographs of the ranch were found in a desk drawer at the pumping station and given to Kathy Loftus. Eight of the photographs have identifiable locations. Some of the photographs are of areas that are no longer part of the Santa Margarita Ranch.
- 1951: Charles C. Puck
Photograph of the barn full of hay, hay hood on the east.
Charles C. Puck was a postal worker who traveled throughout southern California to photograph the landscape and important historic elements during the 1940s and 1950s.