



HISTORIC ADOBES of VENTURA COUNTY.

FROM 1800 TO 1900.

Richard L. Senate
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INTRODUCTION

The word "adobe" means a brick made of sun-dried mud mixed with straw. Most adobe bricks are 18 inches long, 12 inches wide and up to 6 inches thick. Adobe has been used as a building material for many centuries. The Spanish and later the Americans who came to the Southwest discovered adobe had many advantages over other building materials--the most important being that it was readily available. There were no sawmills to cut and shape wood, no brickworks to fire bricks, but the earth could easily be mixed, using foot power, and poured into the wet wooden brick-molds. Dried in the sun, the adobe was laid using adobe mud as mortar. The thick walls kept the interiors cool in the summer and made the adobes easy to heat in the winter.

The early adobes were roofed with tule reeds smeared with waterproof asphalt. Later adobes were roofed with wooden shakes, although some were roofed with Spanish tiles purchased--or stolen--from the padres at the missions. The outsides of the adobes were, for the most part, plastered and whitewashed as protection from the elements. Left untended an adobe melts, returning to the earth from which it was made.

Twelve adobes are still standing in Ventura County today. One of them is melting rapidly and will not be standing in coming years. Once over two hundred adobes stood in Ventura County. Many were

destroyed by developers, others just abandoned and left to return to the soil. The settlers who came in the last decades of the Nineteenth Century looked upon the adobes as "old-fashioned" and "dirty," somehow "un-American." The newer settlers wanted "modern" wooden homes. By this time sawmills had been built so the lumber could be purchased for the roomy clapboard houses so admired at that period. The last adobe in Ventura County to be demolished was the old Valdez Adobe on Main Street, Ventura, torn down as recently as 1957 to make room for a used car lot! Let us hope that no more of these links with our past will be destroyed by unthinking developers.

List of Adobes
VENTURA'S ADOBE HERITAGE

- 1) ARNAZ ADOBE (1863) 9504 N. Ventura Ave., Ventura, CA
Built by Don Jose de Arnaz--Ventura's first doctor. Built on Rancho Santa Ana, this fine two-storied adobe is owned by Art Langford. Private Residence.
- 2) CAMULOS ADOBE (1864) Piru, CA Still a working ranch.
This fine home was the setting of Helen Hunt Jackson's novel of early California life, "Ramona." Owned by Edwin Berger, this is a private residence.
- 3) DE LA GUERRA ADOBE (1800) 17333 Tierra Rejada Rd., Simi, CA
Forms part of the Strathearn home --now a museum. Built for the Pico brothers in 1800 when they were granted the Simi Grant. Burned by Indians in 1822. Later bought by Jose de la Guerra. Open to the public on Sundays, it is a museum showing much of the early life in Simi Valley.
- 4) EDWARDS ADOBE (1860) This "Yankee Adobe" was built by D.W. Hobson for Thomas More, who had purchased the Santa Paula Land Grant. This fine two-storied adobe was later sold to J. Briggs, who planted a citrus orchard, beginning citrus industry in Ventura County. The ranch is sometimes called the Orchard Place. The Briggs place was sold to the Edwards family. Sam Edwards still owns the old place. He grew up in the adobe. Now clapboards protect the adobe walls.
- 5) LECHLER ADOBES (1876-1881) Built on Lechler Ranch in Oak Canyon by Piru. These two small adobes were built by George Washington Lechler. The first small two-storied home was built by Indian labor. Five years later a second home was built using a rammed earth method of making adobe. It is still the residence of Harry Lechler's sister. Still owned by the Lechler family of Piru. (See Lechler's museum in Piru for fur-

ther details.) A private residence on private lands. Not open to the public.

- 6) LOPEZ ADOBE (1818)

Built by the padres in Ojai Valley as a fort to keep Indians from raiding mission lands. Owned by the Lopez family, this adobe stands two and one-half miles north-west of Ojai on Highway 33. A private residence, not open to the public. Now owned by Owen Miller of Los Angeles.
- 7) OLIVAS ADOBE (1851)

This fine two-storied adobe was built by Raimundo Olivas on his vast Rancho San Miguel. Now restored, the old home is open to the public daily and is a fine example of a large rancho hacienda. Once the scene of lavish fiestas, now the old adobe is peaceful and beautiful. It is located in Ventura on Olivas Park Road.
- 8) ORTEGA ADOBE (1857)

On Main Street, the small tile-roofed home of Emigdio Ortega stands. Now restored by the Ventura Historical Society, it is open to the public daily. It is one of the last examples of a middle class adobe of the mid-nineteenth century. The tiles were once used on the Old Mission SanBuenaventura.
- 9) REYES ADOBE (1854)

Built by Rafael Reyes in the Cuyama, this fine home may soon be made into a museum. Located on Lockwood Road where it crosses Reyes Creek. Used as a bull ranch to raise fight-bulls for the bull rings of Ventura, Santa Barbara and Los Angeles. Private residence, not open to the public.
- 10) RODRIGUEZ ADOBE (1840?)

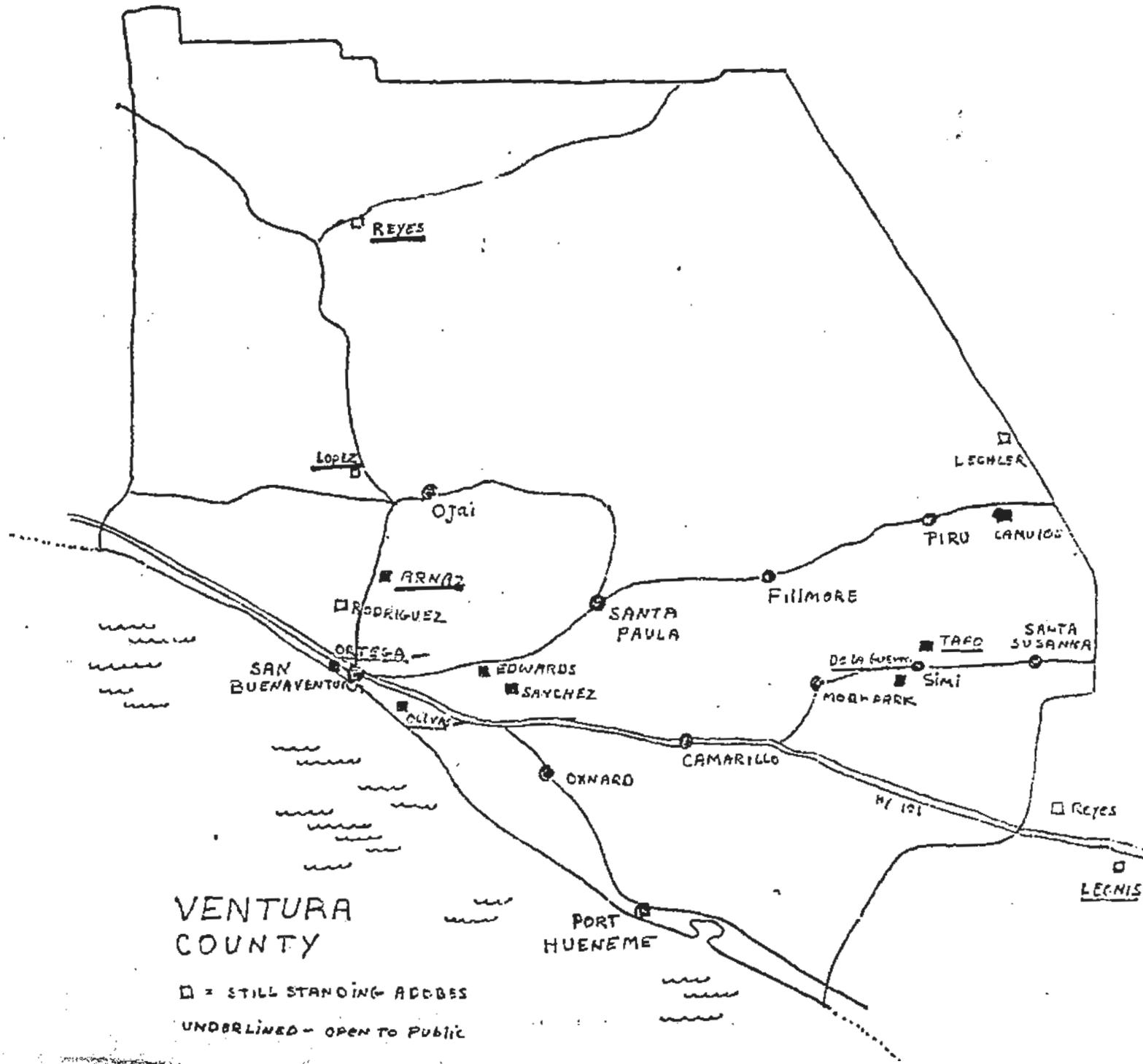
On Shell Oil lease--what was once Taylor Ranch. This fine old home has been restored many times. It was once used as a gun club by the Shell Oil Company. It may have been used by Shell Oil for offices. Private--not open to the public.

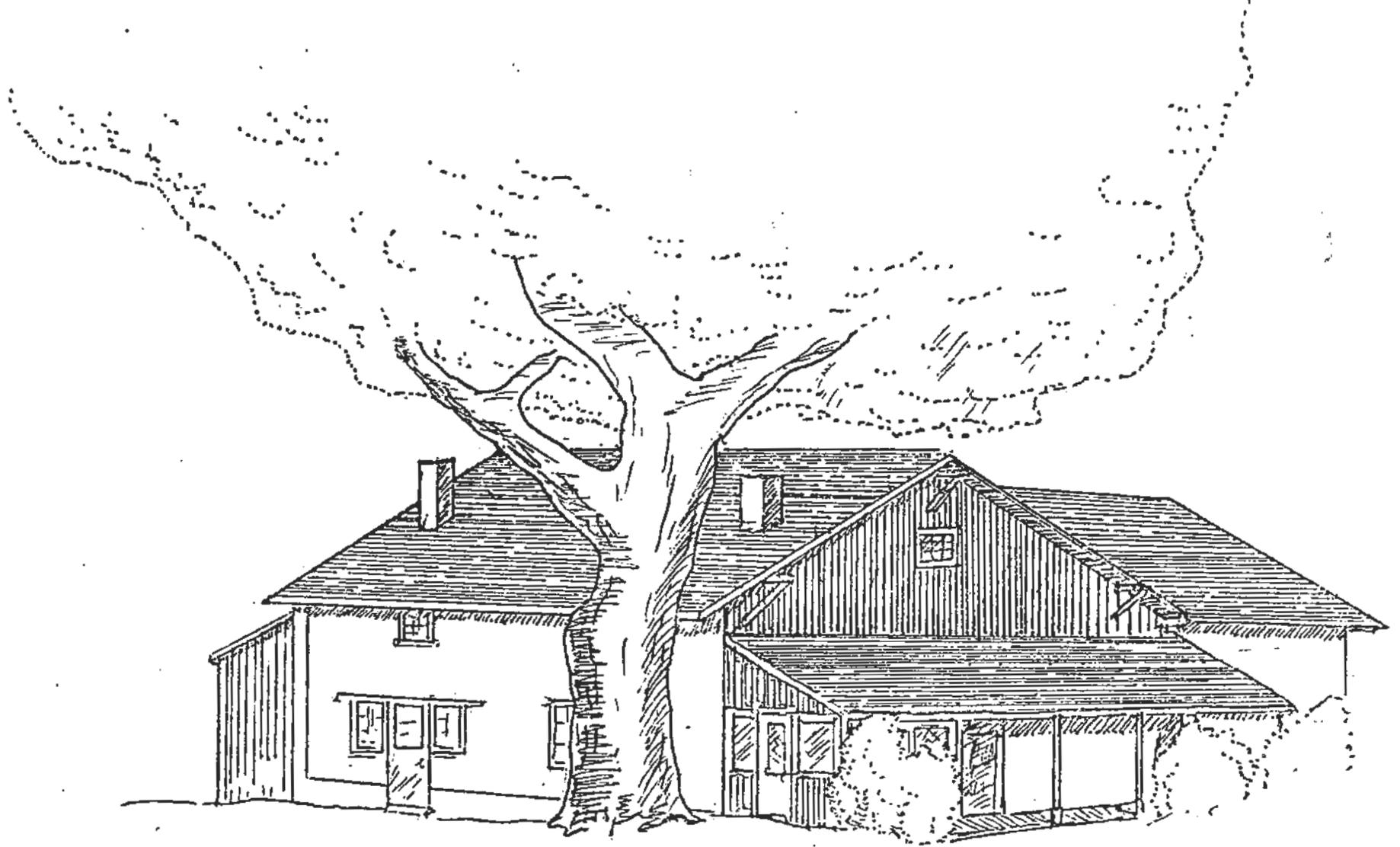
11) SANCHEZ ADOBE (1840)

The old adobe built by Juan Sanchez has been greatly remodeled and bears little resemblance to the one-storied home of the 1840's. Now owned by Lloyd-Butler, the Rancho Santa Clara Del Norte is still a working farm. The two-storied home is a private residence, not open to the public. It is located on Los Angeles Avenue in Saticoy.

12) TAPO ADOBE (1860)

Built by the de la Guerras, the once grand adobe is now a melting ruin on Tapo Canyon Road above Simi. Only about eight feet still stand to mark the site of a two-storied building. A park has been built at the ruin site and is open to the public. No plans are made to restore the hacienda.





ARNAZ ADOBE

ARNAZ ADOBE
9504 N. Ventura Avenue
Ventura, California
Private residence-not open to the public

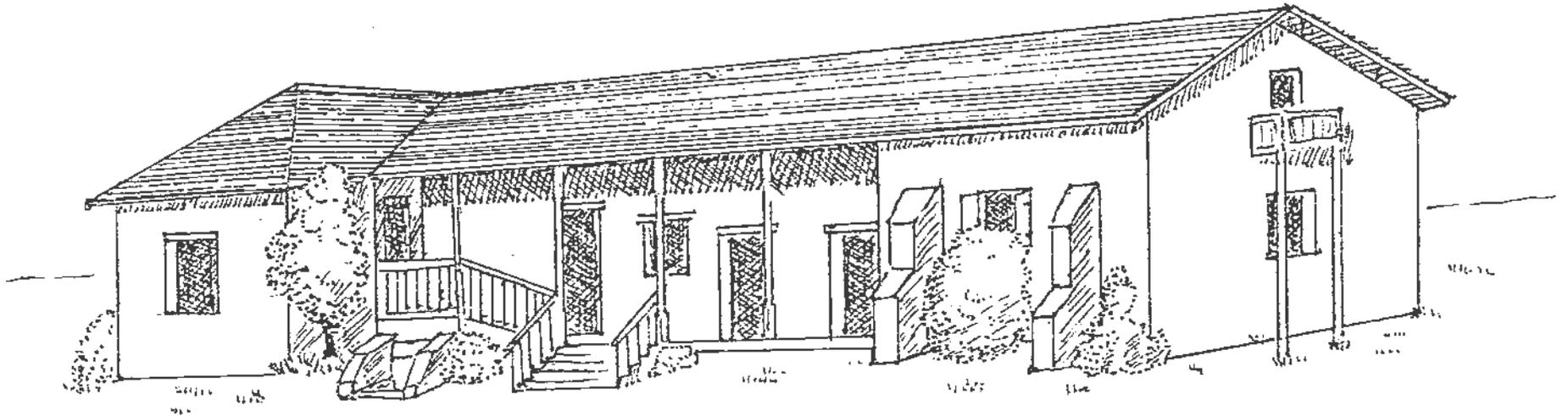
Halfway between Ventura and Ojai stands the historic adobe of Don Jose de Arnaz. The two-storied home was built in 1863 and was for many years a popular stopping-off place for travelers between Ventura and Ojai. For that reason the old adobe was referred to as the "halfway house."

Don Jose de Arnaz was a native of Spain. Trained as a doctor, he came to California in 1841. He worked as a merchant for several years and was sold the Mission San Buenaventura in 1846. Governor Pio Pico had no right to sell the mission but that did not stop him from selling it and the surrounding lands to Don Jose for \$12,000. When John Fremont and his soldiers captured the village of San Buenaventura in 1846 Don Jose was captured and told he would be shot! He was not shot; the Americans were only after information on the Mexican forces to the south. The next day, on request, Don Jose gave Fremont meat, cattle, horses and saddles for which he was never paid. The church lands he had purchased from Pio Pico were returned to the church by the American government.

Don Jose de Arnaz still owned the Rancho Santa Ana and it was on this rancho that he built the adobe that bears his name. His children by two wives grew up at the hacienda. After the death of his first wife in 1867, Don Jose married the daughter of the wealthy Camarillo family. The old home was the center of social life in the late

Nineteenth Century. As many as a hundred guests were invited to the barbeques, where an entire steer was roasted over an open fire. But fiestas were not the only excitement at the adobe. It is told that the ranch was visited by Joaquin Murietta and his bandit gang. A daughter of Don Jose sighted the outlaws from her window as they were moving Arnaz cattle off toward the Ojai. Quickly Don Jose gathered his vaqueros and pursued the bandits. The raiders managed to escape but the cattle were recovered.

The old home has had several owners since Don Jose sold the ranch and retired to a house in Los Angeles. Presently the adobe is owned by Mr. Art Langford. The Langfords have kept up the old home with its thick walls and it presents a stately sight beneath the massive oak trees that surround it.



CAMULOS ADOBE
1864

CAMULOS ADOBE
Camulos Ranch
Firu, California
Not open to the public

The venerable Camulos Adobe is constructed in a classic "L" shape and still functions as the main house of the Camulos Ranch. It was built by Don Antonio Ignacio del Valle in 1864. Don Antonio had been granted Rancho San Francisco in 1819. It was a huge grant of twenty-two square leagues, but he did not want such a vast tract of land so he sold much of his grant to Jacob Feliz, keeping 1500 acres that he named "Camulos."

The ranch did not take time away from Don Antonio's political interests. He was a member of the Territorial Deputation when California was admitted into the Union in 1850. He also was elected to the State Legislature, helping to bind up the painful wounds of the Mexican War.

The adobe he built in 1864 was, like most of the large ranch houses of that time, constructed around a patio laid out in flower beds and walks with a large central fountain. Verandas faced the courtyard and on them most of the activities of the day took place. The Spanish Californians were an outdoors people; only retiring into their homes when forced by the elements. Most of the cooking was done outside--most of the meals taken beneath shady grape arbors. Only weather forced the Californians indoors. The large hacienda even contained a charming family chapel with bells purchased from

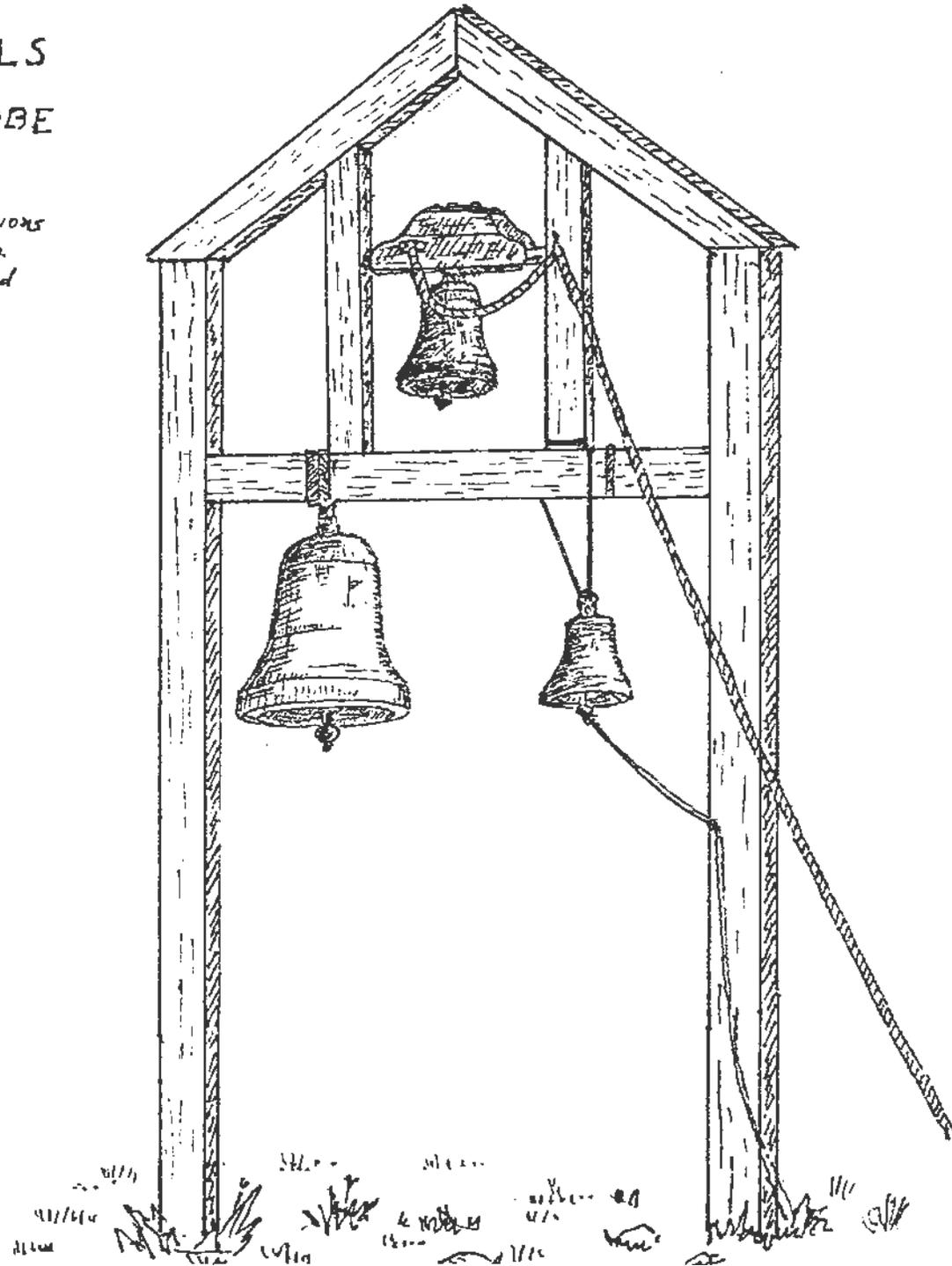
the defunct missions.

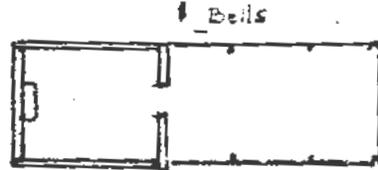
The adobe is built halfway between Mission San Fernando and San Buenaventura. Few travelers failed to stop at Camulos on their journey north or south. Don Antonio prided himself on his hospitality and preserved the traditions of the rancho days far into the Nineteenth Century. Visitors would many times be given fresh horses as well as good food and ample accommodations--all at no charge. Helen Hunt Jackson, the novelist, visited the adobe in 1881. She was so impressed by the hacienda and the people she met that she wrote her classic, Famona, using the Camulos as the setting of her story and based several of her characters on members of the del Valle family.

The del Valle family owned the ranch until 1924 when it was last sold. The adobe is still maintained and a historic marker was erected in 1955 by the Native Sons and Daughters of the Golden West. It is the best preserved hacienda of the days when the dons ruled over their vast land grants and the hills held flocks of sheep and thousands of cattle. The residence is the center of a modern ranch now and the memory of the del Valles is kept alive.

CHAPEL BELLS CAMULOS ADOBE

BELLS ARE RUSSIAN - FORGED IN
ALASKA - TRADED TO THE MISSIONS
BY THE RUSSIAN-AMERICAN CO.
FOR FOOD. LATER PURCHASED
BY THE DEL VALLE FAMILY



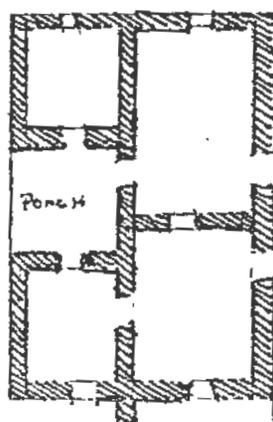


Bells

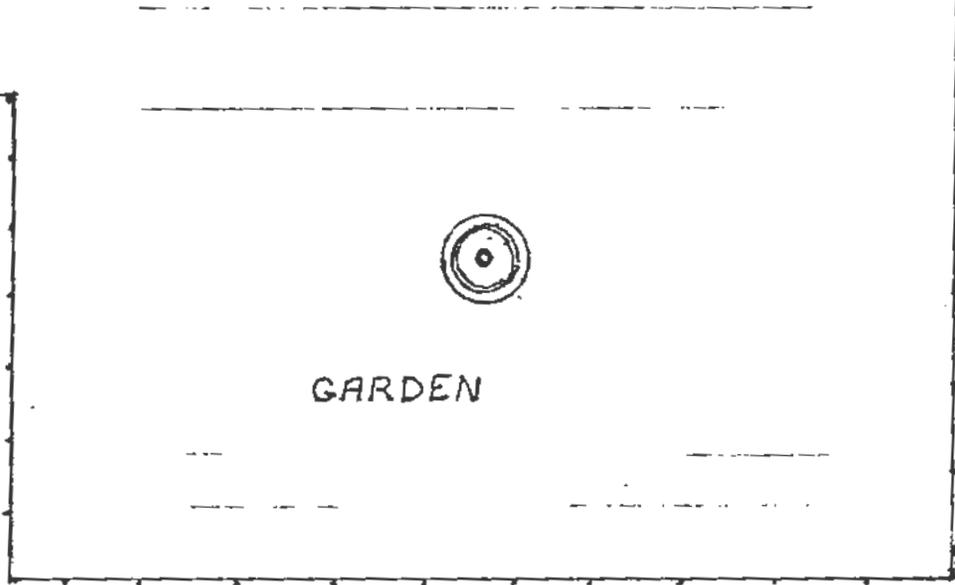
CHAPEL

ORIGINAL HOUSE

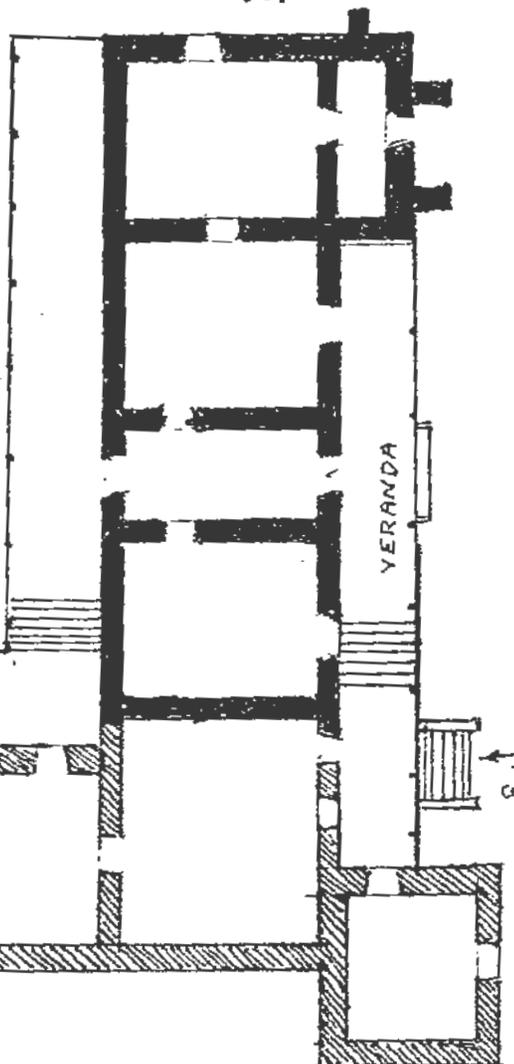
-1864-



COCINA



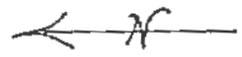
GARDEN



VERANDA

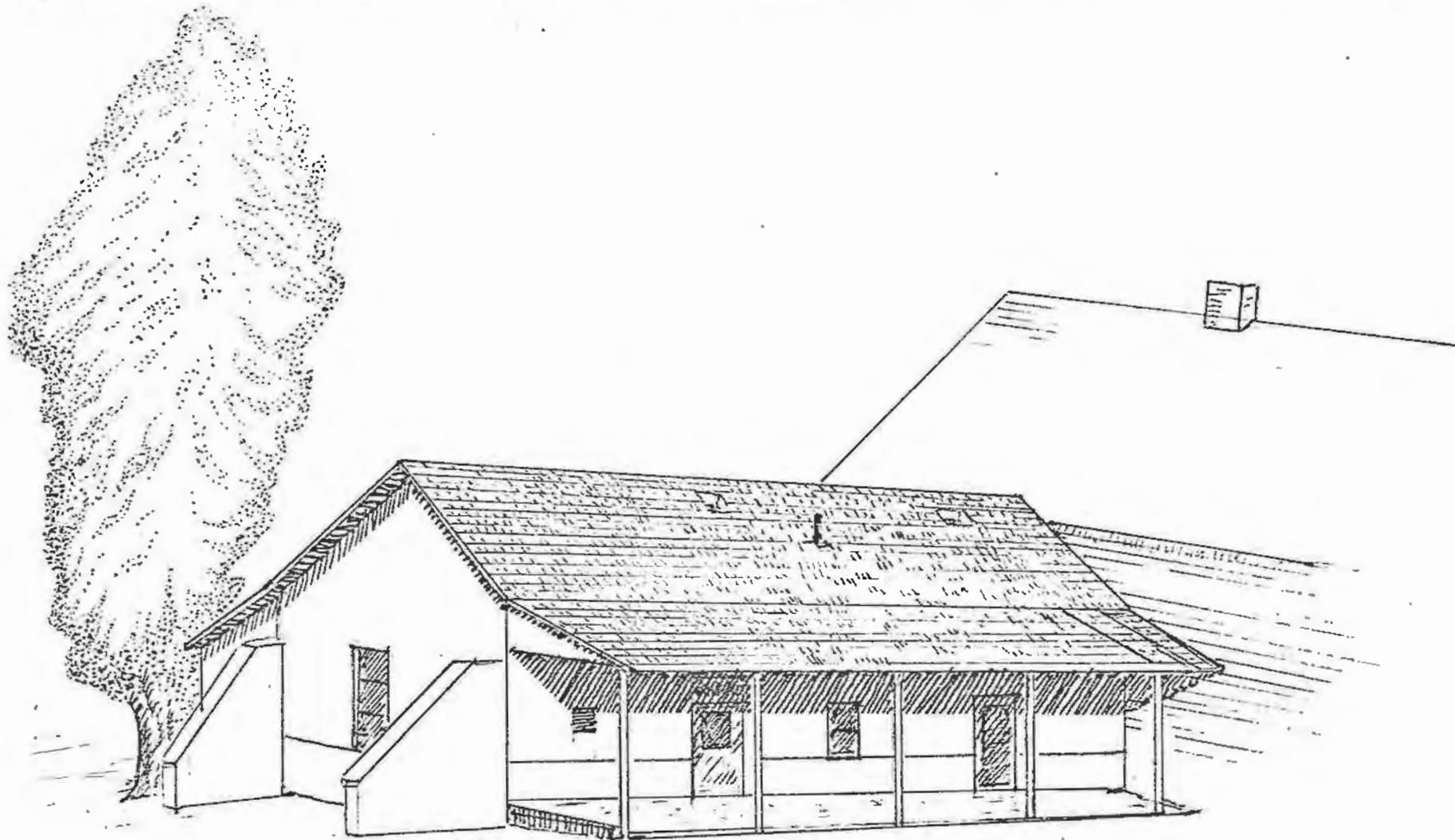
To Cellar

VERANDA



CAMULOS ADOBE

PIRU-



DE LA GUERRA ADOBE

BUILT 1800

DE LA GUERRA ADOBE

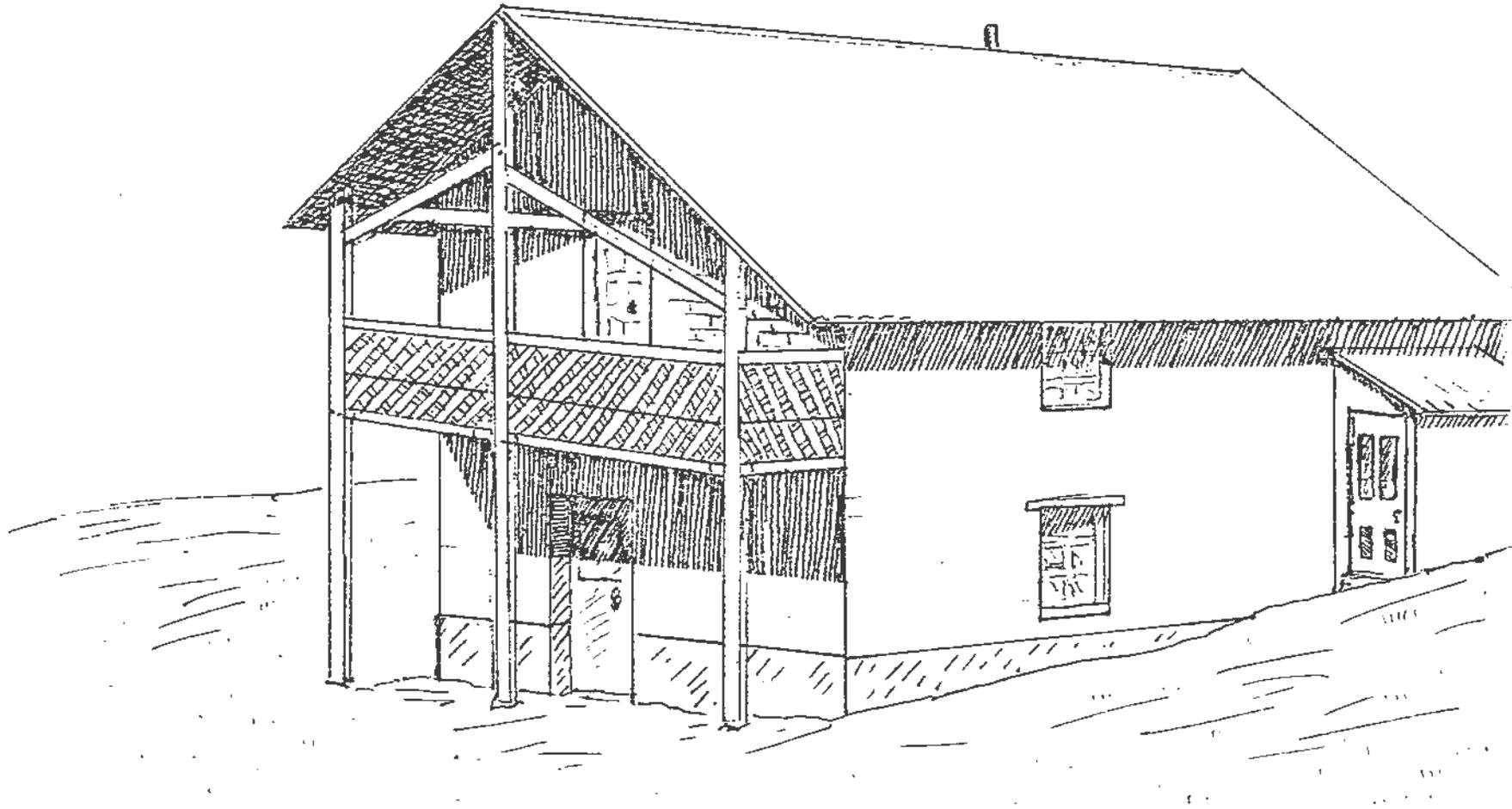
17333 Tierra Rejada Road
Simi, California
A museum open to the public.
Part of Strathearn House

Much of the Spanish history of Southern California is the history of one man--Jose de la Guerra y Noriega. Born in Spain in 1779, he came to the New World as a young man in 1798. He joined the Royal Army and was sent to California in 1801. He rose to lieutenant in 1804 and captain in 1818. He served much of his long military career in the Presidio of Santa Barbara. Captain de la Guerra obtained many land grants, among them was the vast Rancho San Jose de Gracia de Simi. Originally granted to the Pico brothers by the King of Spain in 1797, it was they who built the home now called the de la Guerra Adobe. The Picos constructed the large "L-shaped" hacienda in 1800 using Indian labor but friendly relations with the Indians deteriorated and the adobe was burned twice, in 1820 and 1822. The roof was set aflame but the thirty-nine inch thick walls resisted destruction.

Don Jose de la Guerra y Noriega acquired the Rancho Simi in 1842 and from then on the adobe was referred to by the name of it's new owner. Once a year Don Jose would visit his ranchos; when he became too old to ride, he came in a kind of wagon drawn by oxen. On his cattle and sheep ranchos the vaqueros would drive his stock before him for review. The hacienda was surrounded by fine orchards of apples, pomegranates, peaches, pears, figs, plums, apricots, and olives. A large vineyard was maintained for the production of wine. On festive

occasions mutton and beef were barbequed in spits as wine flowed freely among guests from near and far. These celebrations lasted several days and included horseback riding, singing, dancing and games.

Don Jose de la Guerra died February 11, 1858, and the properties he owned were divided among his children. The Rancho Simi was deeded to his son, Pablo. The adobe was attacked by Indians in 1858 and it was decided to build a second adobe in Tapo Canyon. (See Tapo Adobe) The de la Guerra Adobe was at last sold to the Strathearn family. What was left of the hacienda after the Indian raid of 1858 was incorporated into a large, two-story wooden home. Now the remains of the old adobe and the Strathearn house are restored and open to the public as a museum of Simi's Spanish and American past.



FIRST
LECHLER ADOBE
BUILT 1876

LECHLER ADOBES
Oak Canyon, Piru, California
Private residences, not open to the public.

The story is told that George Washington Lechler was a bartender who once extended credit to one of his steady customers. When the customer failed to pay his debt, he gave Mr. Lechler a deed to Oak Canyon; several acres of land that had once belonged to the Temescal Land Grant. In 1876, with the aid of some local Indians, Mr. Lechler built a small, two-story adobe for his bride. The adobe soon became too small for the expanding Lechler clan so, in 1881, a second adobe was built under the oak trees, a hundred yards from the original small building.

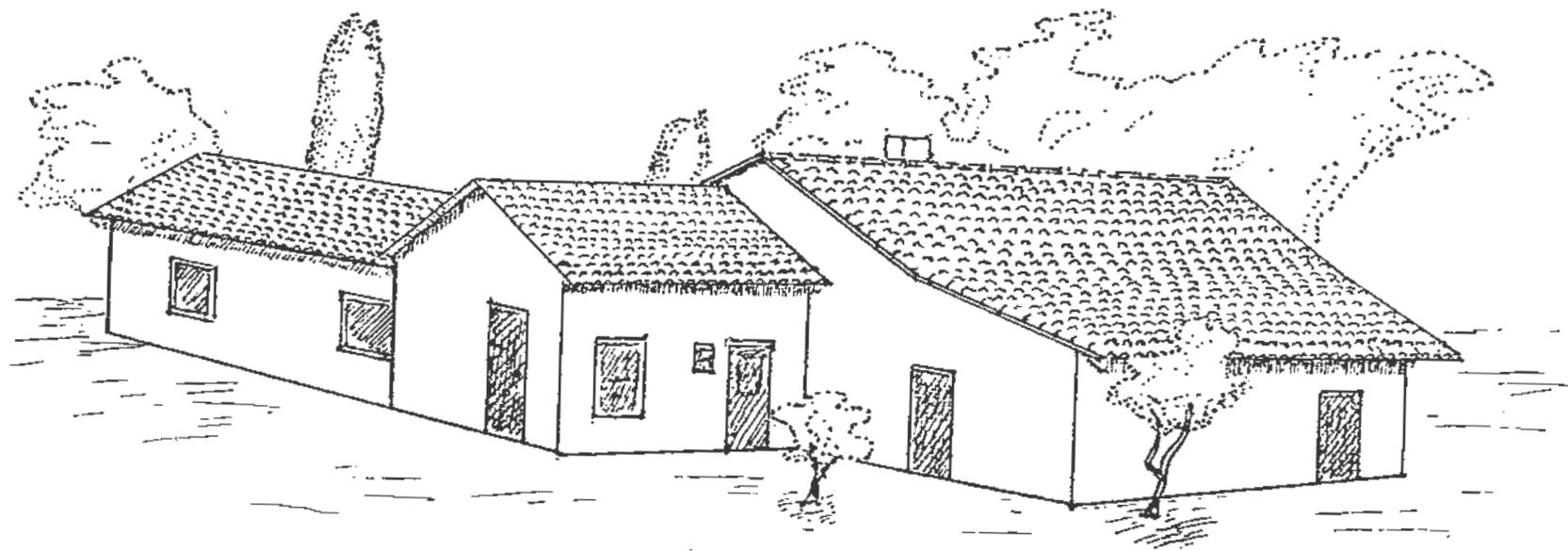
The new adobe was much larger than the first. It was a single story and constructed of rammed earth--unlike the other adobes which were made of sun-dried bricks. Forms were built for the walls and wet adobe poured then rammed down, using foot power, into these molds (much like concrete buildings are made today). This type of adobe is very rare in Southern California. Both adobes were roofed with wooden shakes but insects and woodpeckers so damaged them that tin roofs have recently been added. The two adobes were recently damaged in earthquakes but are still in good condition. They are owned by George Lechler's grandson, Harry Lechler.

Harry Lechler owns and operates the Lechler Museum in Piru which has many historical items of Piru's colorful past.



SECOND
LECHLER ADOBE

BUILT 1881



LOPEZ ADOBE

LOPEZ ADOBE

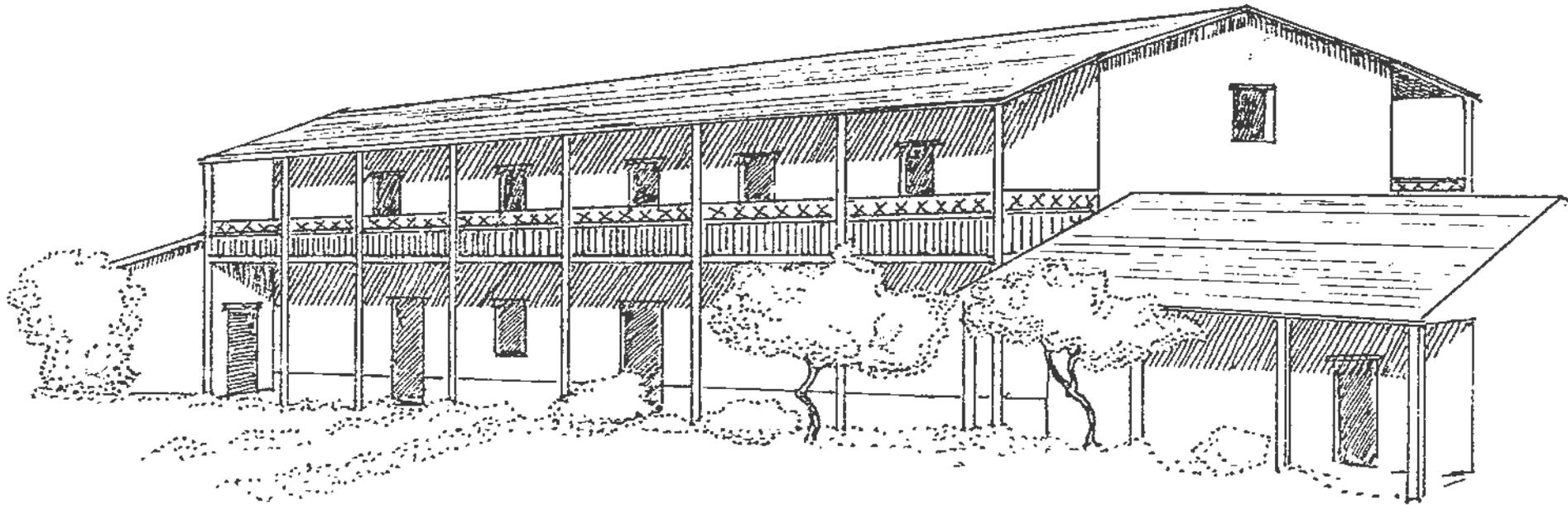
Maricopa Highway north of Ojai, California
A private residence not open to the public.

The old Lopez Adobe still stands upon the mesa commanding the Ventura River Valley. Such a strategic site was selected by the padres and soldiers for a good reason--this adobe was to act as a fort, guarding Ventura from Indian raiders. Built in 1830, the adobe has only three rooms, one large room in the front and two small ones in the back. Only two windows pierced the two-foot-thick walls. Its grim nature won for it several fitting names--"the Barracks," "the Fortress," and "the Castle." Sergeant Rafael Lopez was stationed at the adobe with one or two men to watch for Indian war parties.

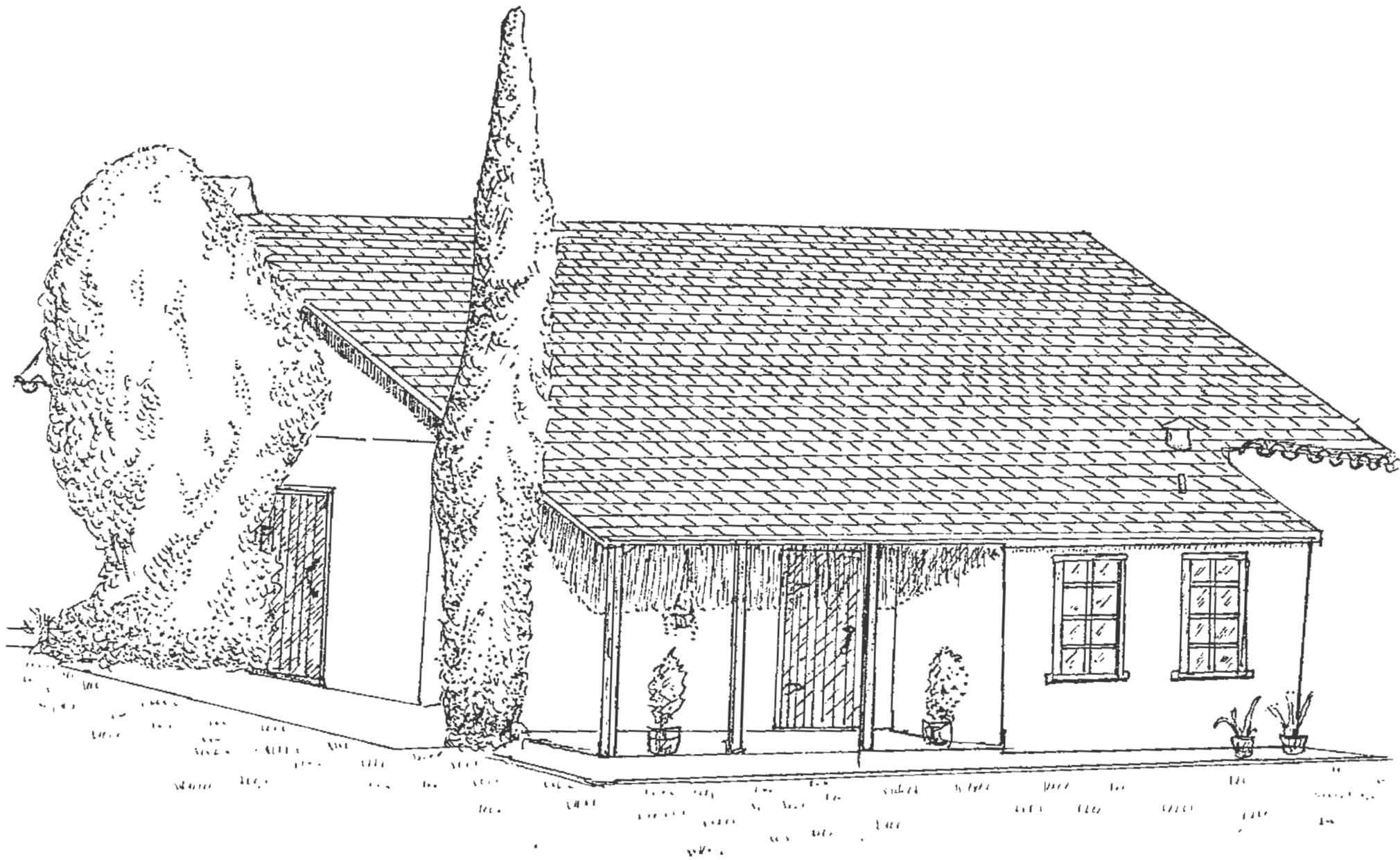
Not only did the adobe operate as a military station, but it also served as a trading post for the peaceful Matilija Indians. Francisco Lopez, the grandson of the adobe's builder, could remember the Indian powwows on the banks of the Ventura River near the old house. These tribal meetings would last for weeks and the Indians would use this time to buy goods on sale at the Lopez home. The mesa where the adobe was built had been used by local Indians for many centuries. Indian artifacts have been found all around the house. A large ceremonial stone bowl was uncurthed and is now used as a fountain in the courtyard of the hacienda.

The Lopez family owned the land for many years but, in 1925, Frank Lopez sold out to Herbert and Louise McCaleb. The McCalebs renovated the old adobe into a fine ranch house. Two wings were added to the

fortress in 1963, making it into a classic U-shaped hacienda. The original wooden shakes were taken off the roof and replaced with Spanish tile. Now the adobe stands beneath tall trees; its red tiled roof and thick walls still surmounting the mesa overlooking the Ventura River Valley. No more do its inhabitants watch for Indian raiders and no more do Indians meet on the banks of the river. Today the adobe is the center of a working citrus farm. The Lopez adobe is the oldest inhabited adobe in Ventura County.



OLIVAS ADOBE



ORIGINAL OLIVAS ADOBE
BUILT 1837

OLIVAS ADOBE
4200 Olivas Park Drive
Ventura, California
Restored and open to the public.

Don Raimundo Olivas was born in the Pueblo of Los Angeles in the year 1801. On coming of age, he joined the army, serving with bravery under General Jose Castro. For his valiant military service he and Felipe Lorenzana were granted the vast Rancho San Miguel in 1841. In 1837, even before the grant was confirmed, Don Raimundo, his son and a few Indians built a small adobe on his land. This original adobe stands on the southeast corner of the patio at the larger hacienda on Olivas Park Drive in Ventura.

When the demand for beef increased during the gold rush, Don Raimundo began driving his herds of cattle north to the hungry--and rich--miners. The price of cattle jumped from \$2.50 a head before the gold rush to \$75.00 a head with the arrival of the Forty-Niners. With his immense profits Don Raimundo began work on the two-story adobe structure.

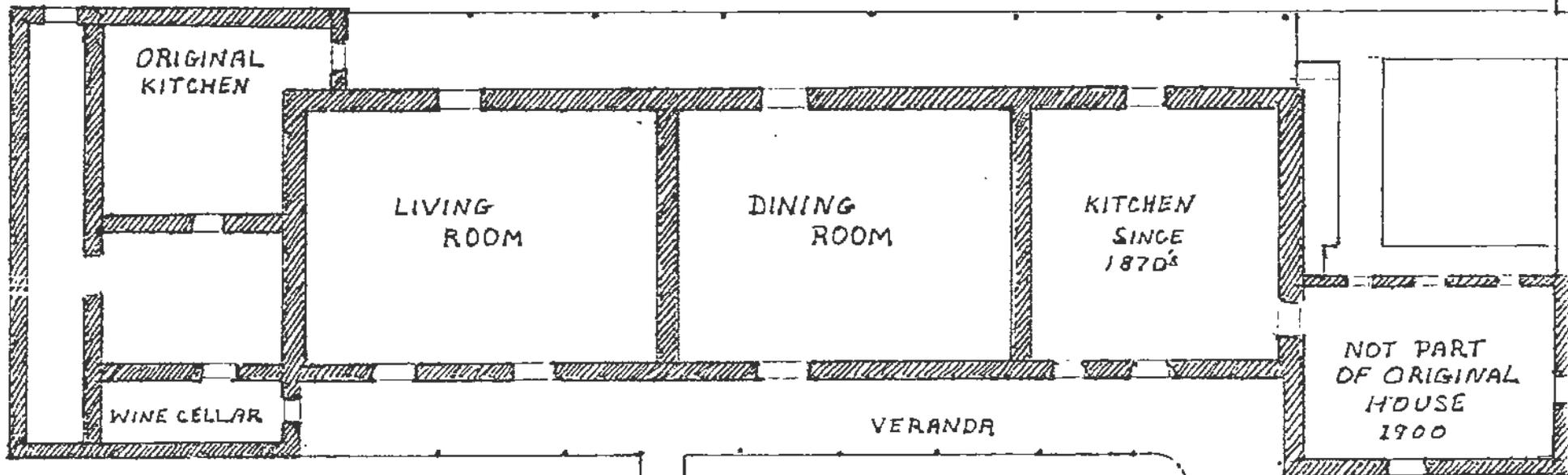
The Olivas hacienda is a large home; it had to be for Don Raimundo had twenty-one children! Guests often stopped by and stayed as long as they liked. The fiestas that were held at the old hacienda would last for days, with wine and food and the fandango.

The story is told that in 1855 the hacienda was robbed by bandits. The outlaws took \$75,000 in gold--the profits of a large sale of sheep and wool. They even struck Senora Olivas and ripped the pierced ear-

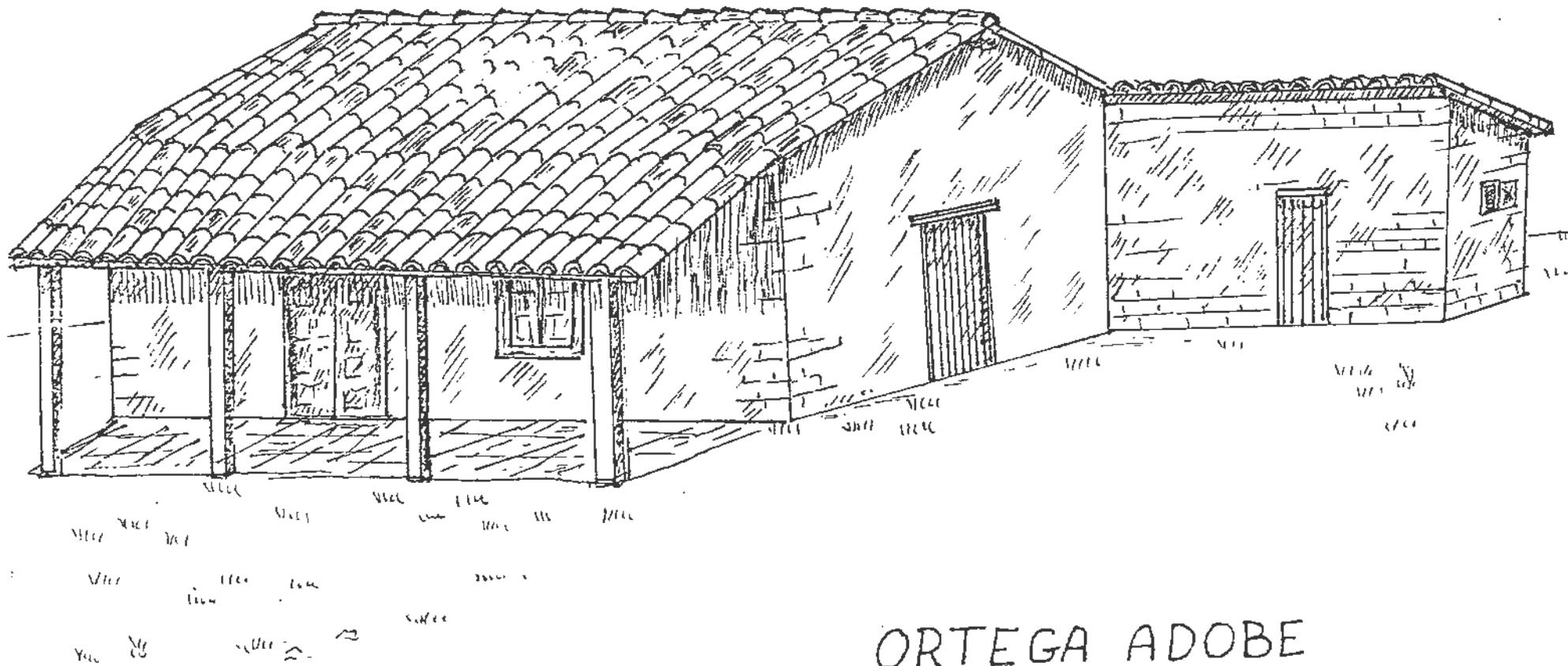
rings from her ears! A posse gave chase and some of the gang was caught and hanged. But the gold was never found. The bandits were lead by a notorious badman, Encarnacion Berryessa. He openly boasted of the robbery, which was unwise for he was soon arrested and hanged.

The Olivas family owned the rancho until the late Nineteenth Century. It was sold and resold several times, serving for a short time as a dairy, before it was finally purchased by Max Fleischmann of Fleischmann's Yeast. It was then used as a hunting lodge. In 1963 the Fleischmann Foundation gave the adobe to the city of Ventura and it was restored as a historic landmark. The Olivas Adobe is designated as California Landmark number 115.

BEDROOMS AND A ROOM USED AS A CHAPAL
ARE ON THE SECOND FLOOR.



OLIVAS ADOBE



ORTEGA ADOBE

BUILT 1857

ORTEGA ADOBE
215 West Main St.
Ventura, California
Restored and open to the public.

Over a hundred years ago small adobe houses like the Ortega home lined Ventura's Main Street from the Mission to the Ventura River. Now only the Ortega Adobe remains to give us some idea of what Ventura once looked like. The adobe was built in 1857 by Enigdio Miguel Ortega. Lumber was scarce in those days so it was natural that the early pioneers used the earth as building material. But still the adobe needed wood for beams to support the roof. So Enigdio, his son Ramon and his riders rode forty miles up the Santa Clara River to the site of an abandoned adobe and took its pine beams for their own house. The tiles for the roof were purchased by Ortega from the mission fathers. As the priests were re-roofing the church with cedar shingles brought "round the horn" they did not mind selling the used tiles. Only nine years after its completion the Ortega Adobe was hit by a great flood. The large room on the west end was totally destroyed. Enigdio's son told of the great flood in a letter that is on file at the Ventura Pioneer Museum:

"The flood swept away a good deal of the land which stood between the house and the river, which held our cow and sheep corrals and our orchard. There was also a cabin built of regular lumber standing fifty feet west of the adobe on a slight elevation. When the

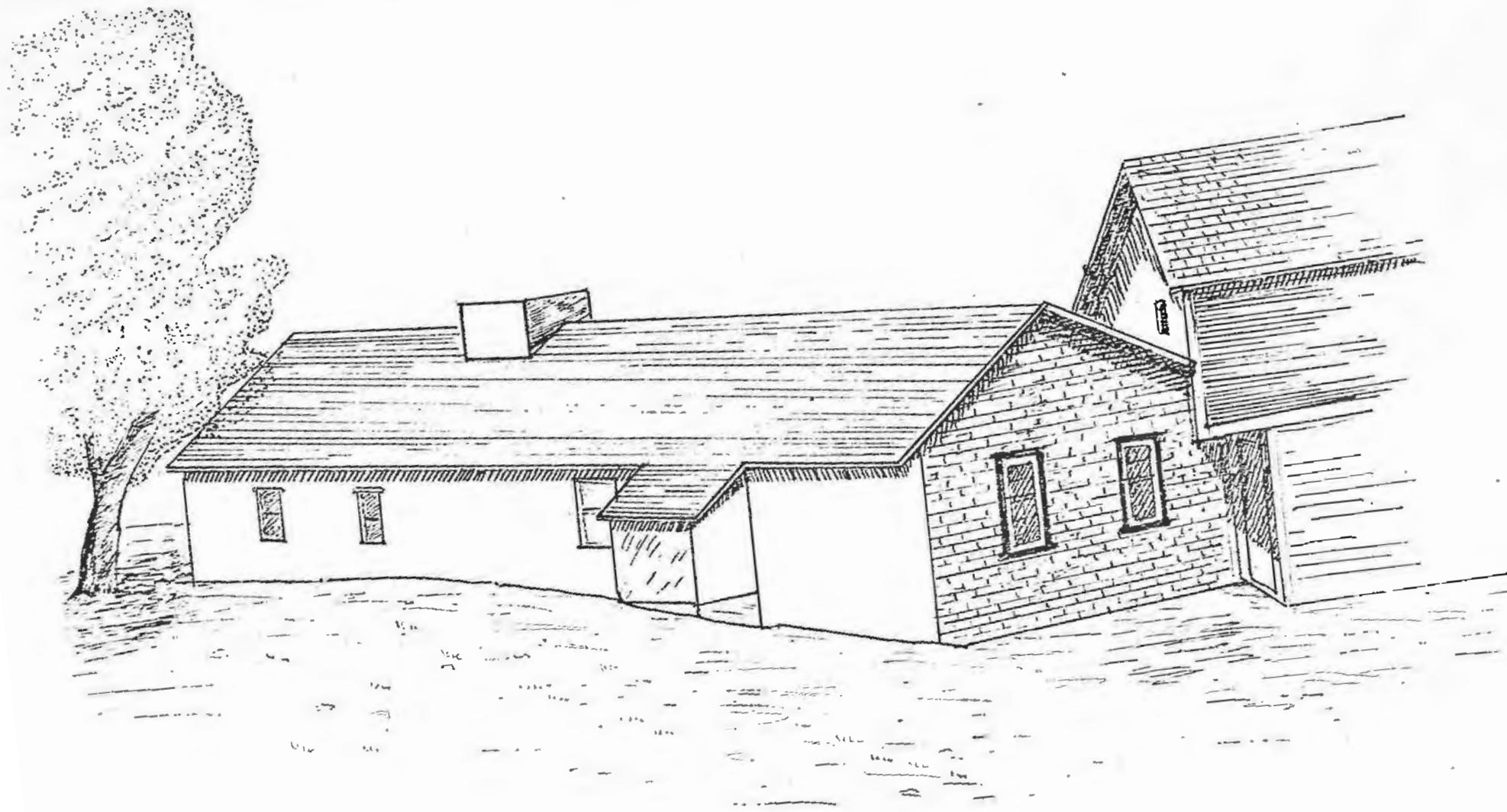
floods were reported coming, the folks thought the old adobe was sure to be swept away so every article of clothing, furniture, etc. was piled in the frame house, even my youngest brother's pet dog and lamb. Next morning at three A.M. the (frame) house and all belongings were swept into the sea. Our women folks were left with only (the) clothes they had on...The flood also took one half of the adobe building and left what now stands ...I can remember how we ran along the beach scanning every nook in hopes of finding our pets or..trunks...filled with our clothes. Had all our belongings been left in the old (adobe) house, everything would have been saved."

The Ortegás filled the doorway that lead to the lost room and repaired the old house. They planted grape vines in the back of the old home, which produced grapes for decades. Richard Haydock visited the village of San Buenaventura in 1876 and his reminiscences are recorded in the Ventura Historical Society's Quarterly, February, 1965. Mr. Haydock gives an accurate description of Ventura adobes:

"One thing about those early Californians was their painstaking efforts to keep things clean about the house. Although the adobes in which

(they) lived had dirt floors, they were swept daily; likewise the yard about the house. In time they left the ground somewhat lowered but they would fill in these depressions from time to time and carefully smooth out and pack the dirt. Hollyhocks seemed to be their flower and gave a colorful touch in the late spring and summer. Geraniums and other hardy flowers were common."

Enigdio Ortega died in the adobe at the age of eighty-three as a result of an injury he suffered trying to break a new mule. The adobe served the Ortegas as a family residence for many years. Only in 1921 was it at last sold to the city of Ventura. But its usefulness was not over. From 1924 to 1931 it was leased as offices to the Shell Oil Company, playing its part in the oil industry of Ventura County. It was then leased to the V.F.W. until 1939. It was even the Ventura Police Department from late 1952 to 1954. After that it was used as a meeting hall for the Ventura Boys Club. In September of 1968 the city decided to restore the adobe as a historic landmark rather than tear it down. Archaeologist Robert O. Browne was in charge of the restoration. The Ortega Adobe is now a museum and remains one of the last examples of a middle class home of the mid-Nineteenth Century.



REYES ADOBE
BUILT 1854

REYES ADOBE

Lockwood Canyon, California

A private residence not open to the public.

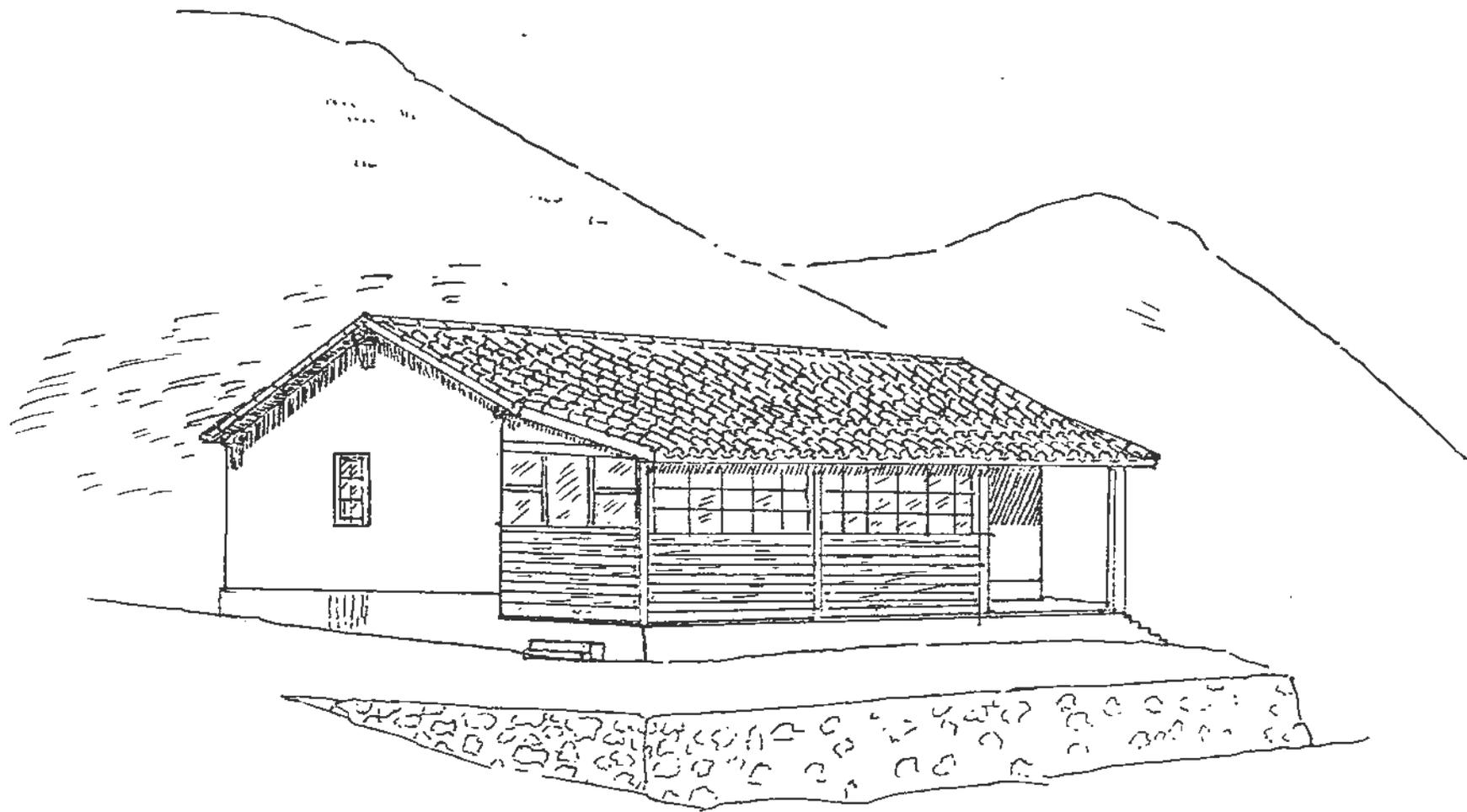
The tall oaks conceal the low one-story adobe from the road but, over a century ago, it was the center of the Reyes Ranch; a ranch that took in much of Lockwood Valley. The creek that flows by the hacienda is named Reyes Creek after the brave pioneers who first settled the northern part of our county. The adobe was built in 1855 and was the main house of the ranch. Jacinto Damien Reyes, the son of the builder of the adobe, wrote of the history of the place:

"My father, Rafael Reyes, was born in Los Angeles in 1834. He was one of a family of five boys and five girls. They owned the Triunfo Ranch, a Spanish grant on which they raised stock. In 1854 feed was short on account of a bad drought, so my father and his brother drove 2000 head of cattle and 1000 horses by way of the Tejon Pass into the head of the Cuyana Valley and settled at the mouth of Reyes Creek. In 1870 my father married Maria Ignacia Ortega at San Buenaventura. I was born in San Buenaventura in 1871.

During the early days my father bred fighting bulls for the arenas. Bullfights were popular in those days, and "El Contesto de Toros"

was usually the featured attraction of every holiday fiesta. Father raised most of the bulls for the bull rings in Santa Barbara, San Buenaventura, Los Angeles and other points all up and down the state. His bulls were famous for their quickness and fighting spirit, and were matched against many a celebrated matador...During my youth I worked as a vaquero among my father's cattle, and it was at this work that I gained a lot of experience that has been valuable since I came into the forestry service in 1900."

Jacinto Reyes was Ventura County's first forest ranger and he spent his entire life in the northern wilderness of the county. Now the adobe forms only one wing of a modern ranch house. The additions were added in this century and are made of wood and concrete blocks. The adobe was purchased a few years ago from the Reyes family by Mr. Leonard Butler. It is still a private residence which stands as a lonely reminder of the pioneers who settled our wild valleys so long ago.



RODRIGUEZ ADOBE

RODRIGUEZ ADOBE
Shell Road, Ventura, California
Private property, not open to the public.

The tiled roof of the Rodriguez Adobe stands out against the hillside that once was part of the Rancho San Miguelito. The history of this small adobe is very much a mystery. No firm date is known for the construction of the house. It could be as old as 1846--when Governor Pio Pico granted the land to Don Ramon Rodriguez just before the Americans ended Mexican rule in California--or the adobe could be as new as 1890--when the lands were owned by the Taylor family. We do not know who built the adobe. It may have served Don Ramon as his first residence before a larger adobe, now gone, was completed. The small home might have been built as living quarters for the foreman of the rancho, or it might have been built by an old Indian named Juan de Jesus. The Ventura Star-Free Press stated that he lived for many years at the adobe before his death on November 6, 1895. That must place its construction much earlier than that. The crossbeams of the adobe were tied together with thongs of rawhide; so states one of the men who renovated the building in 1930. Using rawhide in such a way would date the adobe in the mid-Nineteenth Century, when the land grant was owned by Ramon Rodriguez.

One fact is sure, in the 1930's it was a ruin; its walls melting and its roof half off. The Shell Oil Company restored the adobe, adding a long veranda and a bathroom to the two-room house.

They changed much of the construction--a new tiled roof, a cement floor--so much was changed that it is difficult to determine how it originally looked. The old adobe was used as a gun club for many years and the building has been kept up very well. It is still on lands leased by the Shell Oil Company. It is said that the adobe may be used as an office. There is now no danger of destruction and it shall be preserved. Now the veranda is closed in, making a sun room, but the flavor of the place, so lonely and desolate, remains. Maybe it will never be known just who built the adobe or when, but it is a link between our time and that of the hard-riding rancheros. Cattle once grazed around the thick-walled adobe. Now oil pumps nod and squeak--the only sounds to break the stillness.



SANCHEZ ADOBE

SANCHEZ ADOBE

Saticoy, California

A private residence, not open to the public.

Don Juan Sanchez was granted the Rancho Santa Clara del Norte in 1837. The grant bordered the Santa Clara River and contained 14,000 acres. Proud Don Juan named his lands "The Rancho from Sunrise to Sunset." In the 1840's, not far from the river, he built his one story, six-room adobe. The roof was made of tiles molded and fired at the ranch by Indians who, with the closing of the Mission San Buenaventura, needed work. Indians did much of the work on the ranches. They were the swift-riding vaqueros, the servants, the workers in the orchards and gardens.

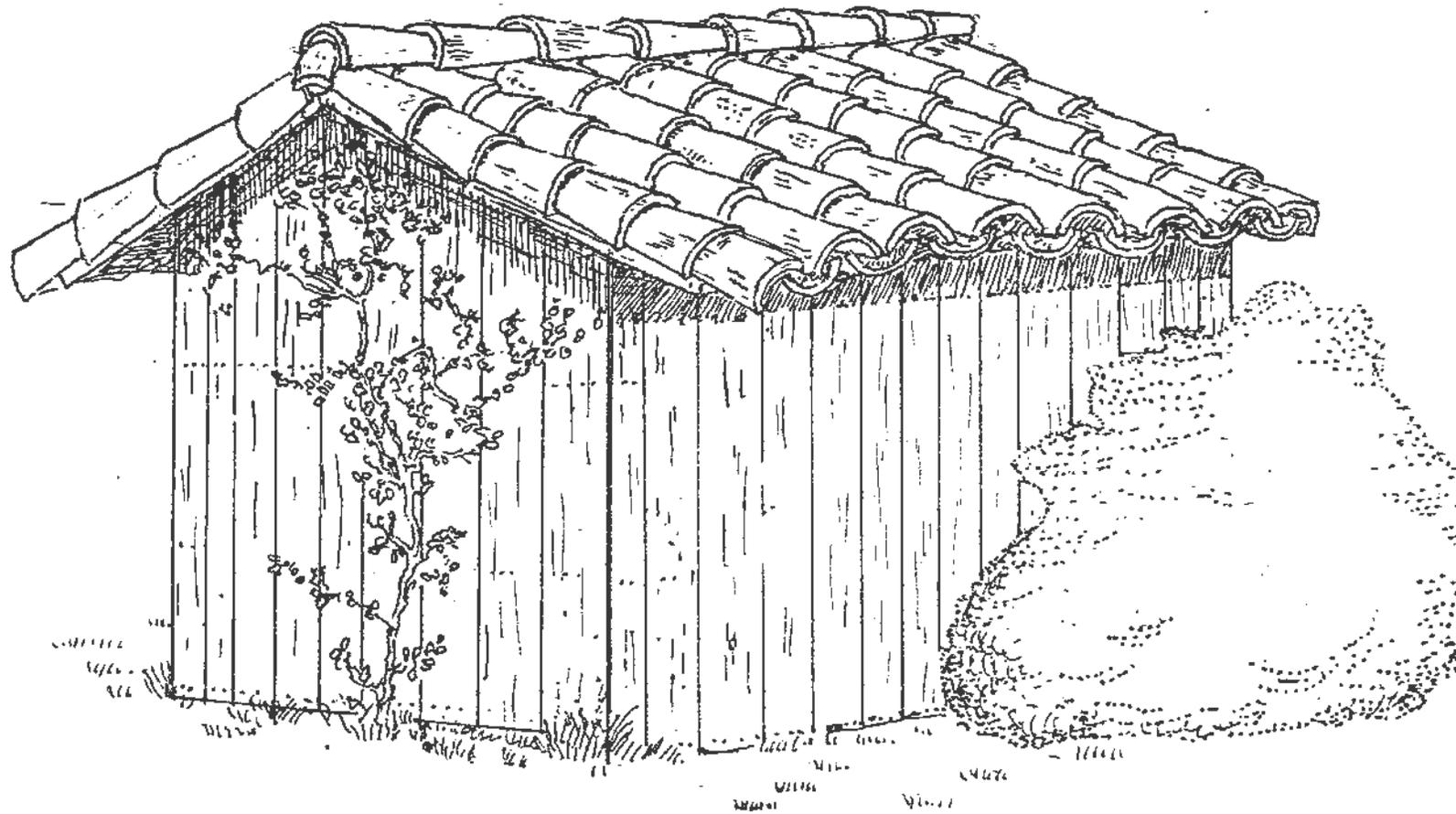
The Rancho Santa Clara del Norte was a vast cattle ranch whose herds wandered over the rich river valley. But, in 1863, a drought parched the lands. The herds of cattle dwindled sharply. The wealth of the ranches was in their livestock. With its loss the Spanish Dons were forced to go into debt to pay for supplies. For two long years rain was scarce and the Sanchez family, like so many others, was forced to borrow against its lands. Finally the rancho was purchased for the debts by the store owner Antonio Schiappa Pietra, an Italian who had extended credit to many of the old Spanish families. Records show that the average price he paid for the rancho was sixty-four cents per acre! In this way Schiappa Pietra gained several land grants in the drought of the 1860's. The Italian realized that the cattle industry was no longer as profitable as farming

so the vast "Rancho from Sunrise to Sunset" was turned into a lucrative lima bean farm.

The old adobe still served as the main house of the ranch, though the Schiappa Pietras lived in their Ventura townhouse on Santa Clara Street. In 1900 it was decided that the adobe should be remodeled into a more "modern" home. The Ventura Star-Free Press reported on June 1, 1900:

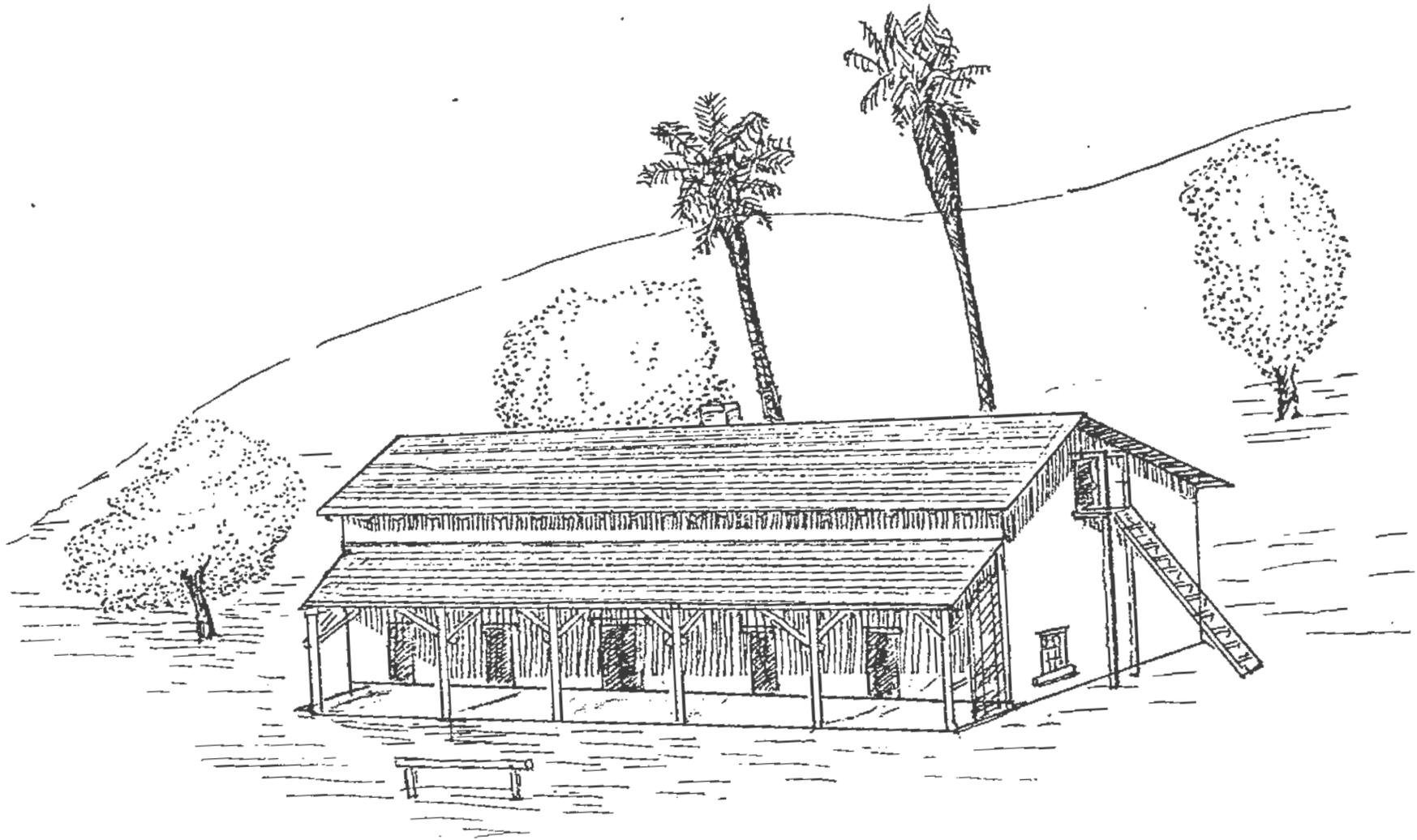
"S.L. Shaw and a force of men began work this week remodeling the fine old adobe building belonging to the Schiappa Pietra estate in the valley. The building will be 36x56; a second story is to be added as well as a servants' quarters. It will be one of the finest ranch houses in the county...It is estimated that all improvements will cost over 10,000 dollars."

The adobe built by Don Juan Sanchez was converted into a stately mansion. The old tiles, hand-made by the Indians, were taken down, later to be used to roof a small tool shed on the ranch. Today the twenty-two-inch walls form the core of a beautiful home, owned by a Mrs. Lloyd-Eutler.



TOOL SHED

RANCHO SANTA CLARA DEL
NORTE



TAPO ADOBE

TAPO ADOBE
Tapo Canyon Road
Simi, California
A historic park open to the public.

On Tapo Canyon Road in Simi stands a portion of an adobe wall. It is all that remains of the once stately adobe of the de la Guerras. The de la Guerra family owned several large land grants in Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties, one of which was the Rancho Simi. Originally given by the king of Spain to the Pico Brothers, it was purchased in 1842 from the Picos by Jose de la Guerra. For many years the adobe which the Picos had constructed served as the main house for the Simi Ranch (see the de la Guerra Adobe), but, in 1860, it was decided that a new home should be built in Tapo Canyon. Jose de la Guerra's son Pablo had the roomy, two-storied hacienda built. The adobe was surrounded by orchards and vineyards and many fiestas were held there. Sol Sheridan, Ventura historian, wrote:

"Sheep shearing time on Rancho Simi was also fiesta time. Bottom lands and hillsides were given over to sheep pastures with huge flocks getting fat on the abundant native grasses. To their Tapo Ranch hacienda, in Simi, members of the de la Guerra family, on festive occasions, drove their coach from their Santa Barbara townhouse. Their six outriders were in livery of blue and silver."

But the de la Guerras lost their lands to rising prices and

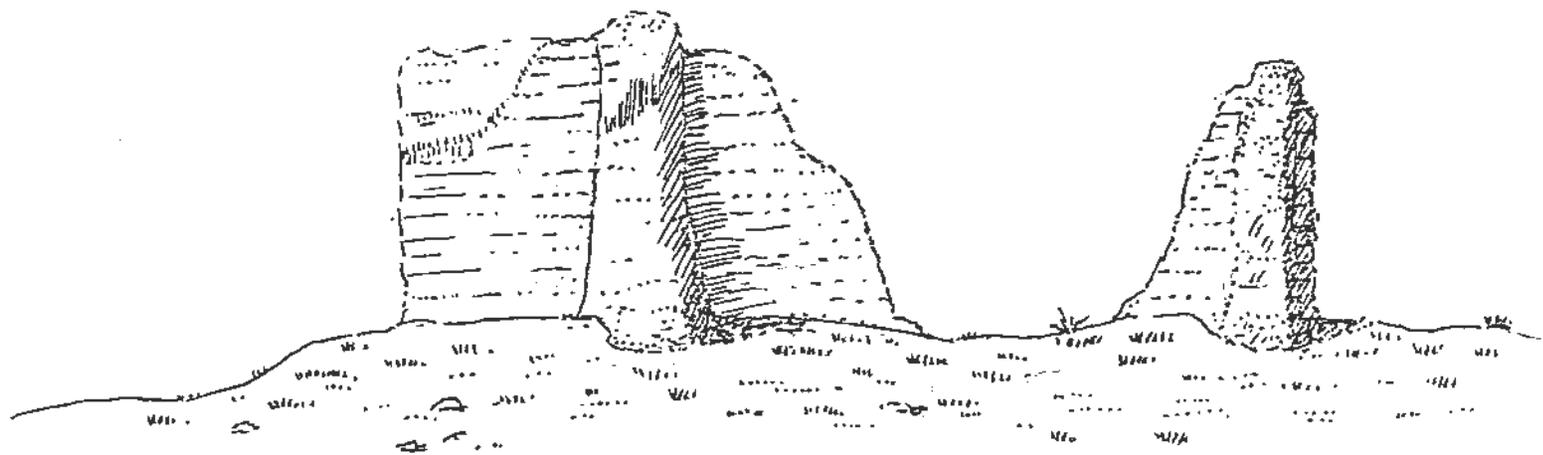
droughts that decimated their flocks of sheep and great herds of tough Mexican cattle. The adobe had several owners in the late Nineteenth Century. It was finally abandoned, ransacked and left to decay in 1900. Once the roof fell away and the walls were exposed to the rains, it began to melt. Now only about eight feet remains of the once high, thirty-seven-inch-thick walls. A park has been built around what remains of the Tapo Adobe and it is open to the public on Tapo Canyon Road. No plans have been made for its restoration.

SIMI

"...The whole of the valley, and far toward the sea
Then belonged to an old Spanish family.

And the old Adobe that they built still stands,
High up on the hills of the Tapo lands,
That lie at the base of the Coast Sierras;
Here once was the home of the De la Guerras.
The De la Guerra y Creanas,
With wide-brimmed hats and bright bandanas,
Whose house was open throughout the year
To friends from far--for none were near,
Whose fine old orchard with fruit abound,
The only orchard for miles around;
And the olive trees still grow on the hill,
Near the old Adobe, now decaying and still..."

(Taken from the poem, "Simi," by Mildred W. Brigham; printed in Legends and Lore of the Long Ago by Mrs. D. W. Mott.)



TAPO ADOBE TODAY

BORDERING ADOBES
IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY

REYES ADOBE

Reyes Adobe Road, Agoura, California
Private residence, not open to the public.

Driving south out of Ventura County into Los Angeles County on Highway 101 a freeway exit stands out at Agoura. It is the exit to Reyes Adobe Road. At the end of this road stands the adobe of Jose Reyes. Built in 1820, the old hacienda was the main house of the Rancho del Triunfo. It was from this adobe that Rafael Reyes moved his herds to the ranch in Lockwood Valley in 1854. It is said that the bandit, Joaquin Murietta spent many a night at the adobe. The old house was also used as a fort during Indian attacks. The fine adobe building was purchased in 1945 by Mrs. Dodson and restored. Today horses are raised at the adobe, carrying on a tradition begun by the Spanish Dons.

LEONIS ADOBE

23537 Calabasitas Road
Calabasitas, California
An historical museum, open to the public.

Miguel Leonis, a six-foot four-inch Basque, controlled what is now Calabasitas and it was there that he expanded an older adobe farm house into a stately adobe home that bears his name. The original adobe is believed to be as old as 1844. By 1870 it was remodeled by Miguel Leonis and his Indian wife, Espiritu, into a large two story home. Today the Leonis Adobe has been restored and furnished as

it was in the late Nineteenth Century. It can be reached from Highway 101 by taking the Mulholland off-ramp and turning right on Calabasas Road. The house recalls the days when "El Basquo Grande" was truly the King of Calabasas. The adobe is officially designated as Historic Cultural Monument No. 1 by the Cultural Heritage Board of Los Angeles.

CONCLUSION

This study of the adobes of Ventura County has been limited to those built before 1900. The use of adobe has never really stopped; regaining popularity in the early part of the Twentieth Century; and adobes are still being constructed today. I have limited my study to the Nineteenth Century when the early Hispanic and American settlers came to our country.

Some of the historic adobes built in the Twentieth Century are listed below.

REED ADOBE

Built on Reed Road, Thousand Oaks, in 1906. This one-storied home was built for Mexican farm workers on the Reed Ranch. It is still a private residence.

LIBBEY-LUCKING ADOBE

Built by Edward Libbey in 1915, this large house and stable was later purchased by Bill Lucking. The adobe has been remodeled into a modern home in Ojai.

FRENCH ADOBE

Built in 1925 by the Santa Monica architect, John Beyers. Owned by the French family, it is a private residence in Hidden Hills. It is a fine example of the Neo-Spanish style.

MARQUEZ ADOBE

Built in 1930. Only the rear walls (now hidden) are left of the

original building. The front of the building is made of brick. The structure is now the Marquez Food Products on 10th Street in Santa Paula. It is still owned by the Marquez family.

NEWMAN ADOBE

Now part of the Procter and Gamble factory in Oxnard, this adobe was once the ranchhouse of the Newman Ranch. Like many other adobes, its thick walls are hidden beneath white clapboards. The home is of undetermined age, most likely of this century. More research will be needed before its history is known.

Further information on the historic adobes can be obtained by contacting local historical societies or the Ventura County Historical Society, Ventura, California.

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