

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received **AUG 15 1986**

date entered **SEP 11**

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic Forster, Frank A., House

and/or common N/A

**2. Location**

street & number 27182 Ortega Highway N/A not for publication

city, town San Juan Capistrano N/A vicinity of

state California code 06 county Orange code 059

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name Martha A. and Richard H. Gresham

street & number 31406 Via La Senda

city, town San Juan Capistrano N/A vicinity of state CA 92675

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Orange County Hall of Records, Orange County Recorders Office

street & number 630 North Broadway

city, town Santa Ana state CA 92701

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title City of San Juan Capistrano Inventory of Historic Sites has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1976  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records City of San Juan Capistrano

city, town 32400 Paseo Adelanto, San Juan Capistrano state CA 92675

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## 7. Description

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**Condition** excellent good fair deteriorated ruins unexposed**Check one** unaltered altered**Check one** original site moveddate N/A

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**Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance**

The Frank A. Forster house is situated on a tree shaded knoll on the south side of the Ortega Highway. It is highly visible to travelers on Interstate 5 and State Highway 74. The architects were Robert F. Train and Robert E. Williams who designed the residence for Frank A. Forster and completed construction in 1910. The architecture is Mission Revival, the only residence of this style left in San Juan Capistrano and the vicinity. It is a rectangular two-story single dwelling with a full basement, approximately 6,000 square feet in all. The basement and the first floor are solid reinforced concrete up to the second floor. Construction of the second floor consists of wood framing with plaster. The outside of the house and the porches are finished in a heavy textured stucco. The roof shape on all four sides is "Española" (Mission Style), and the roof still has its original mission tile. The house had been allowed to deteriorate, but was recently restored for use as an interior designer's showroom.

When entering the property from the Ortega Highway, the driveway leads to a wide covered porch, with six arches, that runs on the north side the length of the building. The porch continues on the west side approximately half the length with four arches. The floor is square tile. On the east side is a Pergola consisting of five large, wooden columns in the Tuscan Style. The Pergola is covered by twenty end-notched beams, fifteen of which are the original beams. On the south side, opposite the kitchen, is a small two-story outbuilding called the well house. Originally, it had four stories and supplied water to the house via gravity and a gasoline driven pump. The pump was on the ground floor. The second floor, opposite the kitchen, was the servants' quarters and storeroom, which connected to the kitchen with a landing and a stairway that was located between the two buildings. There were additional rooms on the third floor. The wooden water tank was on top. The third and fourth floors were torn down in 1950. The main entrance is reached from the east side by a wide concrete stairway that goes up to the porch on the north side.

The front door opens up to a large entry hall with a wide wooden staircase going up to the second floor. At the first landing is a small bay window facing east. The living room is on the north side with a large bay window and a massive fireplace that shows fancy rock work. It is believed that the rocks came from the beach at Salt Creek near South Laguna. The rocks are flat with edges rounded by natural abrasive action. They are set in mortar in roughly horizontal planes with larger cobbles forming corners. An elliptical arch of rocks on end delineates the fireplace opening, while a smaller stilted Roman Arch forms a small niche in the center of the fireplace above the mantel.

The dining room is immediately to the south. It features a big built-in buffet. To the rear of the dining room is a small room. Its shape is half hexagonal and was referred to as the "fernery". The kitchen is adjacent and contains the original built-in cupboards. The counter surface used to be wood but was replaced with tile in 1940. It still has the original cold storage space with wire racks used to keep vegetables fresh. Next to the kitchen is a "utility room" with a door leading to the landing that connects to the servants' quarters in the well house. There is also a small bathroom. Next to the entry hall is a room facing east which was used as a den or library. The

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

**Specific dates** 1909-1910

**Builder/Architect** Train & Williams

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

The Frank A. Forster house is of great significance since it is one of the few structures in San Juan Capistrano that was designed in the Mission Revival Style. Built by the Architects Robert Farquar Train and Robert Edmund Williams, it is the last major residence of its style remaining in the city. It was designed for a prominent local resident, Frank A. Forster.

The L.A. Times published, on March 28, 1909, an article about the plans for this house with the artist's rendering of the mansion signed "R.E. Williams". When Frank Forster chose the firm of Train and Williams for his future residence, the architects were inspired by the nearby historic Mission in San Juan Capistrano, and executed the design in the popular Mission Revival of the period. This building is an exceptional example of its type and period, displaying all of the hallmarks of the style.

The major points of significance to be noted in considering this property for the National Register of Historic Places are:

1. The relatively unaltered appearance of the Mission Revival design, the finest remaining example in San Juan Capistrano and the vicinity, the highly visible Espadaña roof shape, arcade and pergola supported by Tuscan columns, mark an unusually fine example of this popular California style of the early 20th century.
2. The architects' use of reinforced concrete throughout the basement, the entire first floor, the arches of the porch and balcony above. This was still a relatively new material in those days. In addition, the combination of wood framing and heavy plaster for the construction of the second floor and the heavy textured stucco on the entire exterior make this building unusual.
3. Aside from the architecture, it is an outstanding example of an era gone by. The Forster family, at that time, were very prominent and influential in Orange County and San Juan Capistrano as ranchers and landowners.

Frank A. Forster was the second child born to Don Marco and Guadalupe Forster on July 4, 1882. He followed in his predecessors' footsteps by becoming a rancher and was in partnership with his brother, John O. Forster. They owned and managed 3,500 acres in San Juan Capistrano, growing barley and walnuts and raising cattle. Frank married Ada B. Haskell in 1894. They had five children. After completion of the mansion in 1910, he lived there until his death on July 4, 1939. His widow remained in the house until her death May 6, 1950. At one time, the Forsters had several mansions in San Juan Capistrano. All of them have since been destroyed, leaving the Frank A. Forster house the only one remaining.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

PAM HALLAN - DOS CIENTOS ANOS EN SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO, Lehmann Publishing Company, Irvine, California, 1975  
ARMOR - HISTORY OF ORANGE COUNTY 1911, page 609  
LA TIMES - PART V, FRONT PAGE, March 28, 1909

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 0.66 acre

Quadrangle name San Juan Capistrano

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

### UTM References

A 

1	1	4	3	9	1	3	0	3	7	0	7	0	1	0
Zone		Easting						Northing						

B 

Zone		Easting						Northing						

C 

Zone		Easting						Northing						

D 

Zone		Easting						Northing						

E 

Zone		Easting						Northing						

F 

Zone		Easting						Northing						

G 

Zone		Easting						Northing						

H 

Zone		Easting						Northing						

**Verbal boundary description and justification** Northside 125' frontage along Ortega Highway, State Highway #74; on the east side 223.57'; on the south 125.18'; on the west side 235.72'. Boundaries are drawn upon the lot lines which encompass the historic building and its grounds. Lot 89, Assessors Parcel #666-241-3 (Parcel 1 of Parcel Map 85-328).

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county N/A code

state N/A code county N/A code

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Ilse M. Byrnes

organization N/A

date 3-1-1984

street & number Postal Drawer 1029

telephone (714) 493-4222

city or town San Juan Capistrano

state CA 92693

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

*Kathryn Gualtieri*

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date 8/8/86

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

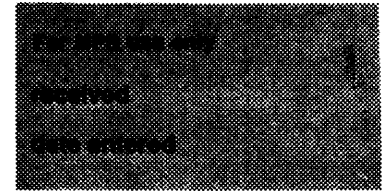
*Alison Byrnes*  
Special Agent in Charge

Area

Comments

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entry hall, living and dining rooms have beam ceilings. The dining room is the only room in the house with wainscot paneling three fourths up the wall. The wall space above the wainscot was painted. An additional narrow stairway is located next to the kitchen which enabled servants to reach the second floor or the basement unnoticed. A door in the entry hall hides the stairway. Wood used throughout the house is fir, and the floors are oak-tongue/groove, double layered. All the hardware is original, most of which is brass.

When the house was first built, it had gas lighting which was later changed to electricity. The second floor contains five bedrooms and a bath. Bedrooms facing north and west have two French doors that open to the wide balcony with tile floor which is on top of the arched porch below.

A room on the south side was a covered balcony at first, which was used as a sleeping porch. It was later enclosed to provide an additional bedroom, in approximately 1925. All the windows are the originals. Many of them are double-hung and still have the original weights. Only the ropes had to be replaced. Window and door sills are solid concrete. The concrete walls on the balcony appear to have been poured in sections.

Mr. and Mrs. Gresham have restored the house to its former splendor. They closely followed the original interior/exterior design with no additions or alterations.

Since the death of Mrs. Ada Forster (wife of Frank A. Forster) in 1950, the house had not been kept up until now. In spite of the many years of neglect, restoration did not require a major undertaking since this house was structurally sound due in part to its solid construction of reinforced concrete and the heavy textured stucco.

In summary, the restoration work consisted of:

- painting the entire interior, staining the wood
- replacing glass in one window
- replacing all the ropes on the double-hung windows, keeping the original weights, replacing five beams over the Pergola, re-stuccoing one side of the Espadaña wall and the ceiling of the porches, as seen in photos number one and three replacing the stairway between the house and the well house,
- fumigating the entire structure.

The garden has been neglected for many years and the Greshams are renovating it. Several large trees did survive. They are:

California Sycamore  
Torrey Pine  
Queen Palm  
Eucalyptus  
Palm - single stem (Chamaerops Humilis)

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The nominated property is a 0.66 acre parcel (Parcel 1 on Parcel Map 85-328) which includes the house and surrounding grounds. An adjacent parcel (Parcel 2) is a vacant lot with no associated historic features. This part of the property is now used as a gravel-covered parking lot for the interior design studio. Boundaries have been drawn to encompass Parcel 1 only; Parcel 2 is not part of the nomination.