

SERRANO ADOBE

The Serrano Adobe, built about 1863, is the oldest surviving house in Saddleback Valley and one of the best preserved Mexican Rancho era adobes in Orange County. It is the second of 5 adobe homes built by the Serrano family on the Rancho Cañada de los Alisos (Sycamore Canyon Ranch) and is the only one of the five adobes still remaining.

The adobe originally consisted of three rooms, a large rectangular front room and two bedrooms flanking a corridor. At the rear of the house, there would probably have been a brick oven for baking and charcoal braziers for frying and cooking. The original house had hard-packed dirt floors, a different roof than today's roof, and fewer windows than the building has today.

Don José Antonio Fernando Serrano, grantee of the Rancho Cañada de los Alisos, was a member of prominent Southern California family. His father, Don Francisco Serrano, served as "alcalde", or mayor, of the pueblo of Los Angeles in 1790. Don José also was a man of importance as he was "Juez del Campo", a judge of the plains. In this position, he was the arbitrator of disputes, also controlling the "recogidas", the annual gathering of the horses, and the rodeos. Don José married Petra Avila, from another proud California family, and it is believed that they had thirteen children.

The ranch was devoted principally to raising livestock, including cattle, horses, and sheep. The ranch included a rodeo ground and a racetrack for entertaining guests at the many fiestas. Don José also maintained fruit orchards, a vegetable garden and vineyards near the main ranch house on Aliso Creek.

Don José died in 1870, and the ranch passed to his widow, Doña Petra Avila de Serrano, while her son Rupherto José, was named administrator of the estate. In 1876, the widow had the ranch divided into 10 lots and distributed among her children. Lot No. 10 that included the Serrano Adobe at Heritage Hill became the property of Rupherto José.

The Serrano heirs lost most of the ranch between 1878 and 1884 through debt, bad business deals and back taxes. In 1884, Dwight Whiting, a Bostonian, bought eight of the ten original lots for \$23,000, or about \$2.70 per acre. Whiting granted the concession for the construction of a railroad line through the ranch and was one of the founders of Aliso City, later renamed El Toro. He also succeeded in attracting English colonists to the area to raise fruit.

The Serrano-Whiting Adobe was used as a caretaker's home. Stanley Goode, Sr., superintendent of the Whiting Ranch, and Dwight's son, George, made extensive renovations and additions to the Adobe in the 1930s.

In 1958, the Whiting heirs sold 5,000 acres to Mr. and Mrs. V. P. Baker, who used the Adobe as a vacation home. In 1969, the Bakers sold their ranch including the Serrano Adobe to Occidental Petroleum with the stipulation that the Serrano Adobe would be preserved as an historic site. Occidental Petroleum deeded 55 acres along Serrano Creek to the County of Orange for a community park in 1974, which included the Serrano Adobe site and 4 acres around it for the development of an historic site.