LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, TRUNK STORAGE
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Building No. 1283)
(Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center)
(Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center)
7601 Imperial Highway
Downey
Los Angeles County
California

HABS CA-2800-AF
HABS CA-2800-AF

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, TRUNK STORAGE
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles Building No. 1283)
Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center

HABS No. CA-2800-AF

Location: 7601 Imperial Highway, located directly east of Erickson Avenue, slightly northeast of the intersection of Ericson Avenue and Gardendale Street.

U.S. Geological Survey Los Angeles Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 3754049 N; 392490.6 E

Present Owner / Occupant: County of Los Angeles

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: The Trunk Storage building is significant under National Register of Historic Places Criterion A for its association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of history. Located on what is now known as the Rancho Los Amigos South Campus, the historic district portrays the establishment of the County Poor Farm at this location in 1887, its transition into a facility for long-term indigent medical care between the two world wars, and its emergence as a medical and rehabilitation center in the early post World War II years. The building was erected in 1923 as a horse stable and hay barn. After an outbreak of hoof and mouth disease at the County Farm in 1924, the building was used to patient store patient belongings on the first floor, and housed a male patient ward on the second floor. The second-floor of the building was removed in 1933 after the Long Beach earthquake. In 1984, the building was converted to offices for medical equipment repairs and workshops. The building had been abandoned by the end of the twentieth century.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. **Date of erection:** 1923[1]

2. **Architect:** No known architect could be associated with the Trunk Storage building.

3. **Original and subsequent owners:** County of Los Angeles (1887/1888–present)

4. **Original and subsequent occupants:** County of Los Angeles (1887/1888–present)

5. **Builder, contractor, suppliers:** No known builder, contractor, or supplier could be

[1] According to historic aerial photographs and Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. Centennial. Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888-1988. Downey, California: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

associated with the Trunk Storage building.

6. **Original plans and construction:** No building permits, original plans, or construction drawings were found for the Trunk Storage building.

7. **Alterations and additions:** Alterations and alteration dates as they appear from historic photographs include the removal of a second-story after the 1933 Long Beach earthquake, a room addition to the east elevation of the building, and a shed roof addition to the south elevation of the "L" projection.

B. Historic Context:

Begun in 1887/1888 as the new County Poor Farm, Rancho Los Amigos upon its inception was a rehabilitation facility that provided work, housing, and medical care to the indigent. The original purchase of 124.4 acres in the vicinity of the town of Downey, founded in 1873, was graded for roads, supplied with water from an artesian well, and improved with a Refectory Building (Dining Hall), the North and South Wards, an aviary, and an Office Building by 1889. During the following decade, barns and ancillary buildings with agricultural functions, a freight and passenger railroad depot, a combined bathhouse and laundry facility, and an additional ward were added.

By the 1890s, the County Poor Farm's livestock and agricultural operations were self-sufficient. The County Poor Farm had a herd of nearly 100 Jersey and Holstein cows, which provided a daily output of 200 gallons of milk. For eggs, the farm relied upon its productive, 800-chicken poultry farm located east of Erickson Avenue and north of Gardendale Street. East of the poultry yard was a hog farm, which supported approximately 150 Berkshire and Poland hogs. Sheep were raised and used for their wool. Percheron draft horses were kept to assist with heavy labor tasks. A wide range of crops were grown at the County Poor Farm, including fruits such as strawberries, peaches, and pears, and vegetables such as cabbage, corn, celery, onions, radishes, sugar beets, peas, cucumbers, and olives. With the assistance of farm supervisors, able-bodied patients helped work the fields and orchards, for which they received compensation of $1.50 per day. Irrigation was provided primarily by the farm's artesian well. Water from the well was pumped using a 10-horse power engine and stored in a water tower.[2]

The County Poor Farm began to make a profit from agriculture in 1909, with oranges its notable and profitable crop. In April 1909, the Semi-Tropical Fruit Exchange paid over $10,000 for 33 cars of navel oranges which constituted about one half of the County Poor Farm's total yield. In May 1909, another $5,000 worth of oranges were sold. The crop was considered so valuable that a high fence was constructed to protect the County Poor Farm's orange grove from thieves, which was calculated to have saved the County from approximately two train car loads worth of stolen oranges that year.

The County Poor Farm's agricultural operations not only met daily needs but also provided

[2] Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888–1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

surpluses of milk and fresh produce to the Los Angeles County Hospital in downtown Los Angeles. Sales between the Los Angeles County Hospital and the County Poor Farm saved Los Angeles County thousands of dollars each year. By 1911, it was reported that the County Poor Farm was supplying the Los Angeles County Hospital with over $13,000 worth of produce and milk annually.[3] This mutually beneficial arrangement between the County Poor Farm and Los Angeles County Hospital continued for many years until farming operations at the County Poor Farm ceased in the 1950s.

The County Poor Farm grew into a nationally recognized institution in the fields of cultivation and scientific breeding as a producer of prized crops and livestock. In addition to operating a successful agricultural enterprise, the County Poor Farm gradually expanded its role as a County medical facility. An increasing number of inmates with chronic medical disorders were being admitted to the County Poor Farm during the 1910s, prompting administrators to employ a staff of physicians and nurses to treat them. This surge in patients, and subsequently employees, would create the impetus for expanded development at the County Poor Farm in ensuing decades. The influx of new patients at the County Poor Farm provided the impetus for the expansion of services and facilities needed, resulting in the construction of a number of buildings at the property. The County Poor Farm's expansion reflected an important shift as the focus of the facility transitioned from rehabilitative care for indigents into a hospital to house long-term invalid patients.

In June 1915, William Ruddy Harriman was appointed the new superintendent at the County Poor Farm in order to reestablish the facility after devastating floods and a hog cholera epidemic in 1914 damaged the property's agricultural enterprises. Harriman promptly moved his family into the new Craftsman residence that had been constructed by the prior County Poor Farm superintendent, Charles C. Manning, at the center of the property. When Harriman took over management responsibilities at the County Poor Farm, the institution was providing care to 500 indigent men and women with a staff of 45. Under Harriman's leadership (1915-1931; 1933-1952), the County Poor Farm's agricultural fields and livestock rebounded and an ambitious plan of improvements, including new and expanded wards, was immediately begun to address the rapidly expanding need for patient accommodations and services. Harriman dramatically improved the property, installing an irrigation system, upgrading the utilities, constructing new buildings, organizing administration duties and developing the property's park-like landscape. These improvements were largely accomplished in the wake of the financial surge following World War I.[4]

The range of improvements Harriman initiated at the County Poor Farm reflects the rapid growth of the facility during the 1920s. New and expanded services included the construction of new on-site housing that was provided for the employees responsible for around-the-clock patient care and attention, patient wards, additions to men and women's psychopathic buildings, dining room extensions, nurses' dormitories, employee bungalows, a new power plant, and street improvements.

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[3] *Los Angeles Times*. 3 May 1909 "Fence Saves County Cash," p. I5.

[4] Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888–1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

In addition to the physical changes that were implemented under Harriman's leadership, there were also philosophical changes at the County Poor Farm. Harriman subscribed to the idea that the physical condition of an individual could be improved through occupational therapy activities and uplifting surroundings. Harriman's philosophy for self-improvement soon encompassed every activity at the County Poor Farm. He insisted that the patient's needs and comfort be addressed through the development of amenities at the County Poor Farm. Patients were assigned to work on the farm or in the greenhouse, based on their physical capabilities and individual talents. These occupational therapy activities were also intended as physical therapy, by providing the patients with fresh air, sunshine and independence.[5]

Throughout the 1920s, as residency continued to increase, Harriman expanded and improved the County Poor Farm's facilities, including a number of large building projects. Understanding the need to house additional patients, Harriman began the construction of four patient wards in 1922 followed by an additional four wards soon after. This project signaled the full-fledged transition of the farm from a rehabilitative care facility for indigents into a hospital to house long-term invalid patients. By 1922, the institution had a staff of approximately 175 employees to care for the needs of the 1,500 ambulatory patients living at the South Campus.[6] By late 1925, an additional five infirmary wards had been constructed. Several substantial buildings continued to be erected through the 1920s. In 1928, the old brick refectory building was razed and replaced with an 850-seat Spanish Colonial Revival Auditorium which provided much needed diversions to the ailing patients and staff. Movies were screened weekly in the Auditorium and other musical types of entertainment were offered as well.

By the end of the 1920s, the County Poor Farm comprised an impressive 540 acres of farmland and buildings, with a property value of $2 million dollars. Real estate improvements included 3 annual crop yields, one mile of paved roads, an additional one and one-fourth miles of decomposing granite roads, miles of sewer mains connected to the County sanitation system, hundreds of acres of new lawns, gardens, trees, and numerous buildings serving a variety of purposes.[7,8]

PART II. ARCHITECTURE INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. **Architectural character:** The brick vernacular style Trunk Storage building is one-story and asymmetrical in appearance with an L-shaped plan. The west facing

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[5] Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888–1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

[6] Foster, Henry. 5 October 1959. "History of the Rancho." Los Angeles: University of Southern California Archives. Box 25, Folder 57.

[7] Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888–1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

[8] Harriman, William R. "1927–1928 Annual Report for Rancho Los Amigos." Los Angeles: University of Southern California. Box 22, Folder 13.

façade entrance is offset to the south within a segmental arched entryway. A room addition was made to the southern section of the east elevation of the building and a shed roof was added to the south elevation of the "L" projection. The addition is metal-framed, capped by a shed roof, and has two metal rolling doors. The building has retained most of its character-defining features that include: flat roof with parapet flush with exterior walls; brick exterior walls in common bond pattern; segmental arched window and door openings, outlined by two to three rows of header bricks; segmental arched main entry outlined by five rows of header bricks; and slightly projecting window sills of header bricks.

2. **Condition of fabric:** The current condition of the Trunk Storage building is fair.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. **Overall dimensions:** The Trunk Storage building net interior condition space (interior dimensions exclusive of covered or enclosed exterior spaces) calculates to 6,870 square feet. The building has a gross area of exterior square footage of 7,736 square feet and a footprint of 6,235 square feet.[9]

2. **Foundations:** The building sits on a concrete slab foundation.

3. **Walls:** Exterior walls are painted brick in common bond pattern.

4. **Structural system, framing:** The structural system for the Trunk Storage building consists of a flat roof supported by brick exterior walls.

5. **Openings:**

   a. **Windows:** Fenestration on all elevations consists primarily of a linear arrangement of multi-light windows (six-over-six and four-over-four) located within segmental arched window openings.

   b. **Doors:** The west façade entrance is offset to the south within a segmental arched entryway and consists of a wide door with glazing. Other entrances are located on the south and east elevations and they consist of non-original metal rolling doors.

6. **Roof:** The building is capped by a flat roof with a parapet that is flush with the exterior walls.

C. Description of Interior: The Trunk Storage building is comprised of storage rooms. A series of small rooms and a bathroom are located in the original western portion. The newer

[9] Sapphos Environmental, Inc. 15 December 2008. Revised Memorandum for the Record, 1217–056, No. 21, Update to the List of Buildings, Structures, and Features of the Rancho Los Amigos Historic District. Pasadena, CA.

addition, located on the southern section of the east elevation, consists of three large rooms.

D. Site:

1. **General setting:** The area surrounding the building is paved in asphalt and a chain-linked fence borders the

2. **Orientation:** The Trunk Storage building is located directly east of Erickson Avenue, slightly northeast of the intersection of Ericson Avenue and Gardendale Street. The west façade is primary.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings:

No original drawings for the Trunk Storage were discovered. A set of as-found drawings were prepared for the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) documentation in 2007 by Mollenhauer Group for the County of Los Angeles.

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C. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

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D. Supplemental Material:

Reduced copies of 2007 as-found drawings

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

HABS documentation for the Trunk Storage was prepared by Sapphos Environmental, Inc. staff from December 2006 to June 2010 on behalf of the County of Los Angeles Chief Executive Office (CEO). The HABS documentation serves as mitigation to comply with the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the proposed Campus Plan project. Measured surveys were carried out in 2007 by Mollenhauer Group, Los Angeles, California. Photographs were taken from January 2010 to June 2010 by Mr. David Lee, production manager, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Part I of the historical report (historic context) was prepared by Ms. Shannon Carmack, senior cultural resources coordinator, Ms. Rebecca Silva, senior cultural resources coordinator, Ms. Deborah Howell-Ardila, senior cultural resources coordinator, Ms. Marlise Fratinardo, senior cultural resources coordinator, and Ms. Laura Carias, cultural resources coordinator, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Part II of the

historical report (architectural information) was prepared by Ms. Rebecca Silva, senior cultural resources coordinator, Ms. Marlise Fratinardo, senior cultural resources coordinator, and Ms. Laura Carias, cultural resources coordinator, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Ms. Leslie Heumann, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. manager of cultural resources, reviewed the final report and supporting documents, and provided research, writing, and project oversight.