

RANCHO LOS ALAMITOS
6400 Bixby Hill Road
Long Beach
Los Angeles County
California

HALS CA-90
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
National Park Service
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RANCHO LOS ALAMITOS

HALS NO. CA-90

Location: 6400 Bixby Hill Road, Long Beach, Los Angeles County, California
33.77693, -118.10738 (Center of Adobe Structure ,Google Earth, Simple
Cylindrical Projection, WGS84)

Significance : The Gardens of Rancho Los Alamitos are an outstanding example of early 20th Century formal landscape planning, exemplifying not only the cultural character of the times but carrying on a tradition of the Beautification Movement of the late 19th Century.

The Gardens as we see them today are the work of Florence Bixby, who built on the gardens created between 1868 and 1906 by her mother-in-law, Susan Bixby. During the period between 1921 and the late 1940s, Florence was assisted by prominent landscape designers and plantsmen. These included William Hertrich, head gardener at the Henry Huntington Estate, Allen Chickering, a native plant expert and college classmate of the Bixby's, Paul J. Howard landscape designer from the great Los Angeles horticultural Howard family, Florence Yoch from the Pasadena firm of Yoch & Council and the California office of the Olmsted Brothers.

Rancho Los Alamitos is listed twice on the National Register of Historic Places. In 1974 it was listed for its significance as the general site of the Gabrielino village of Povuu'ngna. In 1981 it was listed as a place illustrative of the evolution of the Southern California region and for its long history of more than fifteen hundred years of continuous occupation. HABS (CA-310).

Description: Today the 7.5 acre Rancho Los Alamitos historic site comprises the ranch house (1804-1933), four acres of nationally significant gardens and a restored barnyard area with livestock. The ranch was once the private residence and home of Fred and Florence Bixby and their family. It served as a finishing ranch for cattle raised at Bixby ranches elsewhere and they would be fattened up at Los Alamitos before going to market. It was also famous for the prize-winning pedigree Shire Draft horses that Fred Bixby raised. Ranch workers and tenant farmers worked the agricultural part of the ranch which remained in operation until 1956. The original adobe core of the ranch house was sited on a low hill with views of all the surrounding lowlands and the mountains in the distance. Before urbanization surrounded the site, Catalina Island was still visible from the southwest side of the house. After Florence Bixby passed away in 1961 (Fred had passed on in 1952) the gardens fell into decline and vandalism became a problem. Foreseeing future urbanization, in 1931 Fred Bixby had set aside 148 acres with the ranch house at the core, in an irrevocable trust entitled The Home

Trust so that the heart of the ranch would always be there for successive generations of the family. With ever increasing land condemnations for hospitals, naval bases, freeways and a college, it proved impossible to hold on to the land and in the 1960s, the heirs appealed to have the Home Trust reduced to 7.5 acres and to turn the concept of an enduring home available to the public while the remaining open land could be controlled by the family in whatever manner was most practical. In 1968, the Bixby heirs formally donated Rancho Los Alamitos to the City of Long Beach, to be administered as a public historic site. In February 1970, the house, barns and surrounding gardens were opened to the public. With a declining public funding base, Rancho Los Alamitos Foundation was formed to restore, operate and, most importantly, develop the educational potential of the site under a public / private partnership with the City of Long Beach. The Foundation began managing the site in 1986, which set the stage for the current administration of this historic site. The steady implementation of a nationally recognized Master Plan has guided the restoration and educational development of the site.

The gardens that surround the house represent more than a century of development. The traditional and formal entry to the ranch used to be a grand and long sweeping driveway from 7th Street to the southeast of the ranch house. Today the entry is from Bixby Hill Road (previously called Anaheim Road) on the north side of the site, near the North or Old Garden as it has been called since Fred moved his family into the house in 1906. A row of bamboo was planted at the northern edge of the Old Garden primarily to screen out Anaheim Road. Beyond this screen is the Native Garden. The Cactus Garden which borders the Front Lawn, the Tennis Court and Jacaranda Walk lie on the eastern side. The Jacaranda Walk is on the eastern edge of the property and borders on the north-south axis of the Tennis Court, connecting the Cactus Garden to the Friendly Garden, which is on the southern end of the Tennis Court. The Front Lawn situated between the adobe house and tennis court is accentuated by two Morton Bay Fig trees planted by Susan Bixby in 1890.

The South Garden evolved as the southern wing of the house expanded. On the southerly edge of the property, below the graded drive, are the Cutting Garden, Cypress Steps & Patio, Oleander Walk, Rose Garden & Olive Patio, the Old Seventh Street Drive and the Geranium Walk and Rose Gazebo. With the exception of the Geranium Walk and Rose Gazebo, all of the southern gardens were planned by the Olmsted Brothers Firm.

The Back Patio actually was the informal entrance to the ranch house most used by family and friends. It faces the west driveway and the out-buildings that were part of the working ranch. When the Tank House at the west end of the south wing was taken down, a secluded, walled garden was designed by the Olmsted Brothers Firm and was entered from either the Back Patio or the South Lawn. This small garden became the "Play Yard" or "Secret Garden", an intimate

garden that served Florence Bixby as a physical as well as a spiritual retreat.

The Gardens today are maintained with as much care, if not more, as when Florence Bixby was alive. Because of vandalism in the 1960s when the gardens were mostly deserted and the family descendants living elsewhere, much of the statuary was removed but today much of it has been re-installed by the Foundation, or if a piece is too valuable it resides in the ranch house with a replica placed in the garden.

The remaining historic trees on site most clearly evidence two generations of garden development. Rows of historic pepper trees and two majestic Morton Bay Fig trees planted around 1890 mark Susan Bixby's plantings, while a huge Italian Stone Pine towers over and dwarfs the north-east corner of the house. It was planted by Florence Bixby and in 1928 was a small sapling in the garden. A line of tiny Canary Island Date Palms planted in 1911 along the east drive are now a significant marker in the landscape. The Italian cypress used at the Cypress Steps and Patio have been re-planted four times in the last 70 years due, in part, to the ill effects of air pollution, and the difficulty of keeping the plants clean. The historic Oleander trees in the Oleander Walk planted in 1928 became the target of an invasive species known as the Glassy-winged Sharpshooter, became diseased. They were removed and replaced twice, until finally Crepe Myrtle (*Rhus lancea*) was planted four years ago to provide a similar arching and blooming character since there is no known cure for the Oleander scorch.

The Cutting Garden is still in active use today gardeners the floral assistants use the blooms in the ranch house. This small garden was created to try and entice one of the daughters to spend less time on a horse and more time in a ladylike garden.

History: The history of the site dates back to around 500 A.D. when it was a sacred ceremonial and trading center for the Tongva/Gabrielino native people who occupied the land until for more than a thousand years until the advent of Spanish settlement in California. In 1790 it was part of the second and largest of the land grants given under Spanish rule. Three hundred thousand acres were given to Manuel Nieto, a retiring leather jacket soldier with the first Spanish expedition of Alta California in 1769.

Jose Manuel Perez Nieto passed away in 1804 leaving his vast undivided land holdings to his widow and children. By 1833 Nieto's heirs were squabbling amongst themselves, conceivably over the division of hides. This led them to petition Jose Figueroa, then governor of Alta California, to partition the property. Figueroa obliged the heirs and Los Coyotes was divided into five large ranchos and one smaller ranch or sitio. Juan Jose Nieto, Nieto's eldest son, received Rancho Los Coyotes, Rancho Los Alamitos, and the small sitio called Palo Alto. As soon as he received title to his portion, Juan Jose sold Rancho Los Alamitos'

28,500 acres to Figueroa. This may have been the family's, or perhaps just Juan Jose's pay-off to Figueroa for consenting to the division of the original grant. Don Abel Stearns, a naturalized citizen of Mexico and one of the richest and most influential people in California at that time, purchased the Rancho in 1842 from the Figueroa Estate. Primarily to be used as a summer retreat from Los Angeles by him and his wife, Arcadia Bandini Stearns. Stearns made some Yankee changes to the adobe structure, which included adding a gabled and shingled roof and hardwood floors, to make it more accommodating for his young bride, and expanding the north wing to use as a bunk house for the vaqueros. The great drought of 1862-64 hurt Stearns and one of his creditors, a San Francisco financier, Michael Reese, foreclosed on Los Alamitos in 1865. It was the only ranch Stearns lost in this natural disaster.

The Bixby's were from Maine, farmers who endured a short growing season, grudging soils and bitter cold winters. John Bixby arrived in Los Angeles in 1871 with thirty dollars in his pocket. He worked as a carpenter for several months before being invited by his cousin Jotham to work at Rancho Los Cerritos. The Rancho Los Cerritos had been acquired by the Northern California firm of Flint, Bixby & Company from Don Juan Temple in 1866, with Jotham Bixby managing the activities of the ranch. Under Jotham's supervision John learned how to run sheep while also attending to the chores of mending fences, repairing and building other out-buildings, basically the constant chores associated with maintaining a working ranch. While working here he met Susan Hathaway, sister of Margaret Hathaway Bixby Jotham's wife. They were married on October 4th, 1873.

In 1878 when John and Susan Bixby first leased about a thousand acres of Rancho Alamitos and moved into the adobe dwelling, its condition could be described as unmaintained and deteriorating. By 1881, in partnership with his cousin Jotham, and another partner, financier I. W. Hellman, he was able to acquire the entire 26,395-acre property for \$125,000. The improvements made by John and Susan Bixby included adding a south wing and tank house, enlarging the windows all around the adobe, repairing the front porch, building a dairy barn and cheese factory at the northern portion of the knoll, and creating gardens on the east and north sides.

The East garden, or Front garden, was a rectangular area enclosed with a white picket fence, which was replaced by a clipped hedge of Monterey Cypress in the 1890s. After the front porch was repaired, Susan Bixby planted climbing roses and honeysuckle to give the front garden some sense of color. A photo of the North Garden taken in 1887 shows a white picket fence also on the western side of the adobe and marching north toward Anaheim Road. The practice of planting trees on farms is an old tradition which addressed practical as well as aesthetic needs. As shown in some 19th century photos, a few mature eucalyptus trees appear in the front garden and a particular mature pepper tree is shown in the

Old Garden and became known as "the Stearns Pepper Tree" because it was planted in the time of Abel Stearns' occupancy of the ranch in the 1850s. Susan Bixby planted rows of pepper trees along the west and south sides of the house. She also planted them along Anaheim Road (now Bixby Hill Road), in the late 1880s, adding an element of shading as well as screening to an otherwise wide open landscape. Susan planted the two Morton Bay Fig trees that dominate the site today.

In 1882, John purchased a huge abandoned warehouse from Phineas Banning, cut it in sections, and hauled it to the ranch. He reassembled the structure as a barn, added three cupolas, and painted it red. For more than half a century the "Big Red Barn" stood out as a landmark on the knoll, on the top of the mesa at Rancho Los Alamitos.

The Bixby's were a gregarious couple with many friends and a strong sense of responsibility toward the tenants who worked the land with them. At some time in the 1880s they held the first of the Bixby family annual Christmas parties. Friends and relatives, some living as far away as Los Angeles, vaqueros, and Mexican sheepherders were invited for refreshments and fun. Presents were passed out to children; John struck up a tune on his violin; banjos and guitars soon followed and as the shyness wore off there was singing and dancing. The Bixby's were also instrumental in the town's first schools. Susan, for her part in raising money for the town's first school teacher, and John, for being a member of the town's first school board.

John Bixby became ill and died suddenly in May 1887. At this time Susan took her two young children, Fred and Susanna north to the Bay Area and leased the ranch to the two remaining partners, Jotham Bixby's J. Bixby Company and I. W. Hellman.

Fred Bixby graduated from the University of California at Berkeley in 1898. He married his college sweetheart, Florence Elizabeth Green, in August of that year at Berkeley. They went on their honeymoon and then settled at the adobe ranch house at Los Alamitos. From that time on Fred took on managing the affairs of the family's ranch holdings. Susan joined them and for a time they all lived together in the adobe ranch house, until the birth of Fred and Florence's first daughter, Katharine. After Katharine was born Susan leased or gave the young parents an ocean-view house in Long Beach and for several years Fred commuted the six miles from that house to the ranch. The Bixby's were blessed with two more daughters while living in the house, Florence Elizabeth, nicknamed Sister, and Deborah. But Fred was growing weary of the time he was spending commuting when it could have been spent with his young family. Not a great distance, six miles but, consider doing the travel time on horseback or horse drawn carriage. In 1904 Fred cut the house in Long Beach in half and hauled it to the ranch, much like his father had done decades earlier when he had

moved the "Big Red Barn." It was sited in the location that is now the Tennis Court.

Susan Bixby passed away in February 1906, and Fred and Florence moved into the adobe where they were blessed with two sons, John and Frederick. By early 1909 a graded earth drive, complete with curbs and gutters, encircling the house was installed by Fred. This was the beginning of the major improvements and changes that Fred and Florence were making to their home. This installation of the drive led to the hedge on the east lawn being removed and the planting of some tiny Canary Island Date Palms along the Main Drive. By 1910 the south wing of the adobe had to be extended to accommodate their growing family and the Tank House put up by Fred's father, John, came down and a new one was built. A concrete walk was laid parallel to the south drive. Photos show that a deep flower bed edged with a clipped hedge existed between the walk and south wing of the house and vines were planted and trained on trellises against the walls. In the Back Patio area that was becoming more of the everyday entrance to the adobe, a concrete path was laid, which created a narrow planting bed between the path and the south wing. Later on wooden planks were added between the new concrete path and kitchen to help keep the dust down and the mud out of the kitchen. Florence planted a small rose garden enclosed by a high lattice fence in the north-east corner of the Back Patio area. Also a pink trumpet vine (*Podranea ricasoliana*) was planted and climbing roses covered the pipes that brought hot water from the kitchen wing to the south bedroom wing.

A curving concrete path was laid, leading from the new east drive to the paved walk at the front of the adobe. It was in this era, the teens, which Florence had made some changes of her own in the Old Garden. For a time an artichoke bed bordered the western drive of the Old Garden, also two pergolas spanned the paths of the garden, one supporting climbing roses, the other supporting Concord grapes. A Japanese-style garden employing the use of rocks to define a water element was also evident.

In any working ranch of this era the children play an important part in the maintenance and character of the place. Quite often the Bixby children helped round up cattle and horses. When they were young and not full grown they used a circular wooden bench that was around an old pepper tree in the Old Garden to mount their ponies. The children had their own pet area which contained quite a selection of farm and domestic animals, including: rabbits, chickens, guinea pigs, goats, an orphan lamb and several breeds of dogs and cats. The pet area was located on the southern side of the adobe, beyond the row of pepper trees that Susan Bixby had planted.

Oil strikes at Signal Hill in 1921, and at Seal Beach in 1926, made Fred Bixby a wealthy man. But before oil was discovered on Bixby land Florence Bixby had commissioned landscape architect Paul J. Howard to present a design for the

area that is now the Tennis Court. Howard's early design, dated January 1921, shows the Tennis Court, a terrace to the east of it, a swimming pool below, and proposed design for the Back Patio area, and a circular patio around the Stearns Pepper tree. The house in the Tennis Court area had been moved yet again and the Tennis Court was constructed, although family legend has it that Fred would not entertain the idea of a pool on a ranch. In a third design scheme, dated March 1923, Howard transformed the Old Garden into its present form. The plan included a formal, continuous hedge (possibly of cypress), forming an edge to the garden along the northeast side, in front of the existing screen of bamboo. It also called for curving paths enclosing four major planting beds, one of which was a large rose garden which included two small patios at the north and south corners, the latter with a sundial in the center. The design scheme for the hedge and rose garden were never executed. Also included in this design were the Music Room Patio, the octagonal Spanish style fountain and the retention of the circular patio around the Stearns Pepper tree.

The Back Patio design contained in the early scheme, called for parallel concrete paths, grass panels with a central line of palms, a high wall on the western end with a planting bed on the interior court to screen out the barnyard area beyond. The executed design contained a small rectangular pond attached to the interior of the wall. Located more than half the height of the wall is a shelf with a large terra cotta pot and a water feature which kept this vessel overflowing with water which cascaded over the shelf into the pond. Surrounding the pond was a planting bed with a collection of succulents and cacti. Two narrow concrete paths were laid parallel to the wings of the house, creating narrow planting beds between the paths and house. A new crosswalk divided the central space into two panels of grass. Queen Palms were planted down the center, with Pygmy date palms at each corner of the west panel and two Beaucarneas or Elephant foot palms planted at the north and south corners of the west grass panel.

The Native Garden, on the northern edge of the property and bordering Anaheim Road was started sometime in the early 1920s at about the same time Howard's designs were being executed. Howard is also given credit for the design of the pathways in this garden. Florence was assisted by a close friend of the family and classmate at Berkeley, Allen Chickering. Chickering was a member of the 1896 Sierra Club trip down the Sierra Range from Yosemite to Kings Canyon; a trip designed to assist Joseph LeConte, Jr., with his Sierra Club map of the High Sierra. For Chickering this was the beginning of a lifelong study of California wildflowers. It is noteworthy that a particular flowering hybrid sage introduced by the Santa Ana Botanical Gardens bears his name; the Allen Chickering Sage. Chickering suggested appropriate native plants for Florence's Native Garden.

She was also assisted by Ed Howard, a knowledgeable horticulturalist and consultant to Susanna Bixby Bryant, her sister-in-law, who was planning a native garden of her own at the Rancho Canon de Santa Ana, near what is now

Yorba Linda. By 1925 she began planting what would later become the Santa Ana Botanical Gardens. In this endeavor she employed the help of the Olmsted Brothers Firm and, who, no doubt, made the acquaintance of Florence Bixby. Ed was one of the Howard brothers, who ran the famous Howard & Smith Nursery, in Los Angeles. Ed took Florence to Ventura County on a rock collecting expedition. The rocks that form the waterfalls and line the paths of this garden are the result of that expedition. He was also responsible for transforming the slope of the garden into a series of hummocks and mounds mimicking an unspoiled natural landscape.

The Cactus Garden began around 1924 as an experiment in cultivating a spineless *Opuntia* cactus to provide an alternate fluid to water if fed to cattle waiting for shipment at a railhead or located on the arid Arizona ranches. Fred was skeptical that the spineless variety would retain this characteristic if planted next to the spiny cactus, and thus the experiment began. The spineless cacti were shipped to Los Alamitos, but illness prevented Fred from collecting the spined variety. Florence ended up with the job of having to drive out to the desert with the ranch foreman to collect plants. The spine and spineless varieties were planted at the north end of the Tennis Court, and true to Fred's prediction the spineless cactus gave up that characteristic. For Florence, the journey to the desert created a fascination for cacti and succulents. She inevitably collected books on the subject. William Hertrich, the head gardener at the Huntington Estate, also offered advice in the planning and plants for the garden. The collection of desert plants grown at the Huntington was the largest collection in one place, other than a natural desert. The diverse selection of cacti and succulents Florence put together in her garden display a real admiration for these exceptional plants.

With most of the northern side of the property laid-out Florence Bixby's attention was now on the development of the southern outer garden areas. She had made the acquaintance of the Pasadena firm of Yoch and Council through her sister Leslie Green Huntington, who had been using them in the planning and design of their Huntington estate in San Marino. Florence's idea was to create a formal walk below the line of pepper trees planted by Susan Bixby. The design by Yoch and Council proposed a formal bank on the side of the row of pepper trees and a low retaining wall on the lower side which provided a shelf for terra cotta pots of geraniums. At the west end of the walk a low wooden gazebo was constructed. The detailing of columns and capitals of the gazebo structure exemplify the simplicity of early California Mission architecture. This walk, which came to be known as the Geranium Walk and Gazebo, was designed around 1922 and completed before 1925.

In 1926, Fred and Florence took their only trip to Europe, Fred's sister Susanna had taken a mother-daughter tour of Europe before Susan returned to Los Alamitos after Fred and Florence married. Several souvenirs acquired on this

journey now reside in Florence's gardens. Used as a focal point on the Oleander Walk was an Italian sculpture called "Springtime."

In 1927, the Olmsted Brothers were commissioned to design and develop more of the southern outer gardens below the Geranium Walk. The firm was also asked to develop a new planting scheme for the Music Patio area of the Old Garden. Their first design for the southern gardens, dated February 24, 1927, was a very elaborate scheme. The proposed design shows a paved upper terrace with seating. The main Rose Garden below is laid out with grass paths and planting beds on either side. At the southern end of this garden the design showed a lower semi circular patio paved with kidney stones emphasizing floral patterns throughout the paved area. This paving scheme outlines two additional planting beds and in the center of the patio, is a tiled paving entry in the shape of a cross with seating on either side. Below the patio is an elliptical lily pond. On the east and west sides of the pond are a straight, southerly column of twenty cypress trees. To the east from the center of the Rose Garden, was a rose cutting garden with brick paths, which opened east to a long grass walk.

The walk was edged with deep herbaceous borders and framed in a series of rose covered arches. The linking of the Geranium Walk to the gardens below was accomplished by cutting through the low retaining wall and creating a short series of steps for the newly designed Cypress Patio. This path was flanked by Italian Cypress trees, clipped into tall hedges. Beyond towards Seventh Street Drive, a suggested planting of Spanish Broome, acacia and other small plants completed the transition.

The overall design was too elaborate for Mrs. Bixby. In correspondence between her and the Olmsted Brothers Firm she asks that the design be simplified and suggests changes in the planting scheme. By August 1928 the firm presented another plan. The rose cutting garden was eliminated and a small cutting garden for flowers was created between the Cypress Patio and Seventh Street Drive. Brick walks replaced grass paths and pursuant to her wishes the long walk between the Rose Garden and Cypress Patio was lined with oleanders instead of the herbaceous border. The semi-circular terrace at the southern end of the Rose Garden was installed several years later and is called the "Olive Patio" for the trees that edge the semi-circular terrace. A letter, dated April 4, 1932 shows the Olmsted Brothers' final sketch for a simply paved semi-circular patio framed with trees, and no additional planting beds, or lily pond.

In March 1927 a proposed design for a "Play Yard," later referred to as the "Secret Garden," was presented to Mrs. Bixby by the Olmsted Brothers Firm. Located at the end of the south wing of the adobe, where the tank house was, it is a small walled and gated garden that embraces a pepper tree planted by Susan Bixby. At the base of the pepper is a simple water element – a single jet of water falling into a mosaic tile basin at the base of the tree.

Being a keen and practical gardener, Florence continually exchanged and received cuttings and seeds. A friend suggested that she create a special garden where she could cultivate her garden gifts. Florence again engaged the Olmsted Brothers Firm to bring their attention to refining a small garden for just this purpose. Eventually this garden came to be known as the "Friendly Garden."

In January of 1928 they presented a plan titled "The Adobe Terrace." This was actually the design for what is now called the "Jacaranda Walk," but the "Friendly Garden" she had asked them to create was included with this plan. It is located at the south end of the Tennis Court. The gates for the garden matched those created for the Play Yard/Secret Garden designed almost a year earlier. The gate to the Tennis Court remained in place. It is relatively small and rectangular in design, limited by the slope of the knoll which drops off suddenly to the south. Originally a cypress hedge bordered this garden, but was later replaced by a trellis fence sometime in the mid-30s.

In the center of the garden is a circular pool placed at the narrowest section of the hour-glass shaped grass panel. In the center of the pool Florence placed a bronze sculpture entitled "Playdays," by Harriet Whitney Frishmuth, which was a wedding anniversary gift from her husband. Today the valuable sculpture is in the ranch house and an Italian bronze with similar size and figure is in the pool.

The Adobe Walk received that name because the soil is the same clay rich soil as the bricks of the adobe core of the ranch house. From written accounts and photographic evidence the Jacaranda trees were already in place before the plan was conceived. The walk is on the eastern edge of the site bordering the north-south axis of the Tennis Court. A central pergola anchors the walk, on which vines of Belle of Portugal roses climb while historic wisteria vines thread in and out of the wire netting of the court that defines the east edge of the Jacaranda Walk. The west side of the Pergola opens onto the Tennis Court. The eastern low retaining wall of the walk is similar to that of the walls in the south gardens. At the northern end of the walk, at the entrance to the Cactus Garden, are two large blue glazed terra cotta vessels, very much like those found in the south gardens, sitting on top of the retaining wall. Blue was the favored favorite color of Florence Bixby.

Seventh Street was extended east in 1928 and Florence engaged Paul J. Howard to design a new, curved driveway from Seventh Street to the front of the ranch house. In June of 1930 a design scheme was presented to Mrs. Bixby for a graceful, sweeping drive lined with an alternating pattern of pink oleanders and sycamore trees. Four years later, Mrs. Bixby again decided to enhance the Seventh Street entrance only this time she enlisted the help of the Olmsted Brothers Firm to design a planting plan for the drive. The design submitted by the Olmsted Brothers called for 286 trees, with emphasis on the use of pepper

and olive trees, and a large array of shrubs which included ceanothus, lemonade berry, saltbrush, and viburnum. Correspondence suggests that Mrs. Bixby may have simplified the planting recommendations for the large trees, and a lesser amount of shrubs appear to have been ordered.

The Bixby's were a very amiable family. So much so that they revived the annual Christmas parties that Fred's parents had started in the 1880s, the same year his mother passed away. Susan had not had the heart to continue these parties after her husband had passed. The first one hosted by Fred and Florence had thirty people in attendance, the last one held in 1930 had three hundred of the ranch's people, Mexicans, Belgians, Germans, Portuguese, Chinese, and country Americans, children and patriarchs, crowding into the house and spilling out on to the front lawn.

Another humanizing element that gave Los Alamitos its unique character were the June parties held annually from 1913 through 1925 for the Bixby children, their friends and numerous relatives. (These parties were later revived sporadically for Bixby grandchildren)

Florence took a special interest in the welfare of the families who lived and worked at Los Alamitos, making sure that the needs of the ill or elderly were not overlooked. It could be said Florence followed in her mother-in-law's footsteps. As much as one of Susan's contributions to the community was the raising of funds for the town's first school teacher, Florence was one of the founders and for thirty five years served on the Board of the Long Beach Day Nursery.

Oil revenues were definitely a major contributor to the success and survival of this 19th century ranch operation that had its roots merged with the land and the bounties that could be harvested from that land. Fred, like his father, also had roots in the land and invested his oil revenue surpluses in other properties in California and Arizona. During the Depression financially challenged rancher friends asked him to buy into their holdings to keep them afloat. It is also important to note that when Fred's ranch holdings operated in the red, oil revenues kept them in the black.

It is due to this anomaly that the adobe ranch house which the Bixby's called home and the Gardens Florence created and cared for even survive into the 21st century. Quite often when Fred Bixby was asked to what he attributed his success as a livestock operator, he would reply with a grin, "Oil. There's nothing puts fat on the ribs of a steer better than rubbing up against the legs of an oil derrick."

Sources: Casa de los Alamitos, HABS CA-310. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.
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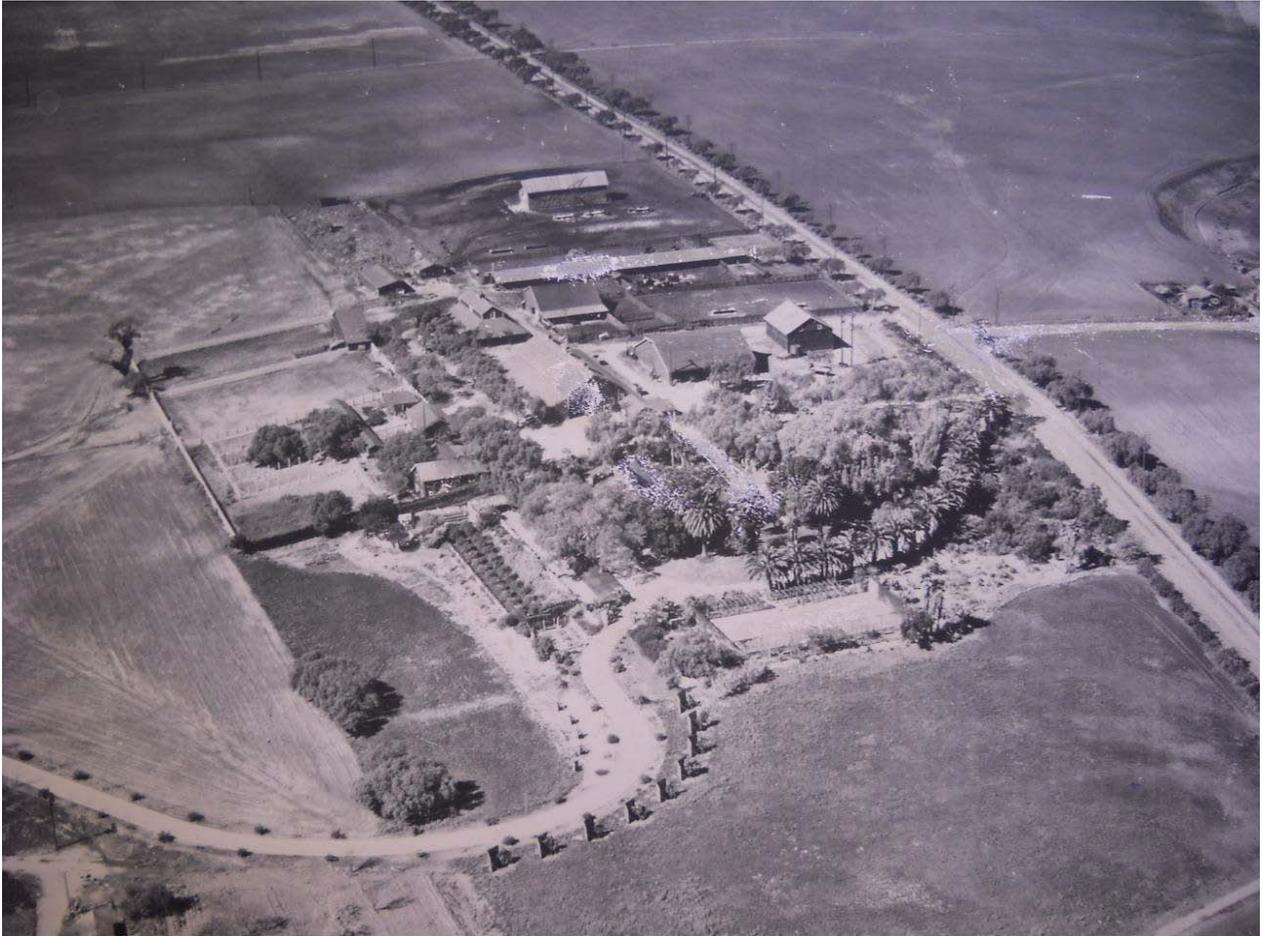
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Los Alamitos-ariel photo, c. 1936. Courtesy of the Rancho Los Alamitos Foundation.



Back Patio with the “Big Red Barn” in the background, c.1925. Courtesy of the Rancho Los Alamitos Foundation.



Cutting Garden, (Cristina Salvador Klenz, March 2011).



Cactus Garden (Fred Rachman, April 1, 2011).



Blue iris in the native garden (Fred Rachman, April 1, 2011).