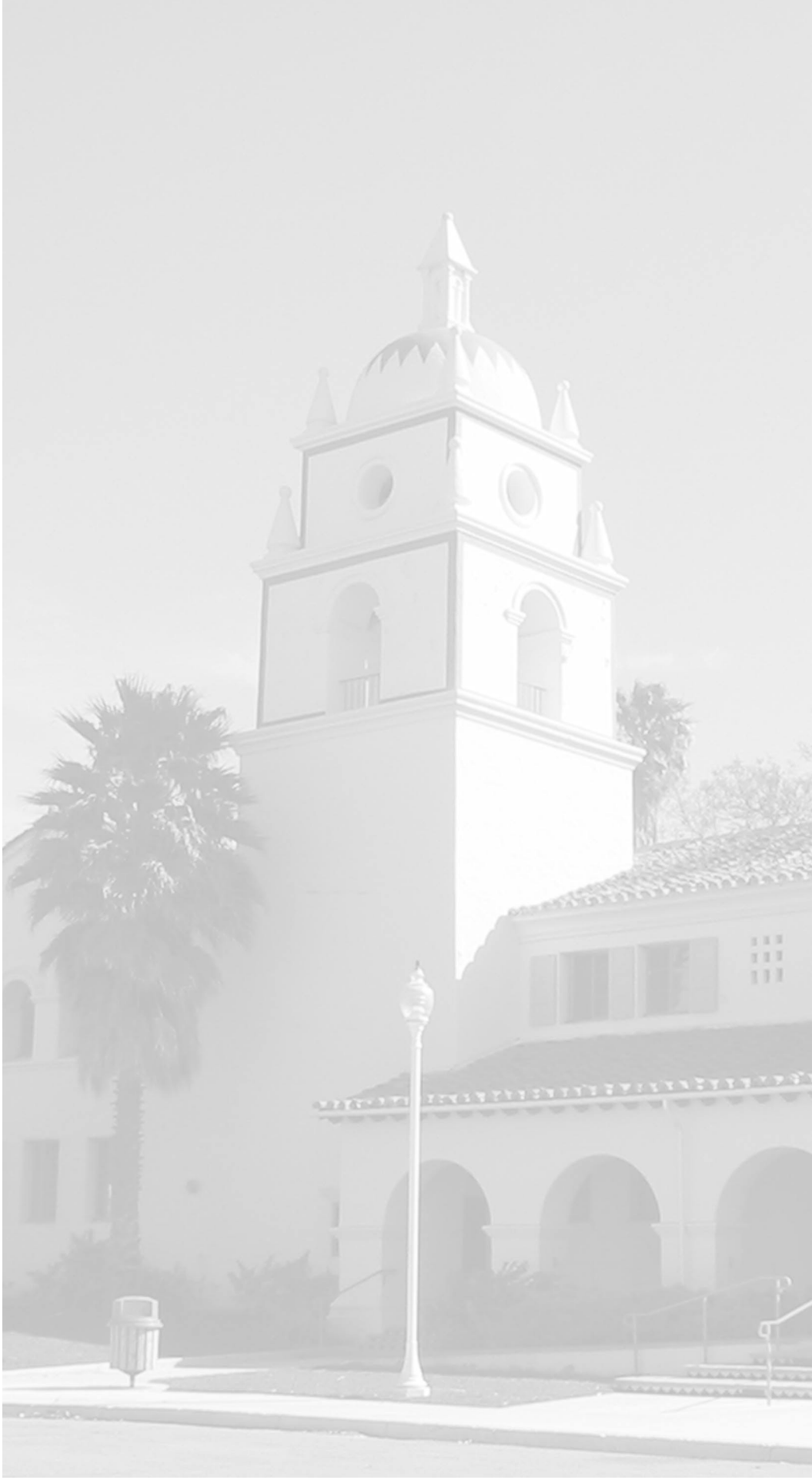




Campus History

HISTORY OF CSU CHANNEL ISLANDS

Located near the Pacific, where the Oxnard Plain meets the Santa Monica Mountains, the 670-acre site of the new California State University Channel Islands (CSUCI) in Camarillo is truly dramatic. The main entrance to the campus is a country road that cuts through fields, orchards, coastal scrub, and astounding crag-topped foothills with spectacular rock formations. Equally dramatic is the architectural environment provided by the old Camarillo State Hospital (CSH), which is being reused, adapted, and further built upon to create the new university. Previously one of the nation's largest state hospitals, its institutional presence is characterized by sprawling Spanish revival buildings of the 1930s, cloistered hallways, a bell tower, tiled fountains, open space, and too many courtyards to count.

The campus site represents a significant and interesting slice of Southern California history. Contained here are stories of Chumash peoples, Californio ranchos and American ranchers, captains of agribusiness and laborers, those associated with Camarillo State Hospital, politicians of local, state, and national importance, and finally, those who will continue to build a university based in Ventura County. In their stories we find vision, power, and struggle.

Chumash Peoples

In 1878, pioneer California archaeologist Stephen Bowers asked, "what has become of this once populous race? In Cabrillo's day they swarmed in multiplied thousands on the islands south of Santa Barbara Channel and on the shore of the mainland." The Calleguas Creek and Santa Monica Mountains connected the campus site to foothill and coastal settlements such as Muwu at Point Mugu and Round Mountain which was a gathering place for celebrating the Summer Solstice. Other archaeological sites found here are thought to be "base camps" for the Solstice rituals. Both Round Mountain and Calleguas Creek give character to the land, and these natural gifts were significant to the numerous Chumash who captured Bowers' imagination. There are three official archeological sites on or close to the campus, as well as many others in the surrounding area.

Californio Ranchos and American Ranchers

After secularization of the missions, large parcels of land were given to wealthy Californios, and Ventura County was divided into nineteen ranchos. The campus site was part of Rancho Calleguas, sandwiched among the much larger Ranchos: El Conejo, Simi, Las Posas, El Rio de Santa Clara o La Colonia, and Guadaluca. Cattle ranching was the foundation for Southern California's economy, first as the basis for trading hide and tallow and, after the Gold Rush, as a significant source of beef for northern Californians.

It became increasingly difficult for individuals to retain ownership of such large parcels of land in the years spanning the late 1850s to the 1930s as California became a national model for corporate farming. Adolfo Camarillo bought the 10,000 acre Rancho Calleguas in 1857 which was subsequently divided. Remains of the great rancho today are 4.5 acres of land, a historic Camarillo Ranch House which is open to the public, and a city which bears the family's name. By 1930, the present campus site was included in an 8,000 acre parcel known as the Lewis Ranch, which included 3,500 acres of cultivated land. Soon after, the Lewis family was evicted by the Citizen's National Bank of Los Angeles which owned and operated the business. In 1932 the bank sold a portion of the land to the state for the purpose of building a hospital.

Captains of Agribusiness and Laborers

As ranching declined in California, agribusiness in the Santa Clara River Valley and the Oxnard Plain became as important as the oil developed in Ventura after 1860. Farmers grew barley and grains, lima beans, lemons,

sugar beets, and strawberries. With completion of the coastal railroad in 1887, Venturans turned southward in their business dealings instead of toward San Francisco, and the population of Ventura County towns almost doubled every twenty years. Henry Oxnard and his brothers built a sugar beet refining factory in 1897, and in 1903, residents incorporated the city of Oxnard. At the same time, Nathan Blanchard and Charles Teague developed organizational and marketing innovations which made them nationally leading citrus producers. The city of Camarillo was not incorporated until 1964.

Ventura County agribusiness became extremely profitable because of easily exploited and poorly paid immigrant workers, especially those from Japan, from the midwest in the 1930s, and from Mexico throughout the rest of the twentieth-century. Though California's agribusiness has changed substantially in the twentieth-century, and despite farmworker success in unionizing, field workers still are immigrants performing difficult labor for low wages. Agriculture remains significant to the campus site, and is evident in the surrounding fields of crops and orchards (and beekeeping). This land, as in other California counties, is one of mixed and often contrary economies--both agricultural and residential, with encroaching suburban sprawl.

Camarillo State Hospital (CSH)

Hidden by curved roads and rocky foothills are those dramatically styled buildings of the Camarillo State Hospital (1936-1997), now to be converted for use by the university. Along with Round Mountain, Calleguas Creek, and adjacent fields of crops, the buildings are the most obvious monument to the past. Among the first workers hired by the State were ranch hands, many of whom had worked for Camarillo and Lewis, or had come from Oklahoma in the 1930s.

By 1952, most of the hospital's buildings were completed. There had been more than a decade of additions built as state planners tried desperately to keep pace with the increasing number of patients. The state hospital system historically was so overwhelmed that Mental Hygiene Director E.H. Crawfis wrote in his 1953 report to the legislature, "it is most realistic to speak in the comparative terms of 'overcrowded, badly overcrowded, and terribly overcrowded.'"

The decade of the fifties, under the direction of the military trained Superintendent Dr. F.H. Garrett, was pivotal and defining for CSH. The newest hospital of its size in California and likely in the nation, hospital staff found themselves with traditional training in the very physical care of patients, yet facing new ideas of "modern" psychiatry and the increasing use of drugs to control behavior. It was in the fifties that the past most directly confronted the present, so to speak, resulting in significant changes that would provide a foundation for the flourishing reforms of the sixties and early seventies. There was growing emphasis on the proactive treatment of patients' behaviors so they could return to the community; drug treatments for schizophrenia; a world renowned program of behavioral modification for schizophrenics; the separation of children and adolescents from the rest of the patients in one of the nation's first "Children's Units;" education for children and youth; and the development of a dynamic program for the autistic.

The fifties were one of those magical moments when citizens of California, faced with such dreary prospects of overcrowding and public exposés like the film "Snakepit" (1948), found resolve to change conditions with commitment of spirit and money. The Receiving and Treatment Center (RT) at Camarillo, completed in 1952, was the first of its size built in California. The RT building has symmetrical sides, matching male and female wards and admitting units, with surgical suite, pharmacy, morgue, and autopsy room centrally located. One feels the promise of order imposing systematically on disorder when looking at this building, as well as a strong sense of faith in medical authority.

Camarillo State Hospital first opened at the height of institutional psychiatric care, and it expanded with newer ideas of medical treatments. At the opening of the RT building, State Superintendent Dr. Frank F. Tallman claimed the new treatment center “gives us the opportunity to offer them [patients] the first in psychiatric medicine. . . . Every phase of the modern hospital is at our fingertips.” In other words, this “unit is a splendid example of the stream-lined advancement of psychiatric treatment at its best.” Father Francis Koene gave the benediction: “This Camarillo State Hospital may be for the sick a welcome oasis in the parched desert of mental distress, fatigue and hopelessness; a lymphid fountain with beaded bubbles breaking o’er the brim, to bring refreshing waters to the arid tired mind, torn and tortured and taut with the stress and strain and strife of modern living.”

It is significant that CSH was built outward, not upward as Utica or other nineteenth-century, eastern institutions. Its sprawl reflected that of Los Angeles, which by 1930 had become the nation’s fourth largest metropolitan area. If there was need for respite from the “stress and strain and strife of modern living,” it was here, outside the world’s archetype modern city. Camarillo and nearby towns grew alongside Los Angeles, a city characterized by a rapid rise in population, urban and industrial growth, and an atypical suburban spatial pattern enabled by use of the automobile.

Such change and continued reform up through the seventies did not by any means make Camarillo a perfect place; yet it is safe to say hope and belief in the possibilities for change must have touched the lives of many. CSH was faced with another period of public exposé with a grand jury investigation of suspicious deaths in 1976. As in the earlier decade, many met this challenge with new ideas and programs. CSH developed training programs for health care professionals and new methods of improved care in a context of a rapidly declining patient population, which in itself must have allowed staff to better do their jobs. However, the lack of financial commitment on the part of State directors, now focused more on community based treatments, resulted in hospital closures. Camarillo State Hospital closed in 1997.

Politicians of Local, State, and National Importance

CSH became a direct colony of the State as many of the local communities preferred to ignore its massive and hidden presence. The site was thus isolated from local and regional politics as it was administered by the State. In the 1990s, the local search for an acceptable site for a university campus in Ventura County, alongside the declining number of patients and lack of state financial support, all dovetailed to close the hospital so the site could be converted to a university. Politicians such as Congressman Bob Lagomarsino, whose papers are now kept at California State University, Channel Islands, were aggressive and persistent in their fight for a local university.

The fight had begun in the early 1970s with the establishment of a CSU Northridge (CSUN) distance learning campus in Ventura. Tireless work and commitment on the part of staff and long-time Director Dr. Joyce Kennedy, not to mention the students themselves, built an organization adapted to Ventura County and increasing numbers of enrolled students. In the Fall of 1999, an excited student body and staff moved the CSUN Campus Center to its home in Camarillo.

Those Who Will Continue to Build a University in Ventura County
Handel Evans took early leadership of CSUCI, also beginning work at the Ventura Center before the move. Located on campus but apart from the CSUN center of university life until very recently, Evans and California State University Channel Islands planners were consumed with the incredible task of acquisition of the site as well as questions of initial programs. New President Richard Rush began his term in 2001, along with a group of initial faculty members. California State University Channel Islands will begin teaching its first classes in the Fall of 2002 as the CSUN @ CI Center begins to phase out.

CAMPUS TOURS

Prospective students may contact the Office of Outreach and Recruitment to arrange an individual or group tour. In addition to campus tours, the Office of Outreach and Recruitment offers monthly information meetings. Tours can be arranged Monday-Friday by contacting Outreach Services. Please contact 805-437-8520 to reserve your spot for an information meeting or to arrange a campus tour.

