

LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, TOILET ROOM
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles County Building No. 1244)
(Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center)
(Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center)
7601 Imperial Highway
Downey
Los Angeles County
California

HABS CA-2800-AR
HABS CA-2800-AR

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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Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center

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Location: 7601 Imperial Highway, located in the northern section of the block bounded by Golondrinas Street to the north, Dahlia Avenue to the east, Consuelo Street to the south, and Erickson Avenue to the west. The Toilet Room is located in the courtyard of the Men's Psychiatric Ward complex (LACO Nos. 1204 and 1205).

U.S. Geological Survey Los Angeles Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 3754338 N; 392745.1 E

Present Owner / Occupant: County of Los Angeles

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: The Toilet Room 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. 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 Toilet Room was erected in 1916 within the Men's Psychiatric Ward complex interior courtyard and served as an outdoor restroom for the resident male patients. The men's and women's psychiatric wards, begun in 1907, represented a significant addition to the mission of the Poor Farm, and reflected its transition into a residential medical facility. The Toilet Room continued to be used in its original capacity until the complex was converted to office and storage space in the late 20th century. The building is currently vacant.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. **Date of erection:** 1916¹
2. **Architect:** No known architect could be associated with the Toilet Room.
3. **Original and subsequent owners:** County of Los Angeles (1887/1888–present)

¹ According to historic aerial photographs and Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888–1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

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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 Toilet Room.
6. **Original plans and construction:** No building permits, original plans, or construction drawings were found for the Toilet Room.
7. **Alterations and additions:** Alterations were identified through observation. The only alteration on the building appears to be the replacement of original wood doors with metal doors.

B. Historic Context:

Toilet Room

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 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-horsepower engine and stored in a water tower.²

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

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

and nurses to treat them. This surge in patients, and subsequently employees, 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.

The psychiatric facility began at the County Poor Farm in 1907 with the construction of the first Psychiatric Ward building. Originally, women and men psychiatric patients were housed together. The first Women's Psychiatric Ward was completed directly south of the men's ward in 1919 after the Superintendent of the County Poor Farm pleaded with the County Board of Supervisors for funding. The Men's Psychiatric Ward complex was erected in several stages from 1907 to 1924. A second women's psychiatric ward was also constructed in 1924.

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.³

PART II. ARCHITECTURE INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

- 1. Architectural character:** The Brick Vernacular style Toilet Room is one-story, asymmetrical in appearance, and squared in plan. The building has retained most of its character-defining features, which include: hip roof, brick walls in common bond pattern, segmental arched window and door openings with lintels of double header brick bands, corbelled brick course defining brick belt course at the wall base, and slightly projecting window sills of header bricks.
- 2. Condition of fabric:** The current condition of the Toilet Room is deteriorated.

³ Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888–1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. **Overall dimensions:** The Toilet Room net interior condition space (interior dimensions exclusive of covered or enclosed interior spaces) calculates to 476 square feet. The building has a gross exterior area of 728 square feet and a footprint of 728 square feet.⁴
2. **Foundations:** The building sits on a concrete slab foundation.
3. **Walls:** Exterior walls are clad in painted brick in common bond pattern.
4. **Structural system, framing:** The structural system for the Toilet Room consists of a hip roof supported by brick walls.
5. **Openings:**
 - a. **Windows:** Fenestration on all elevations consists primarily of window openings composed of segmental arched openings with lintels of double header brick bands and flat-headed windows and are located on the north and south elevations. All extant windows are original wood-framed, one-over-one, double-hung sash windows. The windows are trimmed by slightly projecting window sills of header bricks.
 - b. **Doors:** The primary entrance to the building is located on the west façade and consists of two entrance doors accessed by concrete ramps with iron railings. Secondary entrances are located on the north and south elevations and consist of segmental arched openings with lintels of double header brick bands. The north entrance still retains its original wood paneled door. Replacement metal doors are present on the west façade.
6. **Roof:** The building is capped by a medium-pitched hipped roof with overhanging eaves and exposed rafters. Composition shingles cover the roof.

C. Description of Interior: The Toilet Room comprises four rooms that are accessible only from the exterior of the building. Two rooms consist of bathroom stalls and a sink area. The remaining two rooms are empty.

D. Site:

1. **General setting:** Existing landscaping surrounding the Toilet Room consists of a weeds, and mature grass. A concrete ramp with metal handrails leads to the building's entrances, and concrete paving surrounds the building.

⁴ 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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2. **Orientation:** One of several small support buildings for the Men's Psychiatric complex (LACO Nos. 1204 and 1205), the Toilet Room is located in the northern section of the block bounded by Golondrinas Street to the north, Dahlia Avenue to the east, Consuelo Street to the south, and Erickson Avenue to the west. The building's west façade is primary.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings:

No original drawings for the Toilet Room were discovered. A set of as-found drawings was prepared for the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) documentation in 2007 by Mollenhauer Group for the County of Los Angeles.

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C. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

Rancho Los Amigos Foundation collection

D. Supplemental Material:

Reduced copies of 2007 as-found drawings

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

HABS documentation for the Toilet Room was prepared by Sapphos Environmental, Inc. staff from December 2006 to June 2011 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 Mollenhauer Group, 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 cultural resources coordinator, Ms. Marlise Fratinardo, senior cultural resources coordinator, and Ms. Laura Carias, cultural resources coordinator, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Ms. Leslie Heumann, manager of cultural resources, Sapphos Environmental, Inc., reviewed the final report and supporting documents and provided research, writing, and project oversight.