



# Orange County's Hispanic Heritage

*The Orange County Archives*



Presented by Archivist Phil Brigandi  
to the Orange County Board of Supervisors  
Sept. 20, 2005

## The Orange County Archives

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- ✦ As you may know, September is Hispanic Heritage Month. It's timed to include September 16th – Dieciseis de Septiembre – which is the actual Mexican Independence Day (*not* Cinco de Mayo).
  - ✦ You can't talk about the history of Orange County without talking about our Hispanic Heritage. It's much too big of a subject for a short little talk like this, but let's focus on just three points.
  - ✦ Of course, most folks know that our Hispanic Heritage goes back to the mission days, starting with the first Spanish overland expedition in 1769 under Portolá. Some of the names they bestowed are still in use today, including Trabuco, Santiago, and Santa Ana. But the best-known reminder is Mission San Juan Capistrano, founded in 1776.





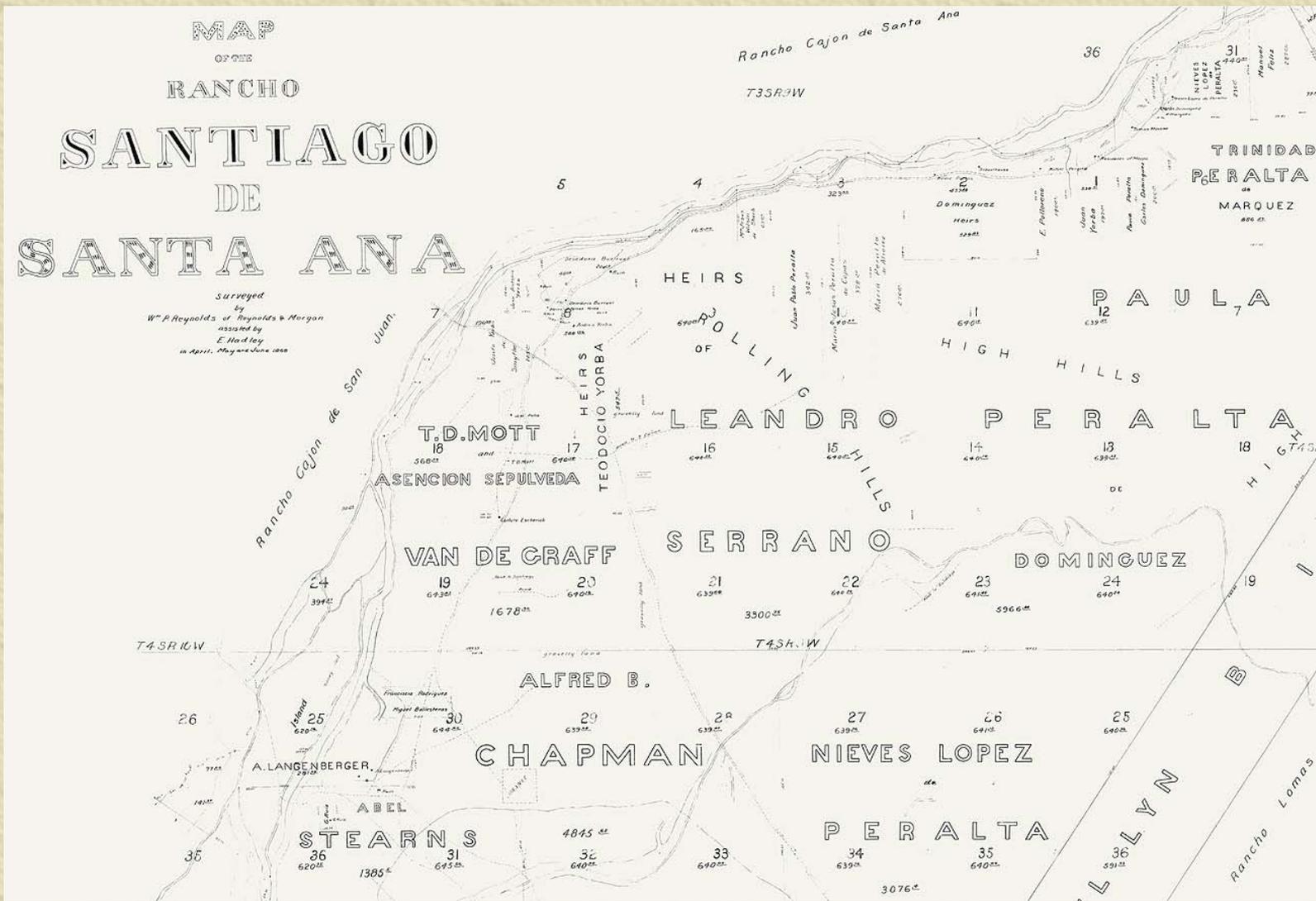
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✦ Then under Mexican rule, we had the ranchos. These vast cattle ranches not only built up California's economy in the 1830s and '40s, they also had a major influence on the later development of the county. The huge ranches of the south county – the Irvines, the O'Neills, the Moultons – all started as Mexican ranchos: the San Joaquin, the Mission Viejo and the Rancho Niguel.

✦ None of the growth in the upper part of the county could begin until the ranchos there were broken up and sold off. In 1868, the Rancho Santiago de Santa Ana, on this side of the river, and several of the ranchos on the other side all came on the market at once. Within five years, the cities of Santa Ana, Orange, Tustin, and Westminster had all been founded, and the communities of Garden Grove, Fountain Valley, and Newport Beach were getting on their way.

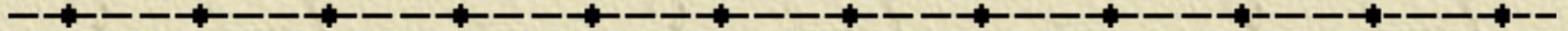
MAP  
OF THE  
RANCHO  
**SANTIAGO  
DE  
SANTA ANA**

Surveyed  
by  
W. P. Reynolds & Morgan  
assisted by  
E. Hooley  
in April, May and June 1880



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- ✦ Nor does our Hispanic Heritage end when California became a part of the United States in 1846. Many of the old rancho families are still here today – the Yorbas, the Peraltas, the Sepulvedas, and others.
  - ✦ After 1900, there was also an increasing number of Mexican immigrants moving north – especially after the revolution began in 1910. At the same time, our agricultural economy was growing, providing more and more jobs that were filled by Mexican labor.
  - ✦ Of course these new settlers had to live somewhere. Some of them settled in what soon became the barrio neighborhoods in the larger cities – like Logan in Santa Ana, or Cypress in Orange. Some other smaller communities became enclaves of families with Mexican roots. El Modena is a good example.
  - ✦ But there were also whole communities founded just for these new settlers. The next slide is of La Jolla, just south of Placentia. There were also a whole string of “colonias” laid out around the county back in the 1920s that grew into their own little communities, with businesses, schools, and churches.





- ✦ You may have heard the name Colonia Independencia as they moved ahead with the annexation of that area to Anaheim, but what about Colonia Juarez just south of Mile Square Park? Or the La Paz and Manzanillo colonias near Euclid and Westminster?
- ✦ By 1950, there were perhaps as many as 40 Mexican-American neighborhoods and communities spread across all of Orange County. Some of them have retained their identity to this day.
- ✦ Finally, let's talk about the role Orange County played in desegregating California's schools.



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- ✦ As our immigrant population increased in the 1920s, it became more and more common for school districts to establish segregated classrooms, and then entire segregated schools for Mexican-American students. All of this was done on the old theory of “separate but equal”. But even when schools were side by side, like in El Modena, there was no doubt which was the Mexican school.
  - ✦ In 1945, Gonzalo Mendez decided to do something about it. He lived in Westminster, where his kids were expected to go to school clear across town at the Mexican school. So he went to court.
  - ✦ The Santa Ana, Garden Grove, and El Modena school districts were later added to the list of defendants, with the families of other local children as plaintiffs. The families were supported by LULAC – the League of United Latin American Citizens – and other groups, including the NAACP and the Japanese American Citizens League.
  - ✦ Mendez v. Westminster was originally heard before Judge Paul McCormick in the District Court in Los Angeles, who ruled against the school districts. The districts appealed to the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals – and lost.

# Local Schools Lose Court Plea

## SEGREGATION OF STUDENTS HELD ILLEGAL

4-14-47

A Los Angeles federal court ruling preventing school officials of Orange county from segregating 5,000 students of Mexican or Latin descent was upheld today by the U. S. Ninth District Court of Appeal in a decision handed down in San Francisco.

Officials of the schools involved—Santa Ana, El Modena, Westminster and Garden Grove argued the segregation had been ruled legal by the U. S. supreme court.

But the circuit court in its decision held that the supreme court ruling was relative to major racial divisions, permitting segre-

racial case "because Latins are Caucasians."

"This," they asserted, "makes the discrimination even more dangerous" because it could lead to discrimination "on grounds of nationality, religion and social or economic position in all parts of nationality.

Judges who heard the case were Clifton Mathews, Homer T. Bone, Albert Lee Stephens, William Denman, William Orr, Francis I. Garrecht and William Healy.

Since the case has been pending, the El Modena school district has remedied the situation, and has discontinued the segregation, with the enrollment of both Roosevelt and Lincoln schools evenly distributed according to grades. Mexican and other children of Latin descent, originally taught exclusively in the Lincoln School, and the American children, exclusively taught in the Roosevelt school, are

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- ✦ So in 1948, California became the first state in the nation to desegregate its schools.
  - ✦ All of this was in many ways a dress rehearsal for the famous *Brown v. Board of Education* case a decade later that desegregated schools all across the United States. Thurgood Marshall, who argued the *Brown* case, wrote an amicus brief for the *Mendez* appeal, and Earl Warren, who had been Governor of California then, was Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court when *Brown* was decided.
  - ✦ That's just a little taste of our local Hispanic heritage. What is important to remember is that these stories are part of *our* story. Knowing about our Hispanic Heritage helps us understand all of the things that make Orange County what it is today.

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**Orange County Clerk-Recorder Dept.**

Tom Daly, Clerk-Recorder

