

LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, KITCHEN AND EMPLOYEE
DINING ROOM

(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Building No.
1295)

(Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center)

(Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center)

7601 Imperial Highway; on Flores Street between Laurel and
Hawthorne Streets

Downey

Los Angeles County

California

HABS CA-2800-D

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

National Park Service

U.S. Department of the Interior

1849 C Street NW

Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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- Location:** 7601 Imperial Highway, located within the block bounded by Flores Street on the north, Laurel Street on the west, Hawthorn Street on the east, and Esperanza Street on the south. The Kitchen and Employee Dining Room faces north to Flores Street and east to a paved parking lot.
- U.S. Geological Survey Los Angeles Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:
11S392534 N; 3754240 E
- Present Owner / Occupant:** County of Los Angeles
- Present Use:** Vacant
- Significance:** Constructed in 1927 to serve as the kitchen and dining room facility specifically for employees and visitors of the Los Angeles County Poor Farm, this building supplemented a still extant earlier facility that had been outgrown as the Poor Farm evolved into a long-term medical care facility. The County Poor Farm began in 1887/1888 as an agricultural facility that provided work, housing, and medical care for the indigent to relieve the overburdened Los Angeles County Hospital system. By the 1910s, an increasing number of inmates with chronic medical disorders were being admitted to the Poor Farm, causing a transition from providing rehabilitative, short-term treatment for the impoverished to a long term patient care facility that eventually became the Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center. The Patient Ward Buildings were the first buildings constructed at the institution strictly to provide ward space for these chronically ill patients. Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center is significant as an example of early twentieth century healthcare of Los Angeles County's indigent population and for its later treatment of those in Los Angeles County with chronic illnesses, both mental and physical. In 1995, seventy-six buildings located in the South Campus area of the former Poor Farm were determined eligible for listing as a historic district in the National Register of Historic Place, and as a result, the South Campus was automatically listed in the California Register of Historical Resources.¹ The Kitchen and Employee Dining Room was listed as a contributor to the Historic District.

¹ McAvoy, Christy J., Historic Resources Group. 26 July 1995. *Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, Primary Record and District Record*. Los Angeles, CA.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. **Date of erection:** 1927
2. **Architect:** Karl W. Muck, Department of the Los Angeles County Architect
3. **Original and subsequent owners:** County of Los Angeles (1887/1888–present)
4. **Original and subsequent occupants:** County of Los Angeles (1887/1888–present)
5. **Builder, contractor, suppliers:** County of Los Angeles Mechanical Department
6. **Original plans and construction:** Original architectural drawings for the Kitchen and Employee Dining Room are on file with the County of Los Angeles.
7. **Alterations and additions:** A modern shed addition was attached on the building's south elevation in the ca. 1980s, as well as a refrigeration system on the west elevation.

B. Historic Context:

Kitchen and Employee Dining Room

Constructed in 1927, the Kitchen and Employee Dining Room was among the numerous buildings constructed and improvements made at the County Poor Farm during the 1920s by the institution's most well-known superintendent, William Ruddy Harriman. One of the most beneficial improvements Harriman made to the campus in the 1920s was the expansion of the dietetics program. He was aware of the growing popularity of the science of dietetics in the 1920s and saw the value of proper nutritional planning for the patients. In 1923, Harriman hired the farm's first dietitian, Otto Jardon, to oversee the kitchen and dietary needs of the campus patients.² Jardon supervised the main kitchen of the Poor Farm located in the Dining Room/Staff Rooms/Kitchen/Commissary Complex, which served the substantial needs of the institution. This was the second kitchen for the Poor Farm, the original campus kitchen and dining room had been located in the Refectory Building, which was demolished in 1927 to make way for the construction of the Auditorium building.

After the opening and expansion of the Patient Wards in 1926, the number of campus employees had increased to over 500, creating a need for additional kitchen and dining space. In 1927, plans were drawn for a new Kitchen and Employee Dining Room (originally called Kitchen No. 2 or the

² Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888–1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, p. 145.

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Service Building) to be located close to the Patient Wards for easy access by the employees. The building design incorporated two kitchens and six dining areas, including a dining area for campus guests and another for the cooks. Harriman wrote the following description of the building in 1934 in the publication *The Story of the Rancho*:

The new Service Building provides one of the finest kitchens in the state—spacious, light and airy under all conditions. Even on the hottest summer day this building is cool and comfortable to work in because of a row of 6-foot steel sash around three sides of the top of the wall. These sashes may be swung to any position by chain controls from the kitchen floor. Electrically operated meat slicers and mixing equipment, automatic toasters, and other economy and labor saving devices are in constant use.³

Over the years, the building was altered to meet the current needs of the institution. The Kitchen and Employee Dining Room was one of the few buildings to continue to be used for its original purpose well after the rest of the buildings on South Campus had been vacated. The building was vacated in 2007.

PART II. ARCHITECTURE INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

- 1. Architectural character:** The Kitchen and Employee Dining Room is a concrete building, one-story in height with central roof projection. The building is asymmetrically composed with an irregular, rectangular plan and horizontal massing. The building's stripped Classical Revival style is best characterized by the spare, streamlined exterior; smooth stucco exterior walls; wrapping parapets; and architectural elements such as a projecting cornice, stringcourses, and raised wall base.
- 2. Condition of fabric:** The current condition of the Kitchen and Employee Dining Room is poor. The building was vacated in 2007; however, due to years of neglect, the building started deteriorating many years earlier. Also, over the years the interior was completely remodeled; it no longer retains many of the historic interior elements associated with the building's original construction. Additional alterations occurred to the south and west elevations circa the 1980s when a metal shed addition and refrigeration system were attached.

³ Harriman, William R. 1934. *The Story of Rancho*. Los Angeles: University of Southern California Archives, Box 22, Folder 13.

B. Description of Exterior:

- 1. Overall dimensions:** The building has an irregular, rectangular plan and stands one-story with a central roof projection. The original architectural drawings for the Kitchen and Employee Dining Room show that the building measures approximately 36'2" in height. The exterior building measurements are 165'1" inch wide by 137'2" inches deep. The net interior condition space, interior dimensions exclusive of covered or enclosed exterior spaces calculates to 18,235 square feet. The total square footage for the enclosed condition space, including exterior dimensions and covered or enclosed spaces, calculates to 18,908 square feet.
- 2. Foundations:** The Kitchen and Employee Dining Room has a concrete foundation.
- 3. Walls:** The consistent use of concrete and stucco is a significant contributor to the character of the Kitchen and Employee Dining Room. The building is defined by its concrete walls covered in smooth stucco painted white and by its concrete foundation. The Kitchen and Employee Dining Room is an example of a simplified interpretation of the Classical Revival. This architectural style of spare, streamlined exteriors was popular for public service buildings during the Public Works Administration (PWA) era of the 1930s. Accordingly, the principal trim features displayed by the Kitchen and Employee Dining Room include a raised concrete cornice that wraps the building below the roof parapet and above a plain frieze and architrave (except for the western section of the north elevation) and concrete stringcourses that wrap around the building above the windows.

The building is irregular in plan with horizontal massing and is composed of three rectangular-shaped segments on an axis that runs parallel to Flores and Esperanza Streets. The rectangular segments create the various character-defining asymmetrical projections and recessions of the east and west elevations of the building.

The east (front) façade is organized into three asymmetrical bays that correspond to the distinct rectangular-massed segments that form the building. The east façade consists of a central projecting bay flanked by a slightly less projecting south bay and a recessed north bay. The north elevation consists of two bays: a recessed east bay and a projecting west bay that spans three quarters of the elevation. The west elevation also consists of three asymmetrical bays; the central recessed bay is flanked by a projecting north bay and a slightly projecting south bay. The south elevation consists of a generally even wall surface that lacks the severe projecting segments extant on the other elevations.

- 4. Structural system, framing:** The Kitchen and Employee Dining Room is constructed of concrete and features a partial basement. The roof is a concrete slab supported by steel trusses and miscellaneous steel framing.

5. **Porches:** Partial-width porches are located on both the north and east elevations of the Kitchen and Employee Dining Room. These porches consist of raised concrete stoops accessed by concrete steps and ramps with metal pipe handrails. A small projecting flat concrete roof overhang suspended by steel cables caps the porches.
6. **Openings:**
 - a. **Doorways and doors:** The primary public entrances to the Kitchen and Employee Dining Room are located in recessed areas on the east facade and north elevation. The two entries are distinguished by an original partial-width porch, and feature a glazed and paneled one-over-one-light wooden paneled door topped by a pair of two-light transoms. The entries are accessed by a concrete stoop with concrete steps and ramp, with a metal pipe handrail. Service entrances to the building are located on the west and south elevations. These seven entries include five non-original metal doors and two metal roll-up freight doors accessed by concrete ramps and loading decks.
 - b. **Windows:** The windows of the Kitchen and Employee Dining Room lend a sense of uniformity and scale to the composition of the building's elevations. The fenestration generally may be described as a linear band of original wood-frame three-over-three-light double-hung sash windows with transoms and raised sills. The windows emphasize the massing of the Kitchen and Employee Dining Room and provide a continuous horizontal rhythm across the building. Other windows on the building include a band of four three-light hopper windows on the south elevation and two wood-frame three-over-three-light double-hung sash windows without transoms on the west elevation. On the north, west, and south elevations of the central roof projection, there are a series of large, steel sash three-over-three-light pivot windows set in bands of three. Non-original steel sash sliding windows are located in a linear fenestration on the north elevation.
6. **Roof:** The Kitchen and Employee Dining Room is surmounted by a flat, steel truss roof clad in composition material and wrapped with concrete parapet walls. A one-story projection over the kitchen space is centrally located on the roof and is surmounted by a flat roof sheathed in composition panels. This central roof projection slightly slopes at the ridgeline on its north and south elevations and features parapets on its east and west elevations.

C. Description of Interior:

1. **Floor plans:** The original 1927 floor plans, as well as 2007 as-found drawings are attached; the interior of the Kitchen and Employee Dining Room has been

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remodeled. Many of the original interior room spaces have been altered and no longer exhibit their original space configurations as new rooms were created and the original function of rooms changed. The original spaces that are still extant include the main kitchen and east dining room.

2. **Flooring:** Concrete floors finished with various sizes of tiles, 6 × 6 to 4 × 4 are characteristic of the interior space of the Kitchen and Employee Dining Room.
3. **Wall finish:** The original plaster walls are present throughout the Kitchen and Employee Dining Room. The original 6 × 6 and 4 × 4 ceramic tiles are present in the kitchen area of the building.
4. **Decorative features and trim:** Painted wooden chair rails and pilasters are located in the main dining room area of the Kitchen and Employee Dining Room.

D. Site:

1. **General setting:** The area surrounding the Kitchen and Employee Dining Room consists of lawns and mature trees, concrete sidewalks and ramps, and parking and loading areas. The extant setting of the building reflects the post-1925 era when Superintendent Harriman was expanding and making improvements to the campus to accommodate the growing staff and patient population. The building is located in the northwestern portion of the South Campus with street frontage on three of its elevations: Flores Street to the north, Laurel Street to the west, and Esperanza Street to the south. Its primary east façade faces toward Erickson Avenue, the historic main thoroughfare and north-south axis of the campus. The existing east elevation parking lot and concrete sidewalks and ramps appear in historic photographs.
2. **Orientation:** The east and north elevations of the Kitchen and Employee Dining Room features the primary street access and public views of the building. The east façade faces out toward a parking lot and two staff cottages that front Hawthorn Street. The north elevation fronts Flores Street. Both main public entrances to the building are located on these two elevations, which serve as the focal point of the building's design. Although the south and west elevations have street frontage (the south elevation is oriented toward Esperanza Street and the Patient Wards, and the west elevation faces Laurel Street), both are considered secondary elevations, as they were historically used as service and loading entrances. This service/support use is reflected in the modest expression of the stripped Classicism style exhibited on the south and west elevations.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings:

The original 1927 architectural drawings were found for the Kitchen and Employee Dining Room. The drawings are on file with the County of Los Angeles. A set of as-found drawings were prepared in 2007 by Diamond West Engineering, Inc. for the County of Los Angeles and are on file at the County of Los Angeles and Sapphos Environmental, Inc.

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C. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

None

D. Supplemental Material:

Historical Photographs
Reduced copies of original architectural drawings
Reduced copies of 2007 "as-found" architectural drawings
Aerial Map

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

HABS documentation for the Kitchen and Employee Dining Room was prepared by Sapphos Environmental, Inc. staff from December 2006 to September 2009 on behalf of the County of Los Angeles Chief Executive Office (CEO). The HABS documentation serves as mitigation to comply with the 2008 certified Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Data Center project. Survey work and the creation of as-found drawings were carried out in 2007 by Ms. Wanda Ostermann of Diamond West Engineering, Inc., Los Angeles, California. Photographs were taken in from July 2007 to July 2008 by Mr. David Lee, production manager, and Mr. Clarus Backes, senior resources specialist, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Part I of the historical report (historic context) was prepared by Ms. Shannon Carmack, senior resources coordinator, Ms. Rebecca Silva, senior resources coordinator, Ms. Deborah Howell-Ardila, senior resources coordinator, and Ms. Laura Carias, cultural resources analyst. Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Part II of the historical report (architectural information) was prepared by Ms. Rebecca Silva, senior resources coordinator, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Ms. Leslie Heumann, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. manager of cultural resources, reviewed the final report and supporting documents, and provided research, writing, and project oversight.