



LEGACY OF THE LAND

BE IT KNOWN that the following is a faithful chronicle of events & occupants of the plateau called Plano Trabuco, now the townsite of RANCHO SANTA MARGARITA, County of Orange, State of California.

❧ The earliest dwellers on the Plano were native Americans of Shoshonean stock, who called themselves Acagchemen, & this great plain Alume, meaning 'Look to the hills.'

❧ By right of discovery and conquest, the King of Spain laid claim to the Californias, the Plano itself being first traversed by the Spanish expedition of Gaspar de Portolá on July 24, 1769. ♦ Priests with the party called the mesa San Francisco de Solano, but the loss here of a soldier's blunderbuss or Trabuco left a lasting name.

❧ With the establishment of Mission San Juan Capistrano in 1776, vast ranches were created & administered by the Franciscans, among them Rancho Trabuco, embracing the Plano, where cattle grazed bearing the Mission brand.

❧ A large adobe was built on the western edge of the Plano. In 1818, when San Juan Capistrano was threatened by insurgents, the Padres transported the Mission's Treasures there for safekeeping.

❧ California became a Mexican Province in 1822 following that country's revolt from Spain, & a dozen years later all Mission lands fell under civil authority. ♦ In 1841 Santiago Argüello was granted the Rancho Trabuco in order to raise his herds and 22 children.

❧ In 1843, Juan Forster, an Englishman, bought the Rancho Trabuco, which he called 'La Victoria.' ♦ An additional grant from his brother-in-law, Gov. Pico, brought the ranch to 22,184 acres. ♦ In 1845 Forster bought the adjoining 46,432-acre Misión Vieja, which he called 'La Paz,' & the two ranches became as one.

❧ To elude capture by American troops who invaded the province in 1846, Pío Pico, the last Mexican governor, took refuge in the old Trabuco Adobe, then fled south to his Rancho Santa Margarita y las Flores. ♦ After the war, California became a territory of the United States, then its thirty-first State.

❧ By 1864, Juan Forster added Pico's vast San Diego estate to his northern ranches,

& devoted the Plano to Wool Raising.

❧ Plagued by droughts & debt, Forster died, & his heirs elected to sell. ♦ Acquiring the Rancho Santa Margarita y las Flores were two Irish immigrants, James C. Flood, the 'Comstock Silver King,' & his ranch manager, Richard O'Neill, Sr., a prominent cattleman.

❧ To upgrade the native longhorns on the Santa Margarita, O'Neill imported breeding stock from Texas, & soon began marketing shorthorn beef under the new Flood & O'Neill brand.

❧ Santa Margarita cattle then grazed from Oceanside in San Diego to Aliso Creek in Orange County. ♦ Subsequently O'Neill introduced grain growing on the Plano, which felt its first plow in 1893. By 1913 Plano Trabuco had become the County's greatest Wheat Field.

❧ In 1907, after 25 years of faithful service, Richard O'Neill, Sr., then past 80, was deeded half interest in the Rancho Santa Margarita y las Flores by James L. Flood to consummate a Handshake Agreement made by his father & O'Neill in 1882.

❧ Soon after, O'Neill deeded his interest to his son, Jerome, who brought the ranch to its greatest extent — 230,000 acres in three counties. ♦ In 1923, to consolidate their holdings, Jerome O'Neill & James L. Flood incorporated under the name Santa Margarita Company.

❧ With the death of both partners in 1926, the corporation dissolved, the O'Neill interests placed in trust for Jerome's brother, Richard, Jr., & his sister, Mary Baumgartner, & their families. ♦ Meanwhile, the Plano returned to pasture & provided the setting for several Silent Movies.

❧ As World War II approached, the Rancho was divided, the Flood & Baumgartner portions being absorbed by Camp Pendleton, while Richard O'Neill, Jr., retained Rancho Mission Viejo & Trabuco, whose cattle now bore the 'Bell' brand.