

USING ORAL HISTORY TO EXPAND KNOWLEDGE OF LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH-CENTURY RANCHING IN THE JOLON AND KING CITY AREA, MONTEREY COUNTY

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ABSTRACT

Twelve historic ranching and small-scale settlement sites were investigated on Fort Hunter Liggett in Monterey County. These sites had limited archaeological data potential. In order to determine the historic significance of these sites, background research became especially critical. All of these residential sites were small, however, and had little or no information recorded in the documentary record. As this limitation became known, oral history began to play a more significant role in the study. Project archaeologists conducted oral history interviews with several long-time residents in the area who were familiar with local landscape and history. Oral history added to knowledge of ranching patterns and landscape use, especially in terms of building construction, house site selection, vegetation, family lives and livelihoods, and community interaction and survival. Combined with the archaeological record, the oral historical record gave meaning to sites that by themselves would otherwise be considered insignificant. This paper also addresses lessons learned from conducting oral historical interviews.

Historical Background

Large land holders have long dominated the area that today makes up Fort Hunter Liggett in Monterey County. Lands have been primarily used for ranching, especially herd grazing, in the San Antonio and Nacimiento Valleys since the 18th century. Mission San Antonio established several areas for grazing of cows and sheep. After secularization in 1834, lands were broken up into large *ranchos*. This pattern of large land holdings continued into the American period (Costello 1994). The land was dominated by cattle ranchers like Faxton Atherton, who still retains a notoriety for dispossessing Native Americans and Mexicans of their land. William Randolph Hearst began buying up properties surrounding Mission San Antonio during the early 1920s. Hearst hired local ranch hands to manage the land and operate his cattle company. In 1940, the lands were transferred to

the U.S. government, to become Fort Hunter Liggett (Eidsness and Jackson 1994).

Despite the dominance of these large-scale operations, some small-scale settlement occurred in both the Nacimiento and San Antonio Valleys. These occupants were initially Mission San Antonio neophytes dislocated by secularization, and local Mexican-American families. Euroamerican occupation of California brought more small-scale settlers. Recent archaeological investigations focused on remnants of these small-scale settlements, whose presence was always economically and legally threatened by the larger ranch holdings. The settler community represented by both ranching and small-scale settlement sites are only a portion of a larger local community. A series of small towns dot the area surrounding Fort Hunter Liggett, including Lockwood, Bradley, Pleyto, San Lucas, and what was once

the town of Jolon. Another of these small towns, King City, has grown into a larger community (see Figure 1).

Part of the town of Jolon still remains on Fort Hunter Liggett property. The settlement of Jolon grew during the beginnings of the American period, from 1850-1880, when the area relied heavily upon cattle ranching and small-scale agriculture. Jolon was on an important business route along the old El Camino road, which connected the missions of California, and was a stop along the route from Los Angeles to San Francisco. Many European-descended families came to Jolon after 1870, and continued to immigrate in the 1880s (Heinsen 1975). German-Danish peoples dominated Jolon, many originally from Föhr, an island off the coast of Germany. Some family names still in the area are Weferling, Heinsen, Martinus, Paulsen, and Wollesen. Asked why so many Germans settled the area, Archie Weferling replied that "one German tells another, and pretty soon you have a neighborhood of Germans." Several Mexican and Native American families remained in the area as well. After large cattle companies began consolidating land holdings, many families relocated to nearby towns like Lockwood and Bradley.

Potential of Oral History

Archaeological remnants of small-scale settlements of Native, Mexican, and Euroamerican families remain on Fort Hunter Liggett lands (Eidsness and Jackson 1994). The archaeology varies in integrity from standing structures to ruins with only a slightly elevated mound and remnants of introduced vegetation like trees of heaven. By itself, however, the limited archaeological record poorly represents the area's history. There is a limited amount of archival history and data available in local historical societies, recorder's offices, and libraries. In a rural area such as this, archival information is often scarcer than it would be in urban areas, and provides few details of everyday ranch life. There is, though, a wealth of oral history available.

Many of the descendants of the small-scale settlers can be found in the communities around Fort Hunter Liggett, such as Lockwood and Bradley. During the current project, archaeologists interviewed seven informants, asking questions about the area's local and regional history (Allen and Hildebrand 1996). One informant, Archie Weferling, is a fourth generation Lockwood resident, and remembers ranching during the early part of the century. Four informants are fifth generation area residents. Fort Hunter Liggett was established during their childhood. Frances Garcia, a Salinan Native American informant, remembers the area before the army purchased the land, even though she mostly lived in nearby King City. Finally, Frank Taylor is the son of Hearst's superintendent. Each of the informants had a different perspective, teaching the project archaeologists several lessons.

Lessons Learned from Oral History

First, oral history has much to contribute to the understanding of early 20th-century historical sites. It fleshes out the picture of the historical past, adding names, faces, and details of everyday life that cannot be reconstructed from the archival and archaeological data – the human dimension. In the current study, oral history contributed to our knowledge of house site selection and vegetation. Most of the sites for this project had few surface remains; often only introduced vegetation remained as a clue that a house site once existed here. Informants added plants like cottonwood and rose bushes to the list of vegetation favored by ranchers, helping with site identification. Little remained of the structures themselves. Informants gave further details of building construction methods and general site layout. They discussed the use and construction of adobe buildings, wood buildings, and outbuildings such as corrals and barns.

Sometimes oral history informants politely responded to questions that sounded silly to them. In response to a question that was obvious to him, Archie Weferling stated that in relation to the house, outhouses were "not too

far...not too close..you didn't want to have to go too far in the rain." He also said that most trash was burned, and what was left was thrown into washes and arroyos. This implied that archaeological investigations were not likely to find trash pits or privies full of artifacts on any of the sites. More likely, domestic refuse would be found in dispersed arroyo trash scatters. Structural remains, however, could be found on ranch sites (assuming they had not been destroyed by the Army occupation), in addition to the trees and bushes planted by settling families.

Informants also told how families made their livelihood. Charles and Emogene Willoughby, and Emogene's brother Ellis, still raise and sell cattle. They described stock raising, and how the family used to make ends meet with eleven children. The Roth family lived on what is now Fort Hunter Liggett gunnery target practice lands. "We had cattle, and we raised all our own vegetables." For other necessities, they went to King City, for "flour, beans, stuff like that." Mostly though, the family raised the food it consumed: they had beef and dairy cattle, pigs, chicken, and doves. They also occasionally hunted deer. Crops raised, according to Shirley Merritt, were mostly wheat and barley, and fruits and vegetables for the family's daily needs. Trips to the city, San Lucas or King City, were few and far between.

Informants frequently made remarks about community interaction. Butch Heinsen mentioned baseball teams, grange halls, schools, and church gatherings. He talked about two Salinan Indians, Joe and Dave Mora, who lived on the Heinsen property in a small house in their later years. He remembered his dad giving the Moras insulin shots, and that the brothers chopped wood for extra money. He also talked about the Borronadas, and families helping each other to fix windmills and pumps. His father, part of the Lockwood German community, did not learn to speak English until he went to the local school. Among all the informants, there seemed to be a recognition of ethnic communities, the Germans, Mexicans, and Indians, but no hostilities. Neither, however,

was there intermarriage. As Butch Heinsen put it, "You know, we're all kind of inbred here..." He also stated that he imported his wife from Colorado. Speaking of the local community, Frances Garcia summarized it best: "Everyone knew everyone in those days."

During the interview with Frances Garcia, she remarked that she did not know much about the specific site locations we mentioned because she was "just a kid then, and really didn't pay too much attention." When she went out to the sites with archaeologists in tow, however, a different story emerged. At the ranch site of El Piojo, Mrs. Garcia remembered where the old house was, where she used to find "Indian points," the wooden corrals that predated the modern army metal ones, a prehistoric occupation site behind the barn, and where an adobe site was possibly located. Here was the second lesson: physically taking informants to sites triggers a lot more memories, and produces much more site-specific information. Frank Taylor confirmed this rule of thumb. At Milpitas Ranch No. 2 site, Mr. Taylor told archaeologists where the house, barns, and corrals were, little or none of which could be traced archaeologically. He remembered the different people who lived there, and crops that were raised. He provided information about agriculture and irrigation on Fort Hunter Liggett lands as well.

The interviews also pointed out differences in generations, and the knowledge they shared, or did not share. This was the third lesson. Only one informant, Calverne Saylor, is still actively farming. His interview focused on dry farming techniques, modern and historical (most of the lands on present-day Fort Hunter Liggett were not irrigated), and on ranch building layouts, farm equipment, and crop raising. He frequently noted that his dad, Clarence, had much more to say about what ranching was like in the early part of the century, but that Clarence was ill with chronic heart troubles, and was not up to talking. Butch Heinsen told us that most of the younger generation were trying to stay in the area, but living off of the land was no longer possible. He is a banker, his daughter is a school teacher, and his son has some real estate dealings. Mr.

Heinsen said that only Calverne Saylor farms full-time, and that even he runs the Pleyto store to help supplement his income. Jim Weferling, Archie's nephew, runs the Lockwood store and also farms part-time. Although the local community is aware of their ranching heritage, and are proud of it, there is a direct knowledge of ranching and farming life that is not being shared by the generations. Lockwood recently celebrated its centennial, and highlighted the city's ranching background. However, the fifth generation often grew up away from ranches, and the result is a loss of knowledge of the historical past, and sometimes a romanticization of what life was like.

Butch Heinsen recalled the past as a time when neighbors helped one another "Amish style," locals gathered together often for social events (until television came along, he added, a change he did not appreciate), but most people were self-reliant. Mr. Heinsen stressed this self-reliance as an important and admirable trait. He thought that William Hearst was probably a good neighbor, and added that the Army was, too. According to him, the Army paved roads, brought income to the community, and preserved land. Archie Weferling, in his 80s, recalled a different kind of life. He stated that Hearst was a good neighbor, but that the Army "ruined the countryside...[and] the way we live." Referring to social interaction, Mr. Weferling said that "people stayed to themselves because a horse and buggy took too long." He also talked about the itinerant workers, like carpenters and field hands, that helped build the houses and harvest. He said that families raised their own food, but that trips to town for lumber and other supplies were very important. Generally, Mr. Weferling thought life was harder then, and preferred the comfort of his home now.

Conclusions

The generation represented by Archie Weferling is the most reliant source of information about rural early 20th-century life in Monterey County. It is also a generation that is dying. During the present study, we were only able to interview Archie Weferling. Jan Martinus

and Clarence Saylor, his contemporaries, were both ill. This generation is an important source of information. Their memories of the 1910s-1930s are the most accurate. This generation has details of daily routines that make rural ranching and farming come to life, rounding out the picture provided by archaeology and archival materials. In the conclusions of the report to the Army on small-scale settlement sites of Fort Hunter Liggett (Allen and Hildebrand 1996), it was recommended that further oral histories take place, and soon. Each generation loses oral traditions concerning the past. Potential historical knowledge is lost with each passing. The present study has pointed out how significant oral historical resources are. However, it has also taught us that this is source of information that is quickly fading, and must be tapped soon, or it simply will not be available.

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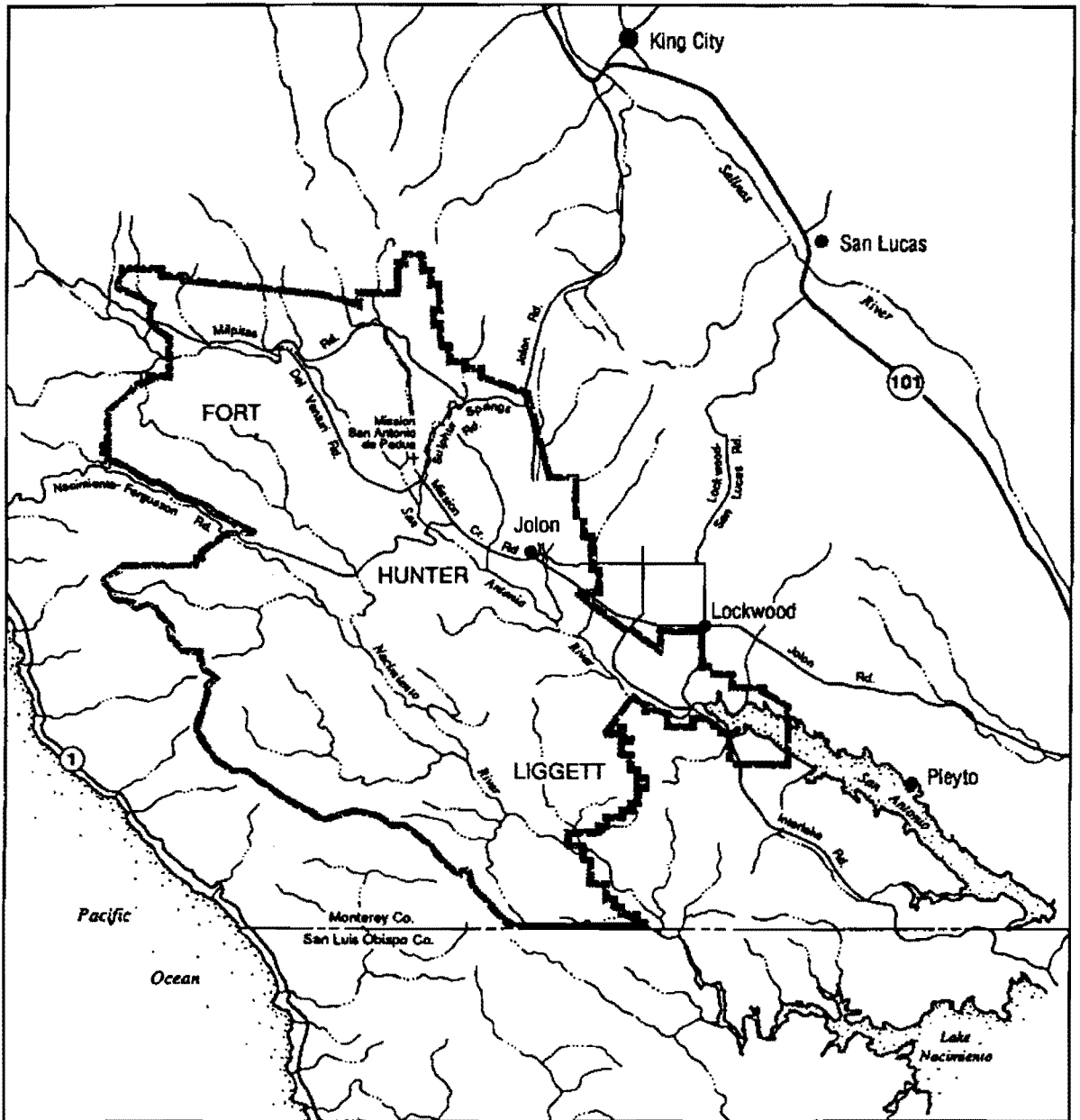


Figure 1. Project location.



0 5 miles

Source: Defense Mapping Agency's Ft. Hunter Liggett Military Installation Map, 10/85.

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