LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, SHELTER
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles County Building No. 1240)
(Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center)
(Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center)
7601 Imperial Highway
Downey
Los Angeles County
California

HABS CA-2800-AO
HABS CA-2800-AO

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, SHELTER
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles County Building No. 1240)
Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center

HABS No. CA-2800-AO

Location: 7601 Imperial Highway, located centrally within the block bounded by Golondrinas Street to the north, Dahlia Avenue to the east, Consuelo Street to the south, and Erickson Avenue to the west. The shelter is located in the courtyard of the Women's Psychiatric Ward complex (LACO Nos. 1202 and 1203).

U.S. Geological Survey Los Angeles Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 3754268 N; 392723 E

Present Owner / Occupant: County of Los Angeles

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: The Shelter 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 structure was erected in 1930 as a covered walkway in the interior courtyard of the Women's Psychiatric Ward complex. The men's and women's psychiatric wards, begun in 1907, represented a significant addition to the mission of the Poor Farm, and reflected its transition into a residential medical facility. The structure continued to be used as a shelter until the complex was converted to office and storage space in the late 20th century. The structure is currently not in use.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. **Date of erection:** 1930[1]

2. **Architect:** No known architect could be associated with the Shelter.

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

[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.

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

5. **Builder, contractor, suppliers:** No known builder, contractor, or supplier could be associated with the Shelter.

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

7. **Alterations and additions:** There appear to be no alterations to the property.

B. Historic Context:

Shelter

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]

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

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

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.

The psychiatric facility began at the County Poor Farm in 1907 with the construction of the first Psychiatric Ward building. Originally, women and men psychiatric patients were housed together. The first Women's Psychiatric Ward was completed directly south of the men's ward in 1919 after the Superintendent of the County Poor Farm pleaded with the County Board of Supervisors for funding. A second women's psychiatric ward followed in 1924.

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]

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[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.

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 throughout 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."

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[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. 1928. "1927–1928 Annual Report for Rancho Los Amigos." Los Angeles, CA: University of Southern California. Box 22, Folder 13.

PART II. ARCHITECTURE INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. **Architectural character:** The Shelter is a one-story utilitarian structure that consists of a roofed corridor that is open to the sides and paved in concrete. The structure has retained most of its character-defining features, which include: simple, straightforward design, open corridor plan, concrete paving, flat wood roof, exposed beans with tapered ends, and metal pipe columns.

2. **Condition of fabric:** The current condition of the Shelter is fair.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. **Overall dimensions:** The Shelter net interior condition space (interior dimensions exclusive of covered or enclosed interior spaces), gross exterior area, and footprint calculate to 232 square feet.[8]

2. **Foundations:** The structure sits on concrete pavement.

3. **Walls:** n/a

4. **Structural system, framing:** The structure is capped by a flat wood canopy roof that is supported by metal pipe columns.

5. **Openings:**

   a. **Windows:** n/a

   b. **Doors:** n/a

6. **Roof:** The structure is covered by a flat wood canopy roof trimmed by a scalloped fascia. Exposed beams with tapered ends are visible underneath the roof.

C. Description of Interior: n/a

D. Site:

1. **General setting:** Existing landscaping surrounding the Shelter consists of weeds and mature grass. Concrete walkways and sidewalks surround the structure.

[8] 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.

2. **Orientation:** The Shelter is located in the courtyard of the Women's Psychiatric Ward Complex (LACO Nos. 1202 and 1203).

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings:

No original drawings for the Shelter were discovered. A set of as-found drawings was 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:

Rancho Los Amigos Foundation collection

D. Supplemental Material:

Reduced copies of 2007 as-found drawings

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

HABS documentation for the Shelter 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 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, manager of cultural resources, Sapphos Environmental, Inc., reviewed the final report and supporting documents and provided research, writing, and project oversight.