

LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, CHAPEL & COMPUTER  
CENTER

(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles County Building No. 1254)

(Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center)

(Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center)

7601 Imperial Highway

Downey

Los Angeles County

California

HABS CA-2800-AV

*HABS CA-2800-AV*

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, CHAPEL / COMPUTER CENTER  
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles Building No. 1254)  
Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center

HABS No. CA-2800-AV

**Location:** 7601 Imperial Highway, located east of Erickson Avenue and directly southeast of the Women's Psychiatric Ward Building (LACO No. 1203).

U.S. Geological Survey Los Angeles Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 3754280 N; 392643.1 E

**Present Owner / Occupant:** County of Los Angeles

**Present Use:** Vacant

**Significance:** The Chapel / Computer Center 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 1908 as the original chapel for the County Poor Farm which served as a place for prayer every Sunday and once during the week for patients and staff of Rancho Los Amigos. The building served in that capacity until a new chapel was constructed northeast of the intersection of Dahlia and Consuelo Streets in 1952. The building was moved some 88 feet from its original site to accommodate the construction of the two Women's Psychiatric Ward Buildings (LACO No. 1202 and LACO No. 1203) in 1919. Once it was no longer needed as a chapel, the building was converted into a library for several years, and a south wing was added to house a medical library. In the 1960s, the building's exterior brick walls were covered with horizontal metal siding. Sometime in the late 20th century, the building was converted into a computer center. The building is currently vacant.

### PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

#### A. Physical History:

1. **Date of erection:** 1908<sup>1</sup>
2. **Architect:** No known architect could be associated with the Chapel / Computer Center.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

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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 associated with the Chapel / Computer Center.
6. **Original plans and construction:** No building permits, original plans, or construction drawings were found for the Chapel / Computer Center.
7. **Alterations and additions:** Alterations were identified through observation and include a south wing addition, the replacement of the original roof with composition shingles, and the replacement of original wood siding with metal siding.

**B. Historic Context:**

**Chapel / Computer Center**

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.<sup>2</sup>

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

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.

## **PART II. ARCHITECTURE INFORMATION**

### **A. General Statement:**

- 1. Architectural character:** The wood-frame Craftsman-influenced Wood Vernacular style Chapel / Computer Center is one-story, symmetrical in appearance, and L-shaped in plan. Extant character-defining features include: horizontal massing, medium-pitched gabled roof with overhanging eaves, cross-gabled roof, original wood cladding in situ under later metal siding, attached elevated entry porch with hipped roof and square porch supports, and original wood-paneled and glazed doors.
- 2. Condition of fabric:** The current condition of the Chapel / Computer Center is fair. Windows and doors have been boarded over.

### **B. Description of Exterior:**

- 1. Overall dimensions:** The Chapel / Computer Center net interior condition space (interior dimensions exclusive of covered or enclosed interior spaces) calculates to 2,353 square feet. The building has a gross exterior area of 2,414 square feet and a footprint of 2,414 square feet.<sup>3</sup>
- 2. Foundations:** The building sits on a concrete slab foundation.
- 3. Walls:** Exterior walls are clad in non-original horizontal metal siding.
- 4. Structural system, framing:** The structural system for the Chapel / Computer Center consists of a cross-gabled roof supported by wood-framed walls.

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<sup>3</sup> 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. Job No. 1217-056. Pasadena, CA.

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5. **Porches:** A partial-width entry porch, attached to the west façade, is elevated, and covered by a hipped roof supported by square porch supports. It is accessed by 5 concrete steps.
  6. **Openings:**
    - a. **Windows:** The building has a linear fenestration pattern of equally spaced window openings on the north and south elevations of the original chapel wing.
    - b. **Doors:** The primary entrance (west façade) is centrally located within the attached, elevated entry porch. Additional entrances are located on the building's north and south elevations and are accessed by concrete ramps with metal pipe railings. Doors consist of a combination of original wood paneled and glazed doors and replaced metal doors.
  7. **Roof:** The building is capped by a medium-pitched, cross-gabled roof with boxed eaves, overhanging eaves, sheathed in composition shingles. Vents composed of rectangular metal louvered vents are located in the eaves.
- C. **Description of Interior:** The Chapel / Computer Center comprises six rooms plus a group of restrooms (two bathrooms, a sink area, and a shower) located in the east portion of the building.
- D. **Site:**
1. **General setting:** Existing landscaping surrounding the Chapel / Computer Center consists of mature grass, shrubs, and trees. Concrete ramps with metal handrails lead to the secondary entrances, and concrete sidewalks surround the building. A paved parking lot is located to the building's south and east.
  2. **Orientation:** The Chapel / Computer Center is located east of Erickson Avenue and directly southeast of the Women's Psychiatric Ward Building (LACO No. 1203). The building's west façade is primary.

### PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. **Architectural Drawings:**

No original drawings for the Chapel / Computer Center 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 Chapel / Computer Center 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.