

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	APR 22 1976
DATE ENTERED	MAY 24 1976

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC *nh*  
  JOSE SERRANO ADOBE

AND/OR COMMON  
SERRANO ADOBE

**LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER  
21802 Serrano Road

CITY, TOWN  
El Toro

--- NOT FOR PUBLICATION  
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT  
40th 39

STATE  
California

--- VICINITY OF  
CODE  
92630

COUNTY  
Orange

CODE  
59

**CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME  
County of Orange, California - Environmental Management Agency,  
Development Div.

STREET & NUMBER  
400 Civic Center Drive West, P.O. Box 1078

CITY, TOWN  
Santa Ana

STATE  
California

--- VICINITY OF

**LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT AGENCY  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Orange County Recorder and at above address

STREET & NUMBER  
630 N. Broadway

CITY, TOWN  
Santa Ana

STATE  
California

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE  
California State Historical Landmark (No. 199)

DATE  
June 20, 1935

--- FEDERAL  STATE --- COUNTY --- LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS  
California Department of Parks and Recreation

CITY, TOWN  
Sacramento

STATE  
California

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

---

## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

This was originally a classic U-shaped adobe, almost rectangular, 38'2" x 40'2". Interior measurements of the living room are 34'7" x 15'7-1/2". There are two (2) wing bedrooms, 12'6-1/2" x 13'5" and 10'6" x 12'9", interior measurements. These were separated by a 7'1" wide corridor which was originally open to the north to the outdoor food preparation area; the hallway is now roofed and leads to the frame additions of kitchen, dining area and third bedroom (master bedroom), added in 1932. Before 1932 a frame addition (which became two bathrooms and a den) had been added outside the west adobe wall. The west wall of the added north master bedroom is of original adobe, an extension of the west wall of the original east bedroom. This long wall is described by a local resident who remembers the house before restoration as the wall that shut off from the house's open corridor the stable yard where domestic animals were kept. Its south wall was the rear of the original east bedroom and its two other walls were of wood. The thickness of the adobe brick walls measures 21-22" in thickness.

It is not definitely known, but assumed, that the original roof was shingles. This roof was replaced with a shingle roof about 1915, to preserve the walls from disintegration. The low pitched roof extends to cover the front porch on the south, 9'11" x 38'2", across the front of the living room. It is not known whether the 1915 roof was replaced in the 1932 renovation. It is assumed that the original floors were dirt; a Serrano descendant does not remember any signs of wood floors in the ruined building. In 1932 new floors of large, rough burnt adobe floor tiles were laid throughout the house and the porch. Walls were plastered inside and out, some doors and windows were changed or added, and a fireplace built in the northwest corner of the living room. Electricity was also added.

Three large pepper trees (*Schinus molle*) are the primary tree vegetation on the adobe site. The largest one may date from the Serrano era. Also present are eucalyptus (see section 8) and lemon trees, oleanders and other introduced plants, not associated with the original adobe which would have been surrounded by bare swept earth. Original plantings in the vicinity of the adobe were probably pepper, olive, peach, pomegranate and a few other trees, plus rosebushes, geraniums and grapevines, such as would grow without artificial watering.

Conspicuous native plants still grow within 100 yards of the adobe, such as elderberry (*Sambucus mexicana*), mulefat (*Baccharis glutinosa*), coyote brush (*B. pilularis*), lemonadeberry (*Rhus integrifolia*), toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*), coastal sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*) and California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*). All were utilized by Indian and/or Mexican inhabitants.

A floor plan is enclosed.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW

<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input checked="" 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 checked="" 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 checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES original construction circa 1856-1860/ alterations 1932 BUILDER/ARCHITECT Jose Serrano and family and Indian and Mexican labor

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Francisco Serrano, according to Marie Northrop, California's foremost authority on the old Spanish families, came to California in 1780 and is mentioned in the San Diego Garrison list of 1782.

Francisco is known to have served in the escolta at missions San Gabriel and San Juan Capistrano. The retired corporal of the San Diego Company, and one-time major-domo of Mission San Luis Rey, died in San Diego on March 27, 1808.

Jose Antonio Serrano, the youngest son of Francisco and his wife, Maria Silvas, was baptized April 16, 1804, at San Juan Capistrano. He married Maria Petra Avila about 1829. She bore him at least ten children. Jose Antonio and his wife are listed in the Mexican Census of 1836 as landed proprietors with a home in the Los Angeles Pueblo. Their names and those of three additional children appear in the Mexican Census of 1844.

The Los Angeles Archives mentions Jose Serrano in March of 1941. Santiago Arguello, prefect for the District, accused Serrano of establishing a ranchhouse and corrals on land that was not his, but which was later his by grant. Jose received what was later confirmed as 10,668.01 acres in two separate grants from Mexican Governors Juan B. Alvarado (May 3, 1842) and Pio Pico (May 27, 1846) of the Aliso Creek land upon which he was squatting near El Camino Real. This became his Rancho Canada de los Alisos ("Glen of the Alders", though the term 'aliso' is recognized as referring to the sycamore tree). The boundaries are roughly El Camino Real (The King's Highway - presently along Interstate 5) to the west, Aliso Creek and Rancho Trabuco to the south, Santiago Road and Cleveland National Forest to the east and Ranchos San Joaquin and Lomas de Santiago to the north.

In 1821, Mexico gained its independence from Spain. The secularization of the missions, although begun in theory during Spanish rule, was forcibly and greatly hastened under Mexico. Despite the original purpose of secularization, its effect was to cause the lands of the church to pass

**9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Fox, Clara Mason, *A History of El Toro*, c. circa 1937 (reprinted)  
 Priestley, Herbert Graham, (translator and annotator), *A Historical, Political and Natural Description of California* by Pedro Fages, written for the Viceroy in 1775. 1972 reprint of U.C. Press 1937.  
 Rischard, Ted, (ed.), *Saddleback Ancestors: Rancho Families of Orange County, Calif.*, Orange County Genealogical Society, 1969.  
 Roberts, C. E., *Adobes of Orange County, Calif.*, W.P.A. project #3105, 1936

**10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 5

UTM REFERENCES

A	11	4	3,6	13	0	37	2,3	10,3	0	B					
	ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING						
C						D									

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

N. A. - less than 10 acres

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
N. A.			
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

**11 FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME / TITLE

Charlotte Irons, Park Ranger/Historian February 6, 1976

ORGANIZATION

Orange County Environmental Management Agency, Development, Public Recreational Facilities Div.

STREET & NUMBER

400 Civic Center Drive West

TELEPHONE

(714) 834-4725

CITY OR TOWN

Santa Ana

STATE

California

**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

*Herbert Rhodes*

TITLE

SHPO

DATE

4/16/76

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

**ATTEST**

*Vernon R. Jones*  
*Charles [unclear]*

DATE

8/24/96

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE

5.14.76

**ATTEST**

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
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Title: Historical Landmarks of Orange County (no. 77)

Date: May 1969 COUNTY

Depository: Environmental Management Agency - Advanced Planning  
and/or Development Divisions

City: Santa Ana State: California

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into the hands of Mexican grantees. Jose's grant had once been a part of Mission San Juan Capistrano. Most of the grantees of land were former soldiers or their sons.

A southern California rancho depended on the hides of its cattle, tallow rendered from the carcasses, sometimes its pickled meat, and even the horns for barter with the Boston men who brought the luxuries of the world to California's shore. Jose Serrano could well have carted his hides to the place Dana described in *Two Years Before the Mast*,<sup>1</sup> near San Juan Capistrano and the Serrano rancho.

The former neophytes of the nearby Mission San Juan Capistrano found employment on the Serrano rancho as vaqueros, farmers, servants, and shepherds. Serrano also raised watermelons, grapes, beans, lentils, and corn. The horses of the rancho were some of the finest in southern California.

On January 5, 1847, Serrano was the unwilling host to the American invasion forces under Stockton and Kearny. Serrano and his family are widely remembered in the memoirs of early pioneers for their exemplary hospitality and courtesy; however, on this day the Americans reported that all they could find at "Alisos"<sup>2</sup> was a spring of good water --- nothing to eat.

In 1856, District Court Judge Benjamin Hayes stopped at Serrano's. He reported, "Senor Serrano manages to raise a patch of corn, watermelons, etc...He has a vineyard farther above, a couple of hundred cattle, and, if I rightly remember, thirteen children."<sup>3</sup>

Serrano and his sons eventually built five adobes on the rancho. The first adobe was on the north side of Aliso Creek, near El Camino Real. The adobe of Serrano's brother-in-law, Juan Avila, was a short distance away, on Rancho Trabuco near the south side of Aliso Creek near El Camino Real. As Serrano's sons grew up, married and established their own families, new adobes were built upstream. Jose Anastacio de los Reyes, the fourth son, built the Reyes Serrano adobe. Francisco, younger than Reyes, built an adobe upstream from his older brother, and Joaquin, third son, built an adobe near Aliso Creek. As the family and the population of the area grew, the first adobe became too small to accommodate the numerous visiting friends and relatives,

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so around 1856-1860, a new adobe was constructed on the low hill near Serrano Creek, then called Canada del Toro. (Diary accounts prior to 1856, namely the diary of Judge Benjamin Hayes, mentions the Jose Serrano Adobe as being near Aliso Creek. After 1860, it is mentioned in its present locale). It is this adobe which is being registered and preserved in the community park. This alone, of the five adobes built by the Serrano family, has survived the ensuing century. The remains of the Joaquin Serrano Adobe (the foundation) can still be found along Aliso Creek. ✓

The drought of 1862 destroyed most of the ranchos in the area, including Serrano's. Thousands of cattle died and Serrano borrowed money at fantastic interest rates, using his lands as collateral. He went into bankruptcy and his land was foreclosed by Los Angeles banker Slauson. His family was dispossessed but remained in the area, as Don Jose had purchased government claims 4 miles east of the Adobe near present Cook's Corner area (intersection of El Toro, Santiago and Live Oak Canyon Roads). Jose Serrano died there in 1870 at age 63. Descendants still own and occupy portions of this land. Slauson, meanwhile, divided the Rancho into 10 parcels, and leased a portion of the ranch to Juan Gless and sons, who raised sheep. Gless lived for a time in the Serrano Adobe, his children being born there. When the drought ended, new families arrived in the El Toro area. A Mr. Eldred was the first to buy a portion of the Rancho from Slauson, and he and his wife lived in the ranch house. The Eldreds and other new settlers in the El Toro area raised cattle and sheep, planted vineyards and fruit trees.

In 1884, Dwight Whiting of Boston bought the Adobe and about 10,000 acres of surrounding ranch lands, including the Eldred interests. By 1886, most of the El Toro (Saddleback) Valley was planted in grapes. A blight, called Anaheim Disease, struck, and in a short time the grape vines were dead. Oranges and walnuts were planted to replace the vineyards. Whiting dreamed of establishing a new town, populated by English gentlemen farmers. He made a right-of-way conveyance to the San Bernardino and San Diego Railway Co. in 1887, provided that the line would be operational within 18 months. The town of Aliso City (El Toro) was founded in 1887, about 2 years before the County of Orange was formed and separated from Los Angeles. ✓

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The first "Aliso City" station agent built a 2-story hotel-store-post office across from the railroad tracks at El Toro Road. Dwight Whiting brought his wife and baby daughter first to the hotel, then to a house which he built on the knoll where the Reyes Serrano Adobe had been. After a short while he improved the Jose Serrano "new" adobe, and he and his family stayed there a year or so, then moved to a permanent home in Los Angeles, using the Adobe for a ranch house and hunting lodge while keeping a caretaker in it. Prior to the Whiting improvements mentioned here, the Adobe was occupied by a succession of tenant farmers, most of whom tried briefly and unsuccessfully to raise grain on the clay soil, and by occasional squatters. It then became prey to vandals and "treasure" hunters. Stanley Goods, Sr., superintendent of the Whiting Ranch from 1913-1918, had the Adobe reroofed around 1915 to preserve the slumping walls.

Whiting's attempts to establish an English colony brought a number of families to the area. By this time, a craze for eucalyptus had started, and in 1904, Dwight Whiting hired A. C. Carle to come to the ranch and raise the trees. A 400 acre grove, containing 40-50,000 trees, was planted (too close together for ideal conditions). By the time the trees were grown, the dream of eucalyptus had faded. The trees were not good for railroad ties, pilings, poles or furniture, as they do not cure properly. A naturally crooked grain makes them split when they dry. They were therefore utilized as windbreaks and the entire project termed "Whiting's Folly".

By 1932, the orange groves that made this county famous and other fruit trees were well established in the El Toro area. The Whitings structurally restored the Adobe, plastering its 22" thick walls, adding extra rooms, new windows, doors and a fireplace, and tiling its dirt floor with burnt adobe tiles. (See #7 Description). Little change has since occurred structurally, except certain security measures such as fencing of the property and some reshingling, rewiring and other preventative maintenance now in progress to secure the Adobe for the time being. The house stands today much as it was when restored 44 years ago.

V. P. Baker, et al, purchased the Adobe and the rancho from the Whitings in 1958, and with his wife spent a great deal of time and money refurnishing the Adobe. The Whiting furnishings were given to charity prior to the sale, and Mrs. Baker was able to locate many of the pieces, repurchase them, and return them to the Adobe. This includes the armoire in the hallway which is completely pegged together

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(no nails). Also salvaged were 2 marble-topped dressing tables, another closet and some knick-knacks. The rest of the furnishings are either from antique shops and estate sales, or else they are replicas commissioned in Mexico and Southern California. The carpeting is from Spain (Spanish bridal rugs), with a Victorian throw rug and one American Indian blanket.

In 1969, the Bakers sold the Adobe property and surrounding acreage to Deane Bros. (later incorporated into Occidental Petroleum, Land Development Division). The stipulation was that the Adobe be deeded to a public agency and preserved as a tribute to the Days of the Ranchos which were such a contributing factor to the history of Orange County and to all of California. Though Occidental is constructing its Lake Forest subdivision project nearby (this name taken from the groves of Whiting's eucalyptus), approximately 56 acres of the original Rancho Canada de los Alisos will be preserved as part of Serrano Creek Community Park. The Orange County Environmental Management Agency - Development, Public Recreational Facilities Division, which acquired the property in 1974, has future plans for an "historical village" at the Adobe site. It is proposed to move the old St. George's Episcopal Church, built in 1891, and the Old El Toro Schoolhouse, built in 1886 and later utilized as St. Anthony's Catholic Church, to sites on land near the Serrano Adobe. The "history village" and eucalyptus groves planted by Whiting would be prominent features and attractions of the Park.

To recapitulate:-the property was owned by Jose Serrano from 1842-1870 (28 years), with the Adobe in question being built sometime between 1856 and 1860. This house was occupied by the Serrano family for approximately 10 years (from 1860-1870).

- the ranch was owned by the Whitings from 1884-1958 (78 years), with the Adobe used on and off, and substantially restored in 1932.

-the Bakers, et al, owned the property from 1958-1969, and refurnished it.

-Occidental Petroleum (ownership 1969-1974) deeded the Adobe to the County of Orange in 1974 for preservation and recreational (interpretive) use.

-the County of Orange, Environmental Management Agency, will construct a Community Park extending northwest from the Serrano Adobe property. Plans also call for an "historical village" site next to the Adobe.

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Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Richard Henry Dana, Jr., *Two Years Before the Mast* (Los Angeles, I, 142-143.

<sup>2</sup>Lt. W. H. Emory, *Lieutenant Emory Reports* (Albuquerque, 1968), 183; Joseph T. Downey, *Cruise of the Portsmouth* (New Haven and London, 1963), 196; John S. Griffin, *A Doctor Comes to California* (San Francisco, 1943, 59.

<sup>3</sup>Judge Benjamin Hayes, *Pioneer Notes from the Diaries of Judge Benjamin Hayes* (Los Angeles, 1929, 112.

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Archaeology: There is slight evidence of the existence of an archeological site immediately around and possibly under the Adobe in spite of the modern occupancy of more than 100 years. Spectacular artifacts would long since have disappeared, but as recently as January 11, 1976, a mano (hand grindingstone) and a scraper plane were collected. These and a few other artifacts found north and west of the house indicate the presence of a prehistoric campsite of the Millingstone Horizon, circa 6000 years before the present. It is not uncommon to find a post-contact home built in a location which had the same appeal to aboriginal people, one with strategic outlook and ready availability of water (Serrano Creek in this case). No other prehistoric sites have been reported and further surveying would be futile because of severe alteration of the terrain for roads and tracts. Surrounding lands now or due to be developed have been surveyed in recent years for EIR information; several sites are known but not pertinent to this registration.

The aboriginal site designated ORA-38, registered with the UCLA Archaeological Survey on April 21, 1949, has been believed to be associated with the Serrano Adobe, but pinpointing of the location described as T65, R8W at the intersection of Sections 14, 22 and 23, places it nearly half a mile away from the point of focus (the Adobe and Park), near the north end of Toledo Way and near El Toro High School.

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Note: Portions of the text from the "General Development Plan for Serrano Community Park and Historical Complex" have been incorporated into this text.