

2012 “Year of the Ranchos” Rancho Los Cerritos: *The Roots of Long Beach!*

About Rancho Los Cerritos Historic Site

Rancho Los Cerritos is Long Beach’s only National and State Historic Landmark, as well as a local landmark, and includes one of the few remaining two-story adobes in Southern California from the Mexican Rancho period. It is owned by the City of Long Beach, operated by the Department of Parks, Recreation and Marine as a historic site museum, and supported by two nonprofit groups, the Rancho Los Cerritos Foundation and Friends of Rancho Los Cerritos.

Rancho Los Cerritos is located at 4600 Virginia Road and is open to the public Wednesday through Sunday from 1 to 5 p.m., except on major holidays. Call (562) 570-1755 or visit www.rancholoscerritos.org for more information.



Rancho Los Cerritos History – Overview

Rancho Los Cerritos Historic Site's history is a microcosm of Southern California history, reflecting the earliest times of Native American habitation through Spanish, Mexican and American settlement into the 1940s. Its original 27,000 acres were carved from one of Spain's first land grants in Alta California, to soldier Manuel Nieto. The current adobe house was constructed in 1844 as headquarters for Los Angeles merchant John Temple's cattle ranching operations. The Bixby family, gold miners turned entrepreneur ranchers, later raised sheep on the land prior to subdividing it for large-scale agriculture and town site development; Long Beach was founded on a portion of the Rancho in the 1880s. After selling most of the property, in 1930 the Bixbys remodeled the home in the Monterey Colonial style and landscaped the remaining 4.74 acres for the family's private use.

Rancho Los Cerritos History - The Earliest Peoples

In 1930 clogged stones were found at Rancho Los Cerritos. Dating to 2-5,000 BC, they represent the earliest presence of local Native Americans. Between 500 and 1200 AD, a group from the Great Basin of Utah and Nevada displaced the region's inhabitants, building 50-100 villages in the Los Angeles area including Tibahangna by the Cerritos property. Known today as the Tongva, they lived off the land, gathering, fishing and hunting. Their society included extensive trade, technology, a rich oral literature, birth, rite-of-passage and death traditions, and belief in a supreme being, Chinigchinich. After Spain began settling California, the Tongva and other Native Americans learned new trades and about Christianity at nearby missions. The Tongva became known as Gabrielino, after Mission San Gabriel.

Rancho Los Cerritos History - The Spanish & Early Mexican Era 1784-1843

The Spanish began settling California in 1769, when it sent expeditions to "Alta California" to establish missions, presidios and pueblos. In 1784 a Spanish soldier, Manuel Nieto, was granted 300,000 acres as a reward for his military service and to encourage settlement in California. His acres were reduced to 167,000 because of a dispute with the Mission San Gabriel. His land stretched from north of Whittier to the sea, and from the Los Angeles River to the Santa Ana River. He built a home near the present town of Whittier, stocked the land with cattle and horses, and grew corn. When he died in 1804, his children inherited his property. After years of joint ownership, the lands were divided into six parcels in 1834. Daughter Manuela Cota received Rancho Los Cerritos, 27,000 acres bordered by the Los Angeles River and Pacific Ocean. She and husband Guillermo built at least two adobes on the land and raised 12 children, and cattle and crops. After her death, her heirs sold the Rancho to John Temple in 1843.

Rancho Los Cerritos History - The Cattle Era 1844-1866

John Temple built the present two-story Monterey-style adobe in 1844 for his cattle operation headquarters. To supplement his mercantile business in Los Angeles, he pastured as many as 15,000 head and engaged in the lucrative hide and tallow trade. Although he only used Rancho Los Cerritos as a summer home, much expense was lavished on a formal garden at the Rancho. Significant trees from this time still exist. The Gold Rush boosted Southern California's cattle industry when demand for cow hides was decreasing. Ranchers like Temple drove cattle north to feed hungry miners. By the early 1860s, years of flooding and drought ended these prosperous times. Tens of thousands of cattle died and Temple retired. He sold Rancho Los Cerritos in 1866 to Flint, Bixby & Co. for \$20,000.

Rancho Los Cerritos History - The Sheep Ranching Era 1866-1881

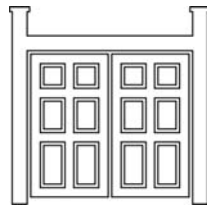
Brothers Thomas and Benjamin Flint and cousin Lewellyn Bixby founded Flint, Bixby & Co. in 1854 and raised sheep in Northern California. In 1866 Lewellyn's brother Jotham began managing their southern ranch. In 1957 Jotham bought into the property and formed his own company. From 1866 to 1881, he and his family lived in the Cerritos adobe where as many as 30,000 sheep provided wool for trade. Jotham and his wife had seven children, and many relatives resided at or visited the Rancho, creating a lively atmosphere. Sarah Bixby Smith shared memories of these times in her book Adobe Days.

Rancho Los Cerritos History - Sub-Division and Development Era 1882-1929

Toward the late 1870s, the Southern California sheep industry declined and Jotham Bixby chose to lease or sell portions of the property. By 1884 the town of Long Beach occupied the southwest corner of the Rancho. Eventually Bellflower, Paramount, Signal Hill and Lakewood were founded as well on Los Cerritos lands. Dairy farms thrived and beans, barley and alfalfa were planted. From 1890 to 1927, the Cerritos adobe housed a succession of tenants and fell into disrepair through general neglect.

Rancho Los Cerritos History - Remodel 1930-1931

The Virginia Country Club was built next door and homes had cropped up in the area when, in 1930, Lewellyn Bixby's son Llewellyn, Sr. remodeled Rancho Los Cerritos for his family. Ralph Cornell kept the original configuration of Temple's adobe intact. He redesigned the grounds for the family, incorporating the trees from the Temple era. After Llewellyn, Sr.'s death, the family sold the house and 4.7 acres of land to the City of Long Beach. In 1955 the site opened as a public museum dedicated to the history of the Rancho and surrounding area.



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