

# Serrano Adobe

## Transcript of Audio Tour Visitor Tape

Welcome to the Serrano Adobe, the last remaining of the original five adobes. The Serrano's rancho, like many of the other Southern California ranchos, raised long-horned cattle, like those seen in western movies. Notice the long horns on the west wall above the fireplace. The end for many of the Mexican rancheros came after a long period of drought in the 1850's, wiping out most of the herds, the mainstay of their economic survival. Many were forced to borrow on their mortgages at high interest rates from gringo bankers in Los Angeles. This, along with bad investments and other problems between 1860 and 1880, caused most of the original Spanish Mexican Californios to lose their ranch holdings. This ranch converted from cattle to sheep after the drought in the 1860's.

After Don José's death in 1871, Doña Petra ordered the subdivision of the ranch into ten parcels and in 1876 the parcels were distributed among her children. Gradually, between 1876 and 1882, the Serrano children were forced to sell their portions of the ranch to pay off back taxes and debt. Various portions of the ranch went into different hands. Eventually most of the ranch, about 8500 acres of the original 10688 acres, were purchased by a Bostonian immigrant by the name of Dwight Whiting who, in 1884, came into California for health reasons. He heard of the availability of the Serrano ranch and paid \$24000 for it. Two of the original ten lots remained in the hands of other investors that were later to become the town site of El Toro.

Now, if you will look at the doorway and windows, you will notice the extremely thick adobe walls. Please observe the sample adobe brick on the floor next to the couch. To make an adobe brick a box must be made to form the size of the brick desired, then it is packed with adobe mud and straw and, perhaps, horse hair or manure to add cohesion. Next, the box is set in the sun to dry. When it is dry the form is taken off and you have an adobe brick. The bricks are then stacked and interwoven, one on top of the other, with adobe mud between them for a mortar. The roofs of earlier adobes were made of simple poles covered with palm thatch and tar, or chapapote in Spanish. This adobe may never have had that type of roof since it was built in the later American period and may have had a gable roof similar to the one it has now. The current roof was added in 1932 and is the second, or perhaps third, roof the adobe had.

Look around the living room and notice the house as it is today. It is actually a good deal fancier than in the days when the Serranos lived here. All of the adobe walls are original, but with a covering of plaster. The original adobe walls had a covering of limewash that prevented the mud brick from eroding from the wind and rain. The original adobe probably did not have

the solid wood doors and glass windows you see now, but cowhide strips over the windows and doorways. The floor was simply hard-packed dirt. Try sweeping the dirt from a floor like that!

The original house consisted of only three rooms, this large main room and two bedrooms that flank the corridor to the rear. Additions were made to the adobe by subsequent owners, including the dining room you see at the end of the hall. The adobe as seen today is primarily the result of an extensive restoration and modernization done by George and Mary Whiting in 1932 when the state historical landmark commission made this building #199 of the state historical landmarks. At the time the doors, windows, fireplace, red tile flooring, and the current roof were added. Also, several additions were made to the back of the house.

During the Whiting ownership the house was furnished with Victorian furniture brought from New England. Most likely, the furniture was shipped to California on a tall-masted ship which sailed around the tip of South America and up the west coast to California. After unloading goods at the old McFadden landing in Newport Beach, the furniture was brought to Saddleback Valley in wagons pulled by horses. The furnishings of the front room did not belong to the Serrano family with the exception of the large pulley on the floor in front of the wood bench seat. All of the other furnishings are additions by subsequent owners, including the Whitings. Today, the only piece of Whiting furniture in the main room is the little desk in the corner which belonged to Mary Whiting. The other desk, with the Burl wood inlays, belonged to V P Baker.

Now, please turn and look down the hall and observe the worn thresholds from years of wear. The Rosewood armoire and marble top dresser in the hall are both original Whiting family pieces. The dining room at the end of the hall originally was an enclosed patio with an adobe wall which possibly enclosed a brick or horno oven for baking in charcoal braziers or cooking or frying. Mexican adobes typically did not have kitchen facilities indoors but were in patios attached to the outside of the adobe. Just outside the back door we have created a replica of a typical cooking area of the Serrano period. After your inside tour you may take a walk around the west side of the building to view the outdoor kitchen.

If you were on a docent-led tour you would view the other rooms in the house which include the two furnished bedrooms, one of which was a stable for the animals. The structure was converted into a bedroom using the original width of the stable. Therefore, the room is not made of the adobe brick as is the original section of the adobe. The park office was originally a bedroom and converted to a reception area when the park opened to the public in 1982.