

LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM,  
HARRIMAN/SUPERINTENDENT'S HOUSE  
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Building No.  
1101)  
(Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center)  
(Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center)  
7601 Imperial Highway  
Downey  
Los Angeles County  
California

HABS CA-2800-AB  
*HABS CA-2800-AB*

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

LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, HARRIMAN / SUPERINTENDENT'S HOUSE  
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles Building No. 1101)  
Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center

HABS No. CA-2800-AB

**Location:** 7601 Imperial Highway, The Harriman / Superintendent's House is located in the central grassy area bounded by Consuelo Street and Erickson Avenue, slightly southeast of the Erickson Avenue traffic circle.

U.S. Geological Survey Los Angeles Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 3754151 N; 392584.8 E

**Present Owner / Occupant:** County of Los Angeles

**Present Use:** Vacant

**Significance:** The Harriman / Superintendent's House is significant under National Register of Historic Places Criterion A for its association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of history as well as Criterion C for its ability to embody distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction. Located on what is now known as the Rancho Los Amigos South Campus, the historic district portrays the establishment of the County Poor Farm at this location in 1887, its transition into a facility for long-term indigent medical care between the two world wars, and its emergence as a medical and rehabilitation center in the early post World War II years. The building was erected in 1915 as the residence for the superintendent of the County Poor Farm. The building was commissioned by Superintendent Charles C. Manning, who oversaw the operations from 1911-1915. The 5,000 square foot residence was designed in the Craftsman style, which was popular during the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Harriman / Superintendent's House is the best example of this influential style at Rancho Los Amigos. The Superintendent's House was not completed until 1915, after Manning had resigned and his position was filled by William Ruddy Harriman, the most influential and well-known superintendent in the history of the County Poor Farm. Superintendent Harriman and his family became the building's first residents, and the residence became known as the Superintendent's House. Harriman lived in the house during his almost forty-year tenure as superintendent. After Harriman's resignation in 1952, the house was converted into an assisted living facility and offices. It currently is used for storage by the Los Angeles County Office of Public Safety.

## PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

### A. Physical History:

1. **Date of erection:** 1915<sup>1</sup>
2. **Architect:** No known architect could be associated with the Harriman / Superintendent's House.
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:** No known builder, contractor, or supplier could be associated with the Harriman / Superintendent's House.
6. **Original plans and construction:** No building permits, original plans, or construction drawings were found for the Harriman / Superintendent's House.
7. **Alterations and additions:** Alterations to the Harriman / Superintendent's House are minor and the building reflects its period of construction. Alterations as they appear from historic photographs include the replacement of original wood doors with metal doors; enclosure of the second-story south elevation (rear) sleeping porches with bands of louvered windows; and the enclosure of the first-story south (rear) elevation projecting brick porch with plywood.

### B. Historic Context:

Begun in 1887/1888 as the new County Poor Farm, Rancho Los Amigos upon its inception was a rehabilitation facility that provided work, housing, and medical care to the indigent. The original purchase of 124.4 acres in the vicinity of the town of Downey, founded in 1873, was graded for roads, supplied with water from an artesian well, and improved with a Refectory Building (Dining Hall), the North and South Wards, an aviary, and an Office Building by 1889. During the following decade, barns and ancillary buildings with agricultural functions, a freight and passenger railroad depot, a combined bathhouse and laundry facility, and an additional ward were added.

By the 1890s, the County Poor Farm's livestock and agricultural operations were self-sufficient. The County Poor Farm had a herd of nearly 100 Jersey and Holstein cows, which provided a daily output of 200 gallons of milk. For eggs, the farm relied upon its productive, 800-chicken poultry farm located east of Erickson Avenue and north of Gardendale Street. East of the poultry yard was a hog farm, which supported approximately 150 Berkshire and Poland hogs. Sheep were raised and

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<sup>1</sup> According to historic aerial photographs and Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. Centennial. Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888-1988. Downey, California: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

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used for their wool. Percheron draft horses were kept to assist with heavy labor tasks. A wide range of crops were grown at the County Poor Farm, including fruits such as strawberries, peaches, and pears, and vegetables such as cabbage, corn, celery, onions, radishes, sugar beets, peas, cucumbers, and olives. With the assistance of farm supervisors, able-bodied patients helped work the fields and orchards, for which they received compensation of \$1.50 per day. Irrigation was provided primarily by the farm's artesian well. Water from the well was pumped using a 10-horse power engine and stored in a water tower.<sup>2</sup>

The County Poor Farm grew into a nationally recognized institution in the fields of cultivation and scientific breeding as a producer of prized crops and livestock. In addition to operating a successful agricultural enterprise, the County Poor Farm gradually expanded its role as a County medical facility. An increasing number of inmates with chronic medical disorders were being admitted to the County Poor Farm during the 1910s, prompting administrators to employ a staff of physicians and nurses to treat them. This surge in patients, and subsequently employees, would create the impetus for expanded development at the County Poor Farm in ensuing decades. The influx of new patients at the County Poor Farm provided the impetus for the expansion of services and facilities needed, resulting in the construction of a number of buildings at the property. The County Poor Farm's expansion reflected an important shift as the focus of the facility transitioned from rehabilitative care for indigents into a hospital to house long-term invalid patients.

In June 1915, William Ruddy Harriman was appointed the new superintendent at the County Poor Farm in order to reestablish the facility after devastating floods and a hog cholera epidemic in 1914 damaged the property's agricultural enterprises. Harriman promptly moved his family into the new Craftsman residence that had been constructed by the prior County Poor Farm superintendent, Charles C. Manning, at the center of the property. When Harriman took over management responsibilities at the County Poor Farm, the institution was providing care to 500 indigent men and women with a staff of 45. Under Harriman's leadership (1915-1931; 1933-1952), the County Poor Farm's agricultural fields and livestock rebounded and an ambitious plan of improvements, including new and expanded wards, was immediately begun to address the rapidly expanding need for patient accommodations and services. Harriman dramatically improved the property, installing an irrigation system, upgrading the utilities, constructing new buildings, organizing administration duties and developing the property's park-like landscape. These improvements were largely accomplished in the wake of the financial surge following World War I.<sup>3</sup>

The range of improvements Harriman initiated at the County Poor Farm reflects the rapid growth of the facility during the 1920s. New and expanded services included the construction of new on-site housing that was provided for the employees responsible for around-the-clock patient care and attention, patient wards, additions to men and women's psychopathic buildings, dining room extensions, nurses' dormitories, employee bungalows, a new power plant, and street improvements.

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<sup>2</sup> Flidner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888-1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

<sup>3</sup> Flidner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888-1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

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In addition to the physical changes that were implemented under Harriman's leadership, there were also philosophical changes at the County Poor Farm. Harriman subscribed to the idea that the physical condition of an individual could be improved through occupational therapy activities and uplifting surroundings. Harriman's philosophy for self-improvement soon encompassed every activity at the County Poor Farm. He insisted that the patient's needs and comfort be addressed through the development of amenities at the County Poor Farm. Patients were assigned to work on the farm or in the greenhouse, based on their physical capabilities and individual talents. These occupational therapy activities were also intended as physical therapy, by providing the patients with fresh air, sunshine and independence.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout the 1920s, as residency continued to increase, Harriman expanded and improved the County Poor Farm's facilities, including a number of large building projects. Understanding the need to house additional patients, Harriman began the construction of four patient wards in 1922 followed by an additional four wards soon after. This project signaled the full-fledged transition of the farm from a rehabilitative care facility for indigents into a hospital to house long-term invalid patients. By 1922, the institution had a staff of approximately 175 employees to care for the needs of the 1,500 ambulatory patients living at the South Campus.<sup>5</sup> By late 1925, an additional five infirmary wards had been constructed. Several substantial buildings continued to be erected through the 1920s. In 1928, the old brick refectory building was razed and replaced with an 850-seat Spanish Colonial Revival Auditorium which provided much needed diversions to the ailing patients and staff. Movies were screened weekly in the Auditorium and other musical types of entertainment were offered as well.

By the end of the 1920s, the County Poor Farm comprised an impressive 540 acres of farmland and buildings, with a property value of \$2 million dollars. Real estate improvements included 3 annual crop yields, one mile of paved roads, an additional one and one-fourth miles of decomposing granite roads, miles of sewer mains connected to the County sanitation system, hundreds of acres of new lawns, gardens, trees, and numerous buildings serving a variety of purposes.<sup>6,7</sup>

The Harriman / Superintendent's House is representative of the Craftsman style, which dominated residential architecture in southern California from circa 1902 through the mid 1920s. Rooted in the principles of the late-19th-century Arts and Crafts movement in England, the Craftsman aesthetic and ideals were developed and promoted in the United States by furniture maker Gustav

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<sup>4</sup> Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888–1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

<sup>5</sup> Foster, Henry. 5 October 1959. "History of the Rancho." Los Angeles: University of Southern California Archives. Box 25, Folder 57.

<sup>6</sup> Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888–1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

<sup>7</sup> Harriman, William R. "1927–1928 Annual Report for Rancho Los Amigos." Los Angeles: University of Southern California. Box 22, Folder 13.

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Stickley and his 1901 magazine *The Craftsman*. Stickley envisioned residences for people of moderate means designed as a unified whole, including furniture and fittings. He discounted the ornamentation of the Victorian-era and preferred a more simplified style that accented the beauty of natural materials such as wood and stone. He stated in the first issue of *The Craftsman*, "Beauty does not imply elaboration or ornament." Drawing inspiration from English architect and designer William Morris, Stickley published plans and construction drawings that epitomized his philosophy. The dissemination of his drawings exerted a strong influence on the development of the Craftsman Style.

Craftsman architectural design reached its apogee with the work of two brothers, Charles S. Greene and Henry M. Greene, who practiced together in Pasadena from 1893 to 1914 and with the work of a handful of other architects primarily located in the vicinity of the Arroyo Seco and the San Francisco Bay Area. The Greene brothers created an architectural style that combined elements of Stickley's influence, the Stick Style, the English Arts and Crafts Movement, and, especially, Japanese techniques of joinery. The concurrent work of Frank Lloyd Wright also is said to have been an influence. Advocates of total design and craftsmanship, the Greenes also lavished attention on interior finishes and details and furniture. Some of the Greene's most notable commissions include the Gamble House, the Blacker House, and the Duncan-Irwin House, all located in Pasadena.

The work of the Greene brothers and other Craftsman style architects was widely published in both professional and popular journals. This exposure fueled the popularity of the Craftsman style, which spread quickly throughout the country. Craftsman house plans became easily accessible to the middle-class through pattern books and mail-order houses such as Sears, Roebuck & Company, and Montgomery Ward's. Affordable and easily constructed from locally available materials, one-to-one and a half-story Craftsman homes became known as bungalows and dominated middle-class residential design during the first quarter of the 20th century. Although some Craftsman homes were two stories in height, large-scale versions of Craftsman houses were rare except in California. A limited number of commercial and public buildings also reflect Craftsman influences.

Craftsman buildings utilize materials such as wood, stone, and brick in a natural-appearing state. Structural features were left exposed and exploited for their decorative qualities. Earth tones were favored, integrating the building with the surrounding landscape. Horizontality was emphasized through low, ground-hugging massing, employment of broadly pitched, overhanging roofs, and utilization of wood siding and flat trim laid in continuous bands. Often, the lower portion of the exterior walls or porch supports was battered or tapered so as to be heavier at ground level. Capacious front porches were nearly ubiquitous features, often overlooked by generous expanses of windows clustered in groups. A combination of window types was used, with casement windows and fixed windows commonly appearing on the facade and double-hung sash on the sides and rear. Entries typically were characterized by oversized, heavy, wood-paneled doors. Craftsman interiors were distinguished by built-in features such as bookshelves, cabinets and hutches with leaded glass doors, and seating nooks and by the use of wood for picture rails, continuous header moldings, window and door casings, and doors.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURE INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. **Architectural character:** The two-story Craftsman style Harriman / Superintendent's House is rectangular in plan, asymmetrical in appearance, and horizontal in emphasis. The building has retained most of its character-defining features, which reflect the Craftsman style: horizontal massing articulated by low-pitched roof; horizontal siding; bands of windows; exposed structural features such as rafters, beams, braces, and piers; use of wood and brick; integration of interior and exterior through incorporation of porches and provision of multiple windows.
2. **Condition of fabric:** The current condition of the Harriman / Superintendent's House is good. Although the building has been somewhat altered, its exterior appearance still reflects its period of construction.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. **Overall dimensions:** The Harriman / Superintendent's House net interior condition space (interior dimensions exclusive of covered or enclosed exterior spaces) calculates to 3,917 square feet. The building has a gross area of exterior square footage of 4,122 square feet and a footprint of 3,267 square feet.<sup>8</sup>
2. **Foundations:** The building sits on a brick foundation.
3. **Walls:** The exterior walls are primarily sheathed in simple (or drop) wood siding laid in alternating tall and short bands, creating a striped appearance. Red brick laid in stretcher bond with contrasting light colored mortar and capped by a coping of header bricks is used for the walls and piers of the L-shaped front porch on the north and west elevations, porte cochère on the west elevation, and now enclosed porch on the west half of the south (rear) elevation. Notched beams project between the first and second story of the building.
4. **Structural system, framing:** The structural system for the Harriman/ Superintendent's House consists of a wood shingled, cross-gabled roof supported by wood-framed and brick walls and piers.
5. **Openings:**
  - a. **Windows:** The windows are arranged asymmetrically on each elevation of the Harriman / Superintendent's House, primarily in bands or pairs, and include

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<sup>8</sup> Sapphos Environmental, Inc. 15 December 2008. Revised Memorandum for the Record, 1217-056, No. 21, Update to the List of Buildings, Structures, and Features of the Rancho Los Amigos Historic District. Pasadena, CA.

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one-over-one-light double-hung sash, casements, and fixed pane, all of which are wood framed and flat-headed. Window trim consists of flat wood boards with slightly projecting sills.

- b. **Doors:** The primary entrance is located on the north façade in the east bay of the porch and consists of a broadly proportioned doorway with a door and frame of unpainted wood. A large, rectangular window occupies the upper half of the door, above a corbelled ledge; two large vertical panels fill the lower half. A Craftsman style wood-framed screen door originally mounted in front of the door is now stored within the house. A narrower secondary entrance containing a wood and glazed door is located on the west elevation, in the south bay of the front porch. Non-original metal doors are also present on the building.

- 6. **Roof:** The Craftsman-style residence has a low-pitched, cross-gabled roof of split-wood shingles with wide over-hanging eaves supported by triangular braces and false beams. Rafter tails are visible under the eaves. The main roof features a side gable configuration. Extending west from the house, a porte cochère topped by a sleeping porch is covered by a second side gable set at a slightly lower height than the main roof. Centered over a slightly projecting second story bay offset to the west on the façade, a front gable is trimmed by a plain barge board and supported by triangular, solid braces. A pent, hipped roof, also with exposed rafters, tops the attached front porch. Multiple gables also face the east, west, and south elevations, all of which feature gable ends with latticework attic vents, supported by triangular braces and rafters in the eaves. Additional roof features include a small pent hipped roof over a one-story projection on the south elevation. A capped interior chimney is located south of the ridgeline of the main side gable.

- C. **Description of Interior:** The first floor of the building is comprised of a foyer, den, dining room, living room, kitchen, bedroom, two bathrooms, and several closets. The primary entrance to the Harriman / Superintendent's House, located on the building's north elevation, provides access to the building's most public spaces, consisting of a foyer, living room, and dining room, which occupy the western portion of the building. Windows from these rooms enjoy views of the campus. Built-in cabinets, which are typical of Craftsman-style interiors, are located in the dining room. A built-in fireplace is located in the living room. A centrally located stairway provides access to the second floor. The second floor of the building has four bedrooms, four sleeping porches, three bathrooms and four closets. The bedrooms, each with sunroom access, anchor the four corners of the building. Built-in features on the second floor include several cabinets and a bench in a recess.

D. **Site:**

- 1. **General setting:** Existing landscaping surrounding the Harriman / Superintendent's House consists of mature trees, shrubs, grass, and vestiges of the original landscaping, including orange trees. Concrete sidewalks surround the house on all

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elevations, and a concrete driveway is located along the west elevation, running through the porte cochère.

- 2. Orientation:** The Harriman / Superintendent's House is located at the central grassy area bounded by Consuelo Street and Erickson Avenue, slightly southeast of the Erickson Avenue traffic circle.

### PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

#### **A. Architectural Drawings:**

No original drawings for the Harriman / Superintendent's House were discovered. A set of as-found drawings were prepared for the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) documentation in 2007 by Diamond West Engineering, Inc. for the County of Los Angeles.

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**D. Supplemental Material:**

Reduced copies of 2007 as-found drawings

**PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION**

HABS documentation for the Harriman / Superintendent's House was prepared by Sapphos Environmental, Inc. staff from December 2006 to June 2010 on behalf of the County of Los Angeles Chief Executive Office (CEO). The HABS documentation serves as mitigation to comply with the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the proposed Campus Plan project. Measured surveys were carried out in 2007 by Ms. Wanda Ostermann of Diamond West Engineering, Inc., Los Angeles, California. Photographs were taken from January 2010 to June 2010 by Mr. David Lee, production manager, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Part I of the historical report (historic context) was prepared by Ms. Shannon Carmack, senior cultural resources coordinator, Ms. Rebecca Silva, senior cultural resources coordinator, Ms. Deborah Howell-Ardila, senior cultural resources coordinator, Ms. Marlise Fratinardo, senior cultural resources coordinator, and Ms. Laura Carias, cultural resources coordinator, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Part II of the historical report (architectural information) was prepared by Ms. Rebecca Silva, senior resources coordinator, Ms. Marlise Fratinardo, senior cultural resources coordinator, and Ms. Laura Carias, cultural 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.