

LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, CASA CONSUELO
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles County Building No. 1238)
(Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center)
(Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center)
7601 Imperial Highway
Downey
Los Angeles County
California

HABS CA-2800-AM
HABS CA-2800-AM

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, CASA CONSUELO
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles Building No. 1238)
Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center

HABS No. CA-2800-AM

Location: 7601 Imperial Highway, directly north of Consuelo Street at the intersection of Consuelo Street and Dahlia Avenue. Casa Consuelo faces south onto Consuelo Street.

U.S. Geological Survey Los Angeles Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 3754166 N; 392719.3 E

Present Owner / Occupant: County of Los Angeles

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: Casa Consuelo 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 and Criterion C for its embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction. 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 1930 as the second women's ward at the County Poor Farm. The original 1897 Women's Ward, located on the northeast corner of Consuelo Street and Main Drive, was converted to house ambulatory men and later demolished. Casa Consuelo was named at its opening in 1930 and was reportedly partially designed by Superintendent William R. Harriman's wife, Elinor. The Spanish Colonial Revival building housed 200 women patients and was planned so that each room had an outside balcony or window. Casa Consuelo provided a private and separate area for the women patients of the Poor Farm in a setting more conducive to their needs and comfort. The building served in this capacity until it was converted to office and storage space. It is currently abandoned.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. **Date of erection:** 1930¹
2. **Architect:** Karl W. Muck, County Architect, Department of the County Architect

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

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:** County of Los Angeles Mechanical Department
6. **Original plans and construction:** An incomplete set of original architectural drawings for Casa Consuelo are on file with the County of Los Angeles.
7. **Alterations and additions:** Alterations to Casa Consuelo are minor, and the building reflects its period of construction. Alterations were identified through observation and comparison with historic photographs and include the replacement of original wood-framed casement windows with metal-framed casement and sliding windows and the replacement of original wood doors with metal doors on the north and west elevations.

B. Historic Context:

Casa Consuelo

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-horsepower engine and stored in a water tower.²

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

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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, 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.³

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's and women's psychopathic buildings, dining room extensions, nurses' dormitories, employee bungalows, a new power plant, and street improvements.

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 patients' 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.⁴

³ Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888–1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

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

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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.⁵ 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. Real estate improvements included three 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, and trees; and numerous buildings serving a variety of purposes.^{6,7}

During the 1930s, funding opportunities were significantly reduced as a result of the Depression, slowing ongoing expansion efforts. Despite the shortage of funds during the Depression years, the County Poor Farm managed to maintain all of its existing services and features, including its landscaping department, thanks to the supply of labor provided by the increasing number of admitted inmates. Improvements during this period primarily consisted of maintenance to existing buildings; nonetheless, several significant buildings were erected. A new ward for women patients, Casa Consuelo (1930), with Spanish Colonial Revival styling, accommodated 188 female patients in bright and cheery rooms, all with an exterior view. Funds for the construction of a recreational facility for patients, Bonita Hall, were allocated prior to the 1929 stock market crash, and Bonita Hall (1932) was one of the few new buildings constructed during the Depression era. One change that required no funding occurred in 1932: the County changed the official name from "County Poor Farm" to "Rancho Los Amigos," which means the Friend's Ranch or Ranch of the Friends. This name change served as public notice of the evolving medical mission of the facility, as well as helping to shed the stigma associated with the title of "Poor Farm."

Prior to the construction of Casa Consuelo, two women's wards, constructed in 1888 and 1897 (both now demolished), were located at the property. Plans for a new women's ward were begun in 1928. Casa Consuelo, considered "truly representative of the best in comfort and convenience

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

⁶ Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888–1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

⁷ Harriman, William R. "1927–1928 Annual Report for Rancho Los Amigos." Los Angeles, CA: University of Southern California Archives. Box 22, Folder 13.

for a building of this type," was opened in March 1930. The building offered ample light and ventilation, a variety of courtyards, sun porches, and parlors and 11 day rooms for patients' use, which were decorated in a range of styles.⁸ Casa Consuelo provided the space necessary to house additional patients during the steady growth of the complex that occurred under Harriman's leadership.

PART II. ARCHITECTURE INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

- 1. Architectural character:** Casa Consuelo is a two-story Spanish Colonial Revival style building with an irregular "H-shaped" plan and a low-pitched, gabled roof covered in red-clay tile. The building is composed of a north-south-running H-shaped polygon with projecting east and west wings. Substantially intact, the Casa Consuelo retains most of its character-defining features: asymmetrical plan incorporating courtyards; tiled and gabled roof trimmed with wooden brackets where the eaves overhang and a decoratively carved frieze board where they do not; board form concrete exterior walls with a string molding between stories; arcades detailed with impost moldings and topped by curvilinear parapets; double entrance doors topped by transoms; wrought iron exterior lighting (where extant); and wrought iron balconies supported by corbels and brackets.
- 2. Condition of fabric:** The current condition of Casa Consuelo is poor. The building has deteriorated from earthquakes, neglect, and exposure, resulting in its current state of disrepair. Windows and doors have been boarded over.

B. Description of Exterior:

- 1. Overall dimensions:** Casa Consuelo is irregularly "H-shaped" in plan and stands two stories. The net interior condition space (interior dimensions exclusive of covered or enclosed exterior spaces) calculates to 36,222 square feet. The building has a gross exterior area of 37,808 square feet and a footprint of 21,320 square feet.⁹
- 2. Foundations:** The building sits on a concrete slab foundation.
- 3. Walls:** Exterior walls consist of painted board-form concrete. Stringcourses wrap the building between stories.

⁸ Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial. Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888-1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

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

4. **Structural system, framing:** The structural system for Casa Consuelo consists of a gabled roof supported by board-form concrete walls.
 5. **Arcade, Balconies, Terraces:** On the north, south, and east elevations, courtyard areas are enclosed by arcades, each topped by a scalloped edge parapet, and each consisting of piers with impost moldings and molded bases.
 6. **Openings:**
 - a. **Windows:** Fenestration consists of wood-framed, flat-headed single and double casement windows that are similarly arranged on both stories. The window frames are set directly into the window openings and have slightly projecting sills. Some windows have been replaced by modern metal sliding windows.
 - b. **Doors:** The primary south entrance, and secondary east entrance, are characterized by an arched opening with double wooden doors, glazed and paneled with sidelights, a transom, and decorative wooden spindles. Additional entrances are located on both the north and west elevations and contain non-original double metal doors. Second-story wood French doors are adorned with projecting balconies with decorative concrete corbels, wrought iron-railings and scrolled brackets.
 7. **Roof:** The main two-story body of the building is covered by a low-pitched gabled roof, covered in red-clay tile. Carved brackets and a decoratively sawn wooden frieze board mark the eaves. Two flat-roofed truncated towers flank the south elevation arcade and a flat-roof tops the one-story projecting cafeteria wing on the west elevation.
- C. **Description of Interior:** The first floor of Casa Consuelo consists of several hallways flanked by a series of patient rooms. A large sitting room is located in the building's eastern portion, and four interior sitting areas have access to either an outdoor terrace or arcade. A terrace occupies the center of the building, and partial-width arcades are located on the north, south, and east elevations of the building. The second floor has a similar arrangement. The second floor has three outdoor courtyards and four roof decks.
- D. **Site:**
1. **General setting:** The setting surrounding the Casa Consuelo consists of mature trees, shrubs, and grass, including vestiges of the original Mediterranean landscaping. There are concrete sidewalks surrounding the building on all elevations and concrete driveways adjacent to the north and west elevations.

2. **Orientation:** Casa Consuelo is located at the intersection of Consuelo Street and Dahlia Avenue. The building's primary elevations face east and south, and the majority of the architectural detail is concentrated on these facades.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings:

An incomplete set of original architectural drawings prepared by the County of Los Angeles Mechanical Department is on file with the County of Los Angeles. A set of as-found drawings was prepared for the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) documentation in 2007 by Diamond West Engineering, Inc. 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 an incomplete set of original architectural drawings

Reduced copies of 2007 as-found drawings

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

HABS documentation for Casa Consuelo was prepared by Sapphos Environmental, Inc. staff from December 2006 to June 2011 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 Ms. Wanda Ostermann of Diamond West Engineering, Inc., 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, manager of cultural resources, Sapphos Environmental, Inc., reviewed the final report and supporting documents and provided research, writing, and project oversight.