

HERITAGE HILL NEW TIMELINE SIGNS

BELOW YOU CAN READ THE TEXT OF THE FIVE MAIN SIGNS LOCATED THROUGHOUT THE PARK



NATIVE WAYS

The Acjachemen and Tongva weave local resources into their culture.

Orange County's early inhabitants, the Acjachemen and Tongva, have a history that dates thousands of years, long before the arrival of Europeans. Here in what is now called Saddleback Valley, grasslands and woodlands spread across the valley floor, not yet replaced by concrete and asphalt. Chaparral-cloaked foothills and forests still rise to the east. The coastal strand and ocean still beckon to the west.

Historically, these people found ample resources to sustain their lives and culture on this land. From mountains to coast, small game, birds, plants, and fish and shellfish supplied everything from food and fiber to medicine and musical instruments.

Each fall people harvested acorns from oaks and stored them in granaries like this one. They gathered the shoots of willow for basketry, the bark for skirts and other clothing, and the wood for making canoes, furniture, and houses like this kiicha. Constructed of willow branches and tules, a kiicha is a remarkably well insulated structure.

Picture captions read:

Many of the plants used by the Acjachemen and Tongva continue to enrich their culture. Today, tribal members still come together, gather plants, and keep their traditions alive.

CIRCA 14,000 YEARS AGO

First people to inhabit North America, the Paleo-Indians, shared the land with ice age animals like mammoths, giant ground sloths, and saber-toothed cats.

CIRCA 8,000 YEARS AGO

People of southern California manufactured stone tools, mortars, and pestles to grind seeds.

CIRCA 1,500 YEARS AGO

Uto-Aztecan speaking people migrated to this land and developed communities that would create the Acjachemen and Tongva culture.

FOOTSTEPS AND HOOFFPRINTS

Spain left an indelible mark on California's land and people.



By the time Spain began exploring this region, the Acjachemen and Tongva had lived on the land for thousands of years. In 1542, on behalf of the Spanish Empire, Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo sailed past their coastal villages in search of fabled riches and water passage. In 1602, Sebastian Vizcaino launched a second expedition to map California's coastline. Yet despite these journeys and Spain's claim to this land, the region had yet to be colonized by Europeans.

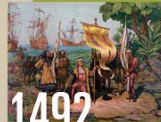
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would change this. Their journey led to the establishment of presidios, missions, and pueblos stretching from San Diego to Sonoma. Spain placed a foot hold on Alta California, controlling it politically and leaving a heavy footprint on both the land and people. Grazing practices and non-native seeds transformed California's native grasslands. Labor practices transformed California's native people.

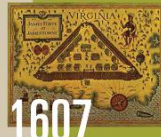
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Other Events



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Christopher Columbus sailed to the "New World."



1607
America's first permanent English colony, Jamestown, was founded in Virginia.



1776
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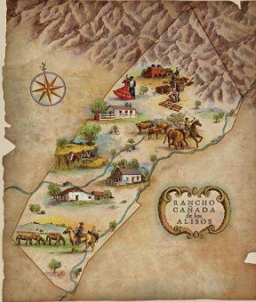
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THE RANCHO ERA

For a time, ranchos reigned and cattle was king.



California's mission system lasted 65 years. By 1834, the adobe buildings and walls had begun to decay and the labor force was all but gone. Having already broken away from Spanish rule, Mexico confiscated the missions' assets and acreage, redistributing them as privately-owned ranchos.

Retired soldiers and others petitioned the Mexican governor of California, Pio Pico, for their own land grants. In 1842, one of those soldiers, José Antonio Fernando Serrano, received Rancho Cañada de los Alisos. Spanning nearly 11,000 acres, it included the land you are standing on. The Serrano family built five adobe homes on their rancho, including this one. Life on the rancho revolved around managing crops, cattle, and prized racing horses. As with the Acjachemen and Tongva, it also meant relying on local natural resources, like clay soil for adobe bricks and water from Aliso and Serrano Creeks. That reliance could spell doom when resources evaporated. Great droughts occurred in the 1850s and 1860s. Pastures withered and the herds starved. Rancho finances were as parched as the soil.

Cattle was no longer king, disappearing along with the one-crop economy and debt-saddled ranchos. A new era loomed on the horizon.



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EL TORO, THE EARLY YEARS

Ranchos gave way to ranches by the 1880s.

Arriving from Boston in 1884, Dwight Whiting began buying the foreclosed upon acreage of Rancho Canada de los Alisos. He augmented the crops with dry-farmed orchards of olives and apricots and subdivided the land. Intent on establishing an English colony and attracting people to it, he built the church you see, St. George Episcopal Mission, in 1891.



Around 1910, John Osterman introduced the water-thrifty black-eye bean to the valley's farmers. Those beans, as well as barley, apricots, and walnuts dominated the valley landscape. While these crops fueled the local economy, the farmers' gut instincts fueled the practice of dry-farming. Until water supplies were secured, people would need to gamble with the weather.



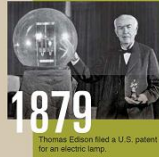
Other visionaries influenced the development of Saddleback Valley as well. In 1877, Charles Bennett purchased land that included water rights from Aliso Creek. That water eventually found its way via pipeline to El Toro, ushering in the development of the rural town. The school you see, El Toro School, was built in 1890.



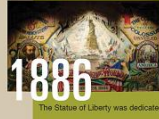
As well technology improved and water supplies became reliable, crops shifted. Growers, including Harvey Bennett, Warren Gray, Ben Osterman, and Dwight Whiting, replaced barley and beans with oranges. By the **1920s**, citrus had become king.



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SUBURBAN SADDLEBACK

By the 20th century, water and wealth saturated the land.



By the 1920s, orange trees dominated the valley's landscape and economy. Sleepy outposts became small towns anchored by general stores, community halls, and packing houses. Water supplies, though barely adequate, sustained life in town and field.

This changed by midcentury when the region tapped into the imported water supplies of Metropolitan Water District. With water now flowing from the Colorado River and California State Water Project, a different

industry was about to take hold. Places like the Bennett ranch house became increasingly rare, icons from a distant era. Built in 1908 and originally standing at 2nd Street and Cherry Avenue, the building is significant as the only remaining turn-of-the-century ranch house in El Toro.

By the 1950s, housing tracts and subdivisions began replacing the citrus orchards. As quickly as orange trees were bulldozed, places like Laguna Woods (Leisure World) and Mission Viejo sprang up. The century-old eucalyptus groves that shade Lake Forest (El Toro) are the legacy of Dwight Whiting. Like the buildings that stand at Heritage Hill Historical Park, they help link us to the past.

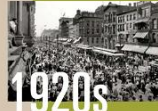
1963 In 1963, one million people lived in Orange County. Today that number exceeds three million.



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Additional signs:



WELCOME TO
HERITAGE HILL
HISTORICAL PARK.

One of Orange County's premier historical parks, Heritage Hill offers a rare glimpse of the past. Here you can learn about the County's past from farming to prehistory through historic buildings, replica structures, and artifacts. The region's history comes alive through daily guided walks, weekly programs, and seasonal celebrations.


HOURS
 Tuesday - Saturday
 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
 (Closed Sunday and Monday)
 Closed on County Holidays.

For more information, please contact the Park office at 949-923-2230 or visit ocparks.com

OCparks


A Walk Across Time


Take a walk back in time at Heritage Hill Historical Park. Visit our historic buildings, replica kiicha, and other exhibits. As you view the collection and read the signs, the region's history will come alive. Discover how it aligns with the nation's history and how the land's resources charted Saddleback Valley's development.



The kiicha replica and acorn granary represent Acjachemen and Tongva village life before Europeans arrived.


The Mexican Rancho era is typified by the circa 1863 Serrano Adobe.






The 1890 El Toro Grammar School and 1891 St. George's Episcopal Mission are representative of the founding of El Toro.

The citrus farming days of the early twentieth century are called to mind by the 1908 Harvey Bennett Ranch House.



OCparks



OCparks

Whisler Ranch Grain Tower

A remnant of the nearby Whisler Ranch, this grain tower once held barley to feed livestock. Constructed in the 1910s, the tower received grain from a hatch at the top. The grain was released into a truck bed through a spout at the bottom.

The Whisler family arrived in Orange County in 1874. They eventually settled five miles east of El Toro, a nascent town surrounded by crops and livestock.