

LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, AVIARY
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles County Building No. 1312)
(Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center)
(Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center)
7601 Imperial Highway
Downey
Los Angeles County
California

HABS CA-2800-AW
HABS CA-2800-AW

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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, AVIARY
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles Building No. 1312)
Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center

HABS No. CA-2800-AW

Location: 7601 Imperial Highway, located in the northwest corner of the Men's Psychiatric Ward complex courtyard, adjacent to the 1907 Psychiatric Ward Building (LACO No. 1205) and directly southeast of the intersection of Erickson Avenue and Golondrinas Street.

U.S. Geological Survey Los Angeles Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 3754381 N; 392723.7 E

Present Owner / Occupant: County of Los Angeles

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: The Aviary 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 first erected in 1888 and was originally located in the center of the County Poor Farm, near to the current locations of the Auditorium (LACO No. 1261) and Bath and Ward Building (LACO No. 1260). Sometime after the completion of the Men's Psychiatric Ward complex, the Aviary was moved to its present location in the interior courtyard area of the 1907 Psychiatric Ward Building (LACO No. 1205) to provide a calming influence to the male patients. The Aviary was abandoned before or concurrent with the conversion of the Men's Psychiatric Wards to office and storage space. To the extent that it retains its original materials, the Aviary represents the oldest structure within the historic district.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. **Date of erection:** 1888¹
2. **Architect:** No known architect could be associated with the Aviary.

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:** No known builder, contractor, or supplier could be associated with the Aviary.
6. **Original plans and construction:** No building permits, original plans, or construction drawings were found for the Aviary.
7. **Alterations and additions:** Alterations as they appear from historic photographs include: replacement roofing material and plywood sheeting.

B. Historic Context:

Aviary

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

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

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:** Relocated from its original central South Campus site in circa 1930s, the wood-framed, utilitarian Aviary is one-story, asymmetrical in appearance, and rectangular in plan. The structure consists of a central enclosed area with screened porches attached to both the north and south elevations. Extant character-defining features include: medium-pitched roof, screened viewing areas, and minimal ornamentation.
2. **Condition of fabric:** The current condition of the Aviary is deteriorated.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. **Overall dimensions:** The Aviary has a gross exterior area and a footprint of 64 square feet.³
2. **Foundations:** The structure sits on a raised circular concrete slab foundation.
3. **Walls:** Exterior walls consist of plywood sheets with cut-out screen insets.
4. **Structural system, framing:** The structural system for the Aviary consists of a front-gabled roof supported by plywood sheets.
5. **Openings:**
 - a. **Windows:** n/a
 - b. **Doors:** The primary entrance to the structure is located on the south elevation and consists of two screen doors in succession creating a screened holding area.
6. **Roof:** The structure is capped by a moderately pitched front-gabled roof with rafters and overhanging eaves. Composition shingles cover the roof.

³ 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.

C. **Description of Interior:** n/a

D. **Site:**

1. **General setting:** Existing landscaping surrounding the Aviary consists of mature shrubs, trees, and grass.
2. **Orientation:** The Aviary is located in the northwest corner of the courtyard area adjacent to the 1907 Psychiatric Ward Building (LACO No. 1205) directly southeast of the intersection of Erickson Avenue and Golondrinas Street.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. **Architectural Drawings:**

No original drawings for the Aviary were discovered.

B. **Bibliography:**

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C. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

Rancho Los Amigos Foundation collection

D. Supplemental Material:

None

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

HABS documentation for the Aviary 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. 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.