

Architectural Narrative
“Rancho Los Alamitos”
by Sally Woodbridge
(Original research by Loretta Berner
and Pamela Young)

The legacies passed from one generation to the next are many and varied. Each reveals some aspect of human endeavor and achievement, but perhaps the most universal and enduring expressions of tastes, attitudes, and circumstances are to be found in the buildings each generation chooses to construct or modify to provide shelter and a place called “home.” Changing needs, lifestyles, and values dictate constantly changing patterns of settlement and building style and use. Multitudes of structures vanish without a trace, to be replaced by a new generation of buildings suited to contemporary taste. However, those structures that do survive for an extended period as archaeological fragments, romantic ruins, or, more rarely, as relatively intact buildings, tell us much about the people who built and used them, and occasionally, about those who preserved these tangible links to our past.

On Rancho Los Alamitos mesa the buildings of the earliest inhabitants are gone. The impermanent structures erected by the Tongva, native inhabitants of Puvunga, left little trace beyond holes in the earth for lodge poles and fire pits. The Spaniards and Mexicans who followed built structures of adobe mud—only slightly more permanent than the reed and willow “wickiups” of the Tongva. However, in the case of Rancho Lo Alamitos, and at other rare sites, circumstances have intervened. The adobe walls of the Alamitos Ranch House, which date from the Spanish period, have survived because, layered over the old mud brick walls, generations of ranchers have added their own walls, successive structural modifications, and extensions. Anchored by its adobe core, the Alamitos ranch house is a dynamic, organic structure with an intriguing, complex story to tell.

Documentation regarding the evolution and appearance of the ranch house is slim, particularly for the first century of its existence. Except for the most basic descriptions necessary to identify a particular structure, the desire or need to record the changing appearance of a common agricultural dwelling simply did not exist. Early patterns of daily life at Rancho Los Alamitos remain uncertain, and little is known about the exact date, location and configuration of the first buildings constructed after the Native American period. Absentee ownership and intermittent conflict over land titles have contributed to a confusing legacy of legal documents which provide names and relationships, but only hint at circumstances which might have affected the conduct of life and the resulting need for housing and utilitarian outbuildings.

While the documented history of the ranch house complex is relatively sketchy until the late 19th century, the arrival of the Bixby family and their interest in the property’s early history prompted various family research projects and memoirs during their ninety-year

occupancy. Unfortunately, the relatively late recognition of the importance of the history of Rancho Los Alamitos has left many unanswered questions. Thus, without the discovery of new sources of primary documentation to provide additional and reliable information, it is unlikely that the architectural history of the site can be developed significantly beyond the information now presented.¹

PRE-HISTORY AND HISPANIC PERIOD

Native American inhabitation of the Alamitos mesa began as early as A.D. 500, no doubt prompted by the abundant spring located on the lower south-east slope and the advantage of the cooling breezes and sweeping views of the hilltop location. In the semi-arid desert land of Southern California, an unfailing source of water was a magnet for people and animals in the pre-modern era. The Puvunga spring, located a short distance from the present Alamitos ranch buildings, ran until 1956. Its water sustained whatever human and animal populations that may have preceded the early Puvunga people, as well as the waves of inhabitants and various ranching enterprises that followed.

It was at the ancient village of Puvunga, on the slopes of what is now Bixby Hill, that the Tongva prophet Chinichnich set forth the creation legend and raised up out of the earth a new race of humans. The doctrine decreed strict laws of obedience and adherence to the tenets of the teachings, as well as strict observation of the secret and sacred rituals. The village name “Puvunga” can be translated as meaning “in the crowd,” and suggests a place of large gatherings, a center for sacred rites.

The secrecy surrounding the Chinichnich teachings and the closed nature of the sacred rites has contributed to the difficulty in establishing the locations of the village, and the exact site has never been confirmed. Housing for the inhabitants of Puvunga consisted of impermanent dome-shaped dwellings, constructed of bent poles, bound together and covered with mats of brush and grass, sometimes coated with mud or tar. The relative abundance of building materials and ease of replacement led the native inhabitants to discard old, dilapidated structures and build anew at frequent intervals. The nondurable nature of the building materials has left little archaeological evidence of the placement of these dwellings.²

When Spain began colonizing Alta California in 1769, the Puvunga village was still a healthy, thriving community.³ However, despite the initial and lengthy native occupation of the land (A.D. 500-800); over time the Spanish name for the place, “Los Alamitos,” eclipsed the much older native name of “Puvunga.” In the same manner, the Spanish name for the indigenous people also took precedence over the now nearly-forgotten name the natives used for themselves: Tongva. Today they are remembered as “Gabrielinos,” recalling the proximity and dominance of Mission San Gabriel (1771-1846).

During Gaspar de Portola’s march from San Diego to the San Francisco Bay (1769-1770), the exploratory party passed to the north and east of Puvunga. Portola’s company

was made up of men from Mexico and Baja California, among them a command of twenty-five Catalonian light infantrymen under Lieutenant Pedro Fages. Fifteen years later, three of the Catalonians in Fages' command received the first provisional land grants under the Spanish Crown.

Unlike their European contemporaries who were also colonizing North and South America, the Spanish did not look xenophobically on the Native Americans as a threat. Although treatment of indigenous people was often cruel, opportunistic and deadly, the Spanish Crown viewed them as potential citizens waiting to be educated and Christianized in order that they might become good loyal, productive and God-fearing subjects of the Crown. Intermarriage with the prospective citizens was not discouraged. The official Spanish policy also held that the Native Americans, once educated and Christianized, had a right to their own land in California. Theoretically, this land was held in trust for them by the Missions until the native peoples were judged sufficiently acculturated to be responsible land owners. Under this doctrine the native people and the Missions had prior right to use of the land and their needs took precedence over other settlers and land grantees. In petitioning for land, colonists had to guarantee that their settlement and activities would not "prejudice" or interfere with the natives' or the Missions' use of the land.

To encourage settlement in the new territory, the Spanish Crown initially made grants for the use of land to its faithful and proven subjects (most often the soldiers of early expeditions). The land grant or concession did not confer ownership, but awarded the right to live upon, use and work certain areas of land. In order to obtain and retain a land concession, a Spanish subject agreed to build a stone (adobe) house, stock the land with at least a thousand head of cattle, and provide enough vaqueros (cowhands) to keep the stock from straying into neighboring lands. Fewer than 25 grants (or concessions) were awarded during the period of Spanish settlement between 1784 and 1821.⁴

In 1821, Mexico won its independence from Spain. The change in status affected Alta California, New Mexico, Arizona, Texas, and parts of Utah, Colorado, and Nevada—all of which were considered Mexican territory. A dramatic result of Mexico's independence was the accelerated granting of land and the change in the status of ownership. Under Mexican rule, land could now be privately owned, and many holders of the earlier Spanish land "concessions" petitioned the new government to grant them outright ownership of the land they had been holding. At the same time, a new wave of settlers petitioned the Mexican government for ownership of available open land. Also, land held by the Missions now was available as a result of the Secularization Act of 1833 and the dismantling of the Mission system. During the years of Mexican rule (1821-1843), over 450 land grants were made, compared to less than 25 during Spanish rule. Grantees under Mexican rule were to fulfill certain obligations very similar to those required under the Spanish Crown, or forfeit the land.

The first individuals to receive land concessions under Spanish rule were three of Portola's leather-jacketed soldiers: Juan Jose Dominguez, Jose Maria Verdugo, and Manuel Perez Nieto. In the year 1784, each was granted the use of a very generous tract

of land, ranging in size from approximately 36,000 acres to 300,000 acres.⁵ When approaching retirement, Nieto petitioned for and subsequently received a concession of land known as *La Zanja de Zacamutin*. Awarded on behalf of the Crown of Spain by Governor Pedro Fages in 1784, the large tract of land was described by Fages in a letter dated November 20, 1784. He defined the property as being “on the High Road (El Camino Real) from said Mission (San Gabriel), towards the Encino (oak tree).” In his letter of petition, Nieto describes the desired La Zanja property as being “about three leagues distant from the Mission of San Gabriel, on the road to the Royal Presidio of San Carlos of Monterey.”⁶

In 1790, Nieto wrote to Fages requesting more land, saying that difficulties had arisen regarding water because La Zanja was near the sources of water for both the Pueblo of Los Angeles and the Mission San Gabriel. Nieto further stated that the Zanja tract was too small to sustain his increasing herds, “. . . Wherefore, I pray your Honor to be pleased to grant me another place which is the place of the Encino, which will be sufficient for the stock that God may be pleased to give me. . . .” Once again Fages granted the request of his former corporal. However, Fages did not give the desired Encino land to Nieto, but directed him to proceed with his stock “. . . to the place of Los Coyotes, since at present there [are] some difficulties in the way of giving the place of the Encino.”⁷

Nieto moved with his family and herds to the generous 300,000 acre tract of Los Coyotes. He appears to have abandoned the Zanja land in favor of the more extensive Los Coyotes, for in 1794, Nieto’s brother-in-arms and neighboring ranchero, Jose Maria Verdugo, petitioned for and received the land of La Zanja de Zacamutin from the newly-appointed Diego Borcia.⁸

The boundaries of Nieto’s new Los Coyotes land were defined as “the river San Gabriel, the river Santa Ana, the main road leading from San Diego along the hills to San Gabriel and the sea coast.” Nieto settled on part of this land, an area later to be known as Rancho Santa Gertrudes. There Nieto lived with his extended family in a compound of *casas*, or houses, and constructed outbuildings appropriate for ranching purposes. The settlement became known as “Los Nietos” and was both a supply center and a travelers’ rest on the way from the southern missions to the Pueblo of Los Angeles.⁹

By 1795, Nieto was once again petitioning the governor, this time for protection and aid. The priests at San Gabriel Mission claimed more land was needed by the Mission to support what they optimistically perceived to be a growing Tongva population. The padres began encroaching upon Nieto’s land, laying claim to the water ditches he dug, even sowing grain in the fields Nieto had plowed. The padres asserted that the Church had a prior right to the land in order to sustain their native converts, and declared “that according to the King, the Indians are to have all the land ‘necessary for this purpose.’”¹⁰ Nieto appealed to the governor:

Sir, I am so much persecuted by the Mission that I am compelled to seek the protection of your Honor, as I now do . . . the Fathers of said Mission . . . are continually endeavoring to force me to abandon the place to the Indians.¹¹

Governor Borica ordered the land in question to be surveyed; but despite a survey report sympathetic to Nieto, the governor determined that Nieto could keep only the land he had under cultivation. The remaining land became the property of the Mission. This reduced the Los Coyotes concession to approximately 167,000 acres, still the largest grant of land made by either the Spanish or Mexican governments in California.¹²

Upon Manuel Nieto's death in 1804, the vast land holding passed undivided to his widow and surviving children. Statements made years later say that around 1806 Nieto's eldest son, Juan Jose, built a small adobe near the Puvunga spring on the portion of the land later called Alamitos. Although there is no firm evidence to confirm this statement, the original adobe dwelling (supposedly built to house vaqueros) may be the adobe core of the current Rancho Los Alamitos Ranch House.¹³

In 1827, Juan Jose Nieto asked the new Mexican government for confirmation of the concession granted to his father by the Spanish government. (Laws passed in 1824 and 1827 had permitted citizens to own land and thus prompted an increasing number of applications for new land grants, as well as for confirmation of existing ownership.) However, the informality and lack of documentation concerning the early Spanish concessions caused subsequent confusion about rights and boundaries. In his petition, Juan Jose Nieto states that the "paper" given to this father by Governor Fages could not be found. Any response from the Governor to Juan Jose's petition is not known.¹⁴

On March 8, 1833, Juan Patricio Ontiveras, a neighbor of the Nieto family, submitted a petition (Expediente 57) to Governor Jose Figueroa requesting the rights of ownership to a portion of the Los Coyotes grant known as Los Alamitos. In his petition, Ontiveras implied that the Alamitos tract of land was vacant, and stated that, "On said rancho there is a *zanja* (ditch) of permanent water; it is however without timber, excepting a few *alamos* (poplars) at the point where I intend to make my settlement." Ontiveras promised to stock the Alamitos with cattle, build "respectable" dwellings, cultivate the land, and plant a vineyard if the governor was so generous as to grant his request.¹⁵

Figueroa required Ontiveras to provide a *diseño* (map) of the desired tract of land and ordered that the matter be investigated by the *Ayuntamiento* (town council) of the Pueblo of Los Angeles. The Ayuntamiento, in its report, stated: "The land petitioned for by the Citizen Ontiveras, is one of the accumulations of the ranch of Santa Gertrudes, belonging to Don Juan Jose Nieto; that it is considered vacant, since there is only found upon it some wild cattle and horses, belonging to different owners, the smallest portion of these belonging to the said Nieto."¹⁶

Despite the Ayuntamiento's opinion that the Los Alamitos portion of the Nieto's land was "vacant," the *diseño* Ontiveras submitted as an addendum to his 1833 petition shows a *casa* (house) in the approximate location of the adobe core of the present ranch house. This *diseño* provides the earliest documentation of a structure at Rancho Los Alamitos. The structure shown on the *diseño* may refer to the adobe purportedly built by Juan Jose Nieto around 1806. However, since the petition does not mention or describe the structure or its use, whether as a dwelling or rudimentary shelter for men and/or animals,

or its condition (ruinous or habitable) the nature of the building remains unclear. Ontiveras' intention to make a settlement and build "respectable" dwellings suggests that the existing building did not meet his needs for sheltering his family.¹⁷

In letters dated September 15, 1833 and July 3, 1834, Juan Jose Nieto argued vigorously against Ontiveras' petition for ownership, saying that the presence of Nieto cattle verified current occupancy and use. In addition, Nieto stated that he could not continue ranching operations without the spring water of the Alamitos. Ultimately, the matter was settled. In 1837 the Ontiveras family was granted an unoccupied and undisputed tract of land named Rancho San Juan Cajon de Santa Ana, and the Alamitos land remained, for a while, with the Nieto family.¹⁸

The Ontiveras challenge may have renewed Juan Jose Nieto's concern about the uncertain legality of his father's land holdings. In 1833, Juan Jose applied to the governor for confirmation of the family's land, and requested a division of land among Manuel Nieto's surviving heirs. With the help of a young Yankee immigrant named Abel Stearns, who acted as a surveyor for the Nieto family, confirmation of the division of land between the members of the Nieto family was drawn up by Juan Jose and submitted to Governor Figueroa. On July 27, 1833, Juan Jose obtained an endorsement for the division of the land which comprised the 167,000 acres remaining from the 1790 Los Coyotes grant.

Permission given, the Los Coyotes was divided into five large ranchos: Santa Gertrudes, Los Cerritos, Las Bolsas, Los Coyotes and Los Alamitos, and one smaller rancho or *sitio* named Palo Alto. Josefa Cota, the widow of Antonio Maria Perez Nieto (Manuel's youngest son), was given the family home ranch of Santa Gertrudes; Rancho Los Cerritos was given to Manuel Nieto's only surviving daughter, Maria Manuela Antonia; the widow of Jose Antonio Nieto received Rancho Las Bolsas; and Nieto's eldest son, Juan Jose Nieto received Rancho Los Coyotes, Rancho Los Alamitos, and the small sitio, Palo Alto.¹⁹

Thirteen months later, on June 30, 1834, while the Ontiveras petition was still unsettled, Joan Jose Nieto sold the Los Alamitos portion of his holdings to Governor Figueroa for the modest sum of \$500. Although Nieto stated that he had made inquiries and could not get a better offer for the land, it was rumored that the governor had been given a reduced price in return for his help in legalizing the Nieto family land titles.²⁰

Upon acquiring Los Alamitos, Figueroa formed a partnership with Nicolas Gutierrez and Roberto Prado called *La Compania Agricultura* for the purpose of stocking and operating the Alamitos ranch. Under the company ownership, it appears that the ranch buildings were augmented to provide additional quarters for the mayordomo and vaqueros. The untimely death of Figueroa in 1835 necessitated the dissolution of the enterprise and the governor's brother, Francisco Figueroa, became the administrator of the estate and the manager of Rancho Los Alamitos. According to one source, Francisco took up residence on the ranch.²¹

About 1840 Abel Stearns began negotiating with the estate of Governor Figueroa to acquire the Alamitos property. Under these circumstances, the earliest surviving inventory was taken of the buildings, equipment, and animals at the Alamitos for the sale to Stearns in July 1842. This inventory described three buildings:

One house of adobe, with two apartments covered with pitch and others without roofs and with two opposite doors.

One more house of adobe with three apartments covered by rushes and with one door placed therein. One other house of adobe with two apartments covered by rushes and with one door.

The exact location of the buildings was not given. However, it is possible that the group of buildings was the same as that represented by the “casa” indicated on the 1833 Ontiveras diseño and on the later 1834 diseño made by Abel Stearns for the Nieto family. (Diseño were inexact documents and did not necessarily give an individual notation for each building on a site, but rather indicated the central location of settlement.)

The 1842 inventory also illustrates the rudimentary nature of the structures built at Alamitos during the Hispanic colonial period. The scant seasonal rainfall in Southern California encouraged various styles of roof construction such as planks, thatching or reed matting surfaced with tar. Such methods would not have been practical in the north where heavy seasonal rains, fog, and moisture caused the supporting unfired mud-brick adobe walls to deteriorate rapidly if unprotected by roofs and broad eaves to deflect water.

Throughout California, adobe bricks were made in molds and laid up with nothing more than adobe mud mortar. Exterior walls approximately three feet thick provided stability; and since openings weakened the walls, and because glass and lumber were scarce, windows and doorways were few and generally small. Following the building traditions brought from Spain and Mexico, circulation was usually by means of exterior *corredors* or covered passageways, similar to the verandahs of tropical countries. The *corredors* also shaded the house in the summer, sheltered it from the rains in the winter, and provided a comfortable area for indoor-outdoor activities. The typical adobe dwelling was composed of two to four rooms with *corredors* on the long sides.²³

The collection of Rancho Los Alamitos buildings described in the 1842 inventory suggests the typical and rather casual buildings often erected by the *rancheros* to provide shelter for men who spent little time indoors and who often shared their quarters with animals, rather than the formal development typical of an adobe residence for a family. Though the scope and details of ranching operations by Figueroa and the subsequent *Compania Agricultura* are unknown, the number of structures cited in the Stearns 1842 inventory does suggest that the ranching activities were conducted on a larger scale by Figueroa and his estate than had been true of the Juan Jose Nieto period of ownership.²⁴

Under the ownership of Abel Stearns, however, there is evidence of greatly expanded ranch operations at Alamitos. Stearns arrived in California in 1829, just four years prior

to the Secularization of the Missions. With Yankee drive and determination, Stearns accumulated vast land holdings and business enterprises, for a while becoming the wealthiest man in California. He also became a member of a select group of Americans who married into the resident Hispanic first families.²⁵

In July 1842, Abel Stearns acquired Rancho Los Alamitos for the estate of Jose Figueroa for \$6,000. Stearns was familiar with the Alamitos property, having surveyed it for the Nieto family in 1834, when the children of the grantee were petitioning Figueroa for the division of the original Nieto land-grant. Rancho Los Alamitos, its livestock and six leagues of land, was the first ranch purchased by Stearns and the initial parcel of agricultural property in what would become the vast Stearns ranching empire.

Unfortunately, no records have been discovered yet which describe how Stearns developed the Alamitos ranch property, or exactly what use he made of the buildings noted in the 1842 inventory. It is reasonable to assume that Stearns used the roomiest and most comfortable of the rehabilitated structures as the headquarters or ranch house for the Alamitos operations, and as an occasional summer home—an escape from the heat of Los Angeles—for Abel and his young bride, Arcadia Bandini.²⁷

No photographs or renderings are known to exist which show any portion of the ranch house during the Stearns period (1842-1866). The limited information available on the appearance of the structure during this time is based on sketchy written descriptions, oral traditions, and examination of the existing building systems. However, improvements by Stearns, such as a porch on the east side of the adobe and wood floors, are confirmed by Bixby family accounts of John Bixby's repair of these existing but deteriorating features.²⁸

The family accounts also credit Stearns with the construction of the wooden north wing, citing it as housing for vaqueros. The almost certain existence of the north wing prior to the Bixby residency (1878) is reinforced by the earliest representation of the ranch house is a small oil painting executed in 1880, and attributed to a Basque shepherd/artist. In the painting, the north wing of the ranch house is not depicted with the same sense of new construction evident in the illustration of the tank house or the barns.²⁹ The wing was probably constructed during the first years of Stearns' ownership and completed around 1845. Divided into nine bays with one window and one door in each bay, the wing had a utilitarian appearance appropriate to its attributed use. Since there was no building timber on the site, lumber for the construction of the "Stearns" wing was probably delivered to the site from Los Angeles or from Stearns' own trading depot. It appears that the adobe part of the ranch house acquired a wooden, gabled roof during the Stearns period, and it is logical that the entire structure would have been re-roofed when the north wing was constructed.

Comparison of the Los Alamitos and Los Cerritos adobes is revealing, largely for the marked differences between the two buildings. The Cerritos adobe was built by Don Juan (Jonathon) Temple in 1844, two years after his friend and neighbor Stearns had purchased the Alamitos ranch. Like Stearns, Temple was also from New England, and the

Cerritos adobe shows the fusion of Hispanic and American building types. It was constructed as a U-shaped, two-story building with single-story wings defining an interior courtyard. Verandas ran along both sides of the upper floors of the central two-story wing. The interior stair at Cerritos, (an American innovation first used by Thomas O. Larkin in his 1835-36 Monterey adobe), marks the Los Cerritos house as an evolved type. Whereas the ranch house at Alamitos likely began as quarters for a ranch manager and working staff, the Cerritos adobe was built as a residence for its owner, his family, and servants. The differences in the design and construction of the two buildings clearly illustrate the intended uses and contemporary importance of each.³⁰

While the Cerritos adobe was the primary residence of the Temple family, Stearns and his wife, Arcadia, lived in Los Angeles in a residence aptly suited to the couple's social status. In 1858, Stearns began a commercial building project in Los Angeles called the Arcadia Block. At the time, it was hailed as the most imposing business development south of San Francisco. However, the interior of the project remained unfinished until 1861 when Stearns was forced to mortgage his Alamitos property to financier Michael Reese of San Francisco in order to complete the ambitious Los Angeles project.³¹

Stearns' good fortune ebbed with the great droughts of 1863-64 during which he reputedly lost 40 to 50,000 head of cattle. Financier Michael Reese, a notorious skinflint, picked up many mortgages from distressed ranchers of the period. He held the mortgage on the Alamitos property and foreclosed on Stearns in 1865, acquiring the 26,289 acre property at a court-ordered auction in 1866 for \$31,000.

Summary: Establishing the Original Construction Date for the Alamitos Adobe

In the absence of records to confirm the construction date for the existing adobe core of the ranch house, the legal wranglings of 1833 and 1834 and the subsequent ownership records relating to Figueroa and Stearns are helpful for what they suggest about the evolution of the ranch buildings. However, the records contain conflicting information regarding the construction of the adobe and the habitation of Rancho Los Alamitos during the Nieto period (1790-1834).

The 1833 Ontiveras diseño of Los Alamitos, with its "casa" clearly marked, is the most conclusive evidence that the Nietos established a building on the land during their ownership. However, the diseño is not helpful in determining how early the house was built, or for what purpose.³² Certainly, the Ontiveras' petition would seem to indicate that the Nietos' land was already informally divided and thought of as separate ranches with identifying names well in advance of the legal division made by Governor Figueroa later in 1833. The practical division may have been a matter of convenience on the part of the Nietos to facilitate the management of such a large piece of property. The records suggest that the Alamitos was managed as a satellite cattle ranch during Juan Jose Nieto's period of influence (1804-1834), the headquarters being the Santa Gertrudes homestead. Therefore, it is likely there were structures on the Alamitos ranch to shelter the vaqueros

and their animals. It also is likely that such shelters were built near the best source of water, the Puvunga spring (without which Nieto said his ranching operation on Alamitos would be worthless).³³ It would also have been prudent to place the buildings on top of the hill where they would command a view of the surrounding countryside, be assured of good drainage, and catch whatever cooling breezes might blow in off the ocean. Testimony during the Land Commission Hearings of 1852 suggests that when Figueroa received the Alamitos, certain ranch buildings existed, and that Figueroa added more structures.³⁴

In his letters and petitions prior to the division of the 1790 land grant, Juan Jose Nieto repeatedly declared himself a resident of Santa Gertrudes, the family seat established by his father. Juan Jose never indicated himself to be a resident of the Rancho Los Coyotes or Rancho Los Alamitos portions of the land grant. Whether this was for reasons of tradition, legal identity, or status, or was an accurate reflection of Nieto's residency, is unclear. Ontiveras' challenge in 1833 and the Ayuntamiento's findings hinge on the assertion that the Alamitos land was unoccupied. However, both the Spanish and Mexican legal definitions of "occupancy" are based more upon the use of the land for livestock than as the physical residence of its owner. Ultimately, Juan Jose Nieto was successful in refuting the Ayuntamiento's findings that the land was unoccupied, and, thus, Nieto retained ownership of the Alamitos.³⁵

Almost twenty years later, in testimony before the U.S. Land Commission, neighbors and employees of the Los Alamitos gave conflicting accounts of the occupancy of the ranch during the Nieto ownership. The 1852 testimonies of Jose Antonio Carillo, Felipe Talmantes, and Jose Justo Morrillo contain ambiguous references to the Alamitos land and its use. It is likely that their responses refer to the occupancy of the Nieto grant as a whole, rather than that portion known as Alamitos. However, testimony by Jose Castro refers specifically to Juan Jose Nieto being the first resident occupant of Rancho Los Alamitos.³⁶

It is the testimony of Carillo that has been used by historians to establish the 1806 construction date for the Alamitos adobe. In 1852, Carillo testified that around 1807 he visited the house of Juan Jose Nieto to write a letter for Nieto. However, Carillo did not specify whether the house he visited was on the Santa Gertrudes or the Alamitos, only that it belonged to Juan Jose Nieto. Researchers assumed that because Land Commission Case 404 dealt with Rancho Los Alamitos, Carillo was specifically referring to the Alamitos in his testimony—a broad assumption.³⁷

Although it is unlikely that Juan Jose Nieto considered Los Alamitos his primary residence, this does not mean that the Alamitos ranch was unoccupied. Nor does it mean that the core of the ranch house could not date from the 1804-1833 period. However, Carillo's testimony before the Land Commission Hearings should not be interpreted as conclusive evidence that the core of the Alamitos ranch house was built before 1807. The house of Juan Jose Nieto which Carillo visited as a boy may have been on the Alamitos, but was more likely a Nieto residence on the Santa Gertrudes. Thus it is possible for the Alamitos adobe to have been built anytime between 1790 and 1833. It is

also possible the surviving adobe core is not from the Nieto period at all, but is one of the later buildings from the Figueroas' ranching operations (1834-1842). However, evaluation of all known evidence to date would seem to indicate that the surviving adobe core of the current Alamitos ranch house is the "two apartment" adobe "with two opposite doors" described in the inventory of the ranch buildings acquired by Abel Stearns from the Figueroa's estate in 1842, and that the date of construction can most likely be placed between 1790 and 1834.³⁸

The American Period: Victorian Era, 1866-1898

Michael Reese, who acquired the Alamitos in 1866, managed his holding from afar and never set foot on the ranch. Instead he leased the land to others for grazing stock. Occupied by various lessees, the buildings deteriorated until the arrival of John Bixby. In 1878, the year of Reese's death, John W. Bixby leased approximately one thousand acres of Alamitos land from the Reese tenant, W.S. Lyon.³⁹

John William Bixby came to California in January 1871 to join his Bixby and Flint cousins in their sheep and cattle ranching operations. The Bixby and Flint families were a large interrelated clan, originally from Shropshire, England, who later settled in Somerset County, Maine. However, the much published economic opportunities in California from the late 1840s through the 1860s were attractive to the younger family members, and following the lead of Benjamin Flint, who settled in California in 1849, several cousins trekked west. Lewellyn, Amasa, Marcellus and Jotham Bixby came to California between 1851 and 1853. Together with other members of the Bixby/Flint family they explored the potential of the new western state. Following the rush to the gold fields, the Bixby/Flint cousins soon discovered that there was more money to be made in supplying the miners than in panning for gold, and they opened a butcher shop and hardware business in the Mother Lode town of Volcano. The cousins proved to be better entrepreneurs than miners and by the end of 1852 they were ready to engage in a new pursuit: raising quality sheep from breeding stock obtained in the Midwest. The newly-formed Flint, Bixby, and Company successfully drove more than 2,000 head of sheep from Illinois to California, a minor epic of the West.⁴⁰

In cooperation with William Hollister, whom they met on the journey west, the Flint, Bixby and Company sheepherding enterprise established itself at the San Justo Ranch near San Juan Bautista in 1855. The purchase of the more southerly Hero-Huero Ranch near Paso Robles followed in 1858. Still, they continued to look for more land and greater opportunity. In 1864, Flint, Bixby, and Company moved into Southern California. Between 1864 and 1868, the company acquired three contiguous parcels of land totaling over 100,000 acres in the Newport and Laguna Beach area. Their partner in this venture was a San Francisco merchant, James Irvine, who had come to California in 1849 on the same ship with Benjamin Flint. The three parcels, Rancho San Joaquin, Lomas de Santiago, and a portion of Santiago de Santa Ana, were used mainly for sheep ranching. However, drought and operational difficulties led Flint, Bixby, and Company to sell out to Irvine in 1876. In 1866, Flint, Bixby, and Company purchased the 26,000 acre Los Cerritos ranch from Don Juan Temple for \$20,000.⁴¹

In 1871, when he came to California at age twenty-two, John Bixby was one of the younger members of the Bixby/Flint clan. Initially, John began working for his cousin Jotham on the Cerritos ranch. John worked as a carpenter and stock manager, and eventually put together some livestock of his own while working for Jotham. John was not the only family member living and working on the Cerritos. An unmarried sister of Jotham's wife was also staying on the ranch. In fact, this sister-in-law, Susan Hathaway,

had arrived in California two years before John. In October 1873, John Bixby and Susan Hathaway were married.

Initially, John and Susan moved to a small house in Wilmington, west of what would eventually become Long Beach. In 1875, the year their first child was born, John purchased a portion of the Rancho Canon de Santa Ana from the Yorba family.⁴² Three years later he began subleasing acreage of Rancho Los Alamitos and moved his small family to the neglected and dilapidated adobe on the top of the hill. The structure urgently needed attention, and it is in the various family accounts of John's repairs and improvements to the ranch house that we find some of the earliest descriptions of the building.⁴³

The adobe into which John and Susan moved was described as derelict. Sarah Bixby Smith says:

When my uncle and aunt first went there to live it was almost a ruin, having fallen during the Reese period from the high estate it had known when it was the summer home of the lovely Arcadia de Bandini de Stearns . . . the front room had been used as a calf-pen and the whole house was infested with rats.⁴⁴

Later family accounts state that, at the time the John Bixby family moved in, a fence divided the large front room on the east side into animal pens. Either at the time of moving in or shortly thereafter, the large room on the west of the adobe was divided into two rooms: "a dark little bedroom with one small window and another room with two small windows." The existing wooden floors were all but disintegrated; what remained of the roof leaked copiously; pigs, calves, and other animals accessed the interior of the adobe through windows; and the front porch sagged at a drunken angle.⁴⁵

John and Susan Bixby rolled up their sleeves and "undertook the rehabilitation of that wreck of a house." Sarah Bixby Smith recalls the improvements her energetic uncle and aunt made to the ranch house, "each one to be rejoiced in and enthused about."⁴⁶ Instigating an honored Bixby tradition, it appears the man-of-the-house threw himself into construction projects for improving the ranch. Barns, sheep shearing sheds, and dairy buildings were constructed. Meanwhile, Susan occupied herself with the creation of a garden out of the arid scrubby hilltop. And together they poured their energies into making a comfortable and respectable home of the derelict Alamitos adobe ranch house.

John and Susan Bixby Period, 1878-1887

The ambiguous nature of the Bixby family's recollections and oral tradition⁴⁷ and the lack of dated photographs makes it difficult, at times, to determine those remodeling projects undertaken during John Bixby's lifetime, and those instigated by his widow in the nineteen years between his death and her own. However, there are several remodeling projects which may be attributed fairly confidently to the period of John Bixby's occupancy (1878-1887).

According to family accounts, “one of the first things . . . Susan did was to cut the windows to the floor.” Susan had some of the doors enlarged and “her husband gouged away enough of the adobe in the window frame openings . . . to allow installation of the bigger windows his wife favored.” John’s “trademark” triple-hung windows with double lights were installed in the enlarged openings.⁴⁹ These windows not only let in more light, but made the interior of the adobe more characteristic of the eastern-influenced houses being built throughout California in the 1870s and 1880s.

John and Susan made the initial addition to the South Wing by adding two bedrooms and the first indoor toilet. Renderings of the ranch house that show this wood and plaster extension suggest that, during John and Susan’s time, the south wall of the wing extended directly out of the original adobe south wall of the ranch house.⁵⁰

The installation of the fireplace in the parlor (now the Billiard Room) is credited to John Bixby, as is the replacement of several windows in the Stearns Wing. John had the reputation of being quite an accomplished carpenter and the family attributes a pair of china cabinets in the dining Room, the wardrobe in the Master Bedroom, and a kitchen cabinet to his craftsmanship.

The interior changes made by the John Bixbys, along with their furnishings, transformed the simple adobe into a respectable Victorian home. Photographs from 1887 reveal a décor more fitting for New Englanders who, unlike the earlier Yankee Dons, did not embrace Hispanic culture. Beaded or tongue-and-groove board siding, one of the most popular products of the lumber mills, was used on the ceilings, as wainscoting on the walls, and to finish the openings John cut in the adobe walls to enlarge the windows and doors. A dark, paneled mantelpiece, glass oil light fixtures, bookcases with glass doors, overstuffed chairs and settees, even the gilt-framed paintings hung from wall moldings that tipped the pictures forward toward the viewer—all of the decorative touches created an appropriately modern Victorian interior.⁵¹

A view of the ranch house at San Justo, the Bixby home near San Juan Bautista, reveals how successful New Englanders could be in recreating in California the settings they left behind. The San Justo house closely resembles the “farm cottages” depicted in Andrew Jackson Downing’s popular *Village and Farm Cottages*, published in New York in 1856. If the John Bixbys had built a new home for themselves at Los Alamitos, they too might have chosen one of Downing’s cottages as a model. As it was, they moved into a building they did not own and made it their home.

However, the Bixby’s position as tenants did not last for long. In 1881, the J.W. Bixby Company purchased from the Reese estate, for \$125,000, the 26,392.5 acres which comprised Rancho Los Alamitos. J.W. Bixby Company was a somewhat complicated three-way partnership between John W. Bixby, his banker friend I.W. Hellman, and J. Bixby and Company. (At the time of purchase, the J. Bixby and Company was a partnership between Jotham Bixby, Lewellyn Bixby, and Thomas Flint.) John and his enterprising partners made many improvements to the ranch and its agricultural operations. According to one family chronicler, one of the first improvements John

made, even before he purchased the ranch, was the construction of a high water tank with a brick cool-house below.⁵² During John's management of the ranch, sheep, cattle, horses, pigs, and dairy cows were raised. A complex of sheep shearing structures was built to the southwest of the ranch house, while a dairy and cheese-making complex was constructed to the northeast.

Perhaps the most significant, almost legendary, improvement recorded in family memoirs was John's construction of the "Big Red Barn." In 1882, John purchased a warehouse from Phineas Banning. The warehouse was part of the Civil War Drum Barracks in Wilmington which Banning had previously purchased at auction from the U.S. government. John cut the warehouse into sections, hauled it to the ranch, and reassembled the structure about thirty yards west of the ranch house. Converted into a barn, this three-story structure with its three cupolas was a magnificent farm building, a much-loved haven for generations of Bixby children, and a familiar landmark dominating Bixby Hill in rural Long Beach until it burned to the ground in the summer of 1947.⁵³

In early May of 1887, John Bixby died suddenly of complications from appendicitis, plunging his wife into deep grief and life-long mourning. The unexpected death of such an active and civic-minded member of the infant City of Long Beach was a significant loss to the community.⁵⁴ But more importantly, John Bixby was a vital and innovative family member and partner in the interrelated business of the Bixby family.

Upon John's death, the division and operation of Rancho Los Alamitos and J.W. Bixby Company had to be settled. For financial reasons, as well as pragmatism, Rancho Los Alamitos was not divided immediately. Instead, it continued to be a joint venture between the original partners and John's heirs, and was managed for several years by Jotham Bixby and his son, George. In 1891 the ranch finally was divided into thirds, as planned before John's death. J. Bixby and Company received the acreage adjoining Rancho Los Cerritos. I.W. Hellman received the southeasterly end (which later became a housing development named Heron Pointe). John Bixby's family retained the middle section of the ranch with the house and barns. Because John died intestate, this inheritance was divided between Susan and the children, Fred and Susanna. Susan received half of this middle section of the ranch, while each child received a quarter, which Susan managed until Fred and Susanna each reached maturity.⁵⁵

After John's death, his widow Susan retired from the world. "She seldom visited and never entertained more than a few intimates at rare intervals, having been so hospitable during the years of her marriage." According to family, she spent the rest of her life dressed in "widow's weeds." She enrolled her son Fred in Belmont Military School near San Francisco, purchased a house in Berkeley, and moved there with her daughter Susanna. However, she was not about to let the ranch fall into ruin again. The Alamitos ranch was leased to John's former business partners. It was managed by Susan's nephew, George Bixby, and John Bixby's foreman, Charles Thornburg who stayed on to oversee the daily operations of the ranch. According to Fred Bixby's daughter, Katharine Hotchkis, her grandmother "brought the family back for all school vacations and watched carefully over the house."⁵⁶

Susan Bixby Period, 1887-1898

The house on the Alamitos ranch continued to undergo remodeling after John's death. However, it is uncertain whether some of the renovations attributed to Susan occurred before or after her husband died. One such ambiguous addition to the house was the "second parlor" or Music Room, which was added on to the north side of the adobe. Early accounts describe this room as long and narrow, created as a place for Susan's "heavy mahogany furniture which was shipped out from her childhood home in Skowhegan, Maine." The present Music Room was constructed in two phases, with the first addition extending along the length of the north side of the adobe. Its width was only as deep as the current "alcoves" at either end of the room (approximately twelve feet). A second addition was then made, extending the room a further ten feet to the north, and giving the room its current configuration. It is not certain if John participated in designing or building the first extension to the Music Room. There is also some question as to whether Susan, or her son Fred, constructed the second addition. However, Susan's granddaughter and family chronicler, Katharine Bixby Hotchkis, credits her grandmother with the construction of the entire Music Room, its fireplace and windows. Hotchkis goes on to say that Susan's daughter-in-law, Florence Elizabeth Green, later was responsible for changing "one of Mrs. John Bixby's tall windows into a French door leading out to the gardens and for creating the Music Patio outside the Music Room in the Old Garden."⁵⁷

Family tradition holds that John Bixby purchased a billiard table for the newly established Long Beach YMCA in 1884. The gift was rejected because of apprehension about the game's corrupting influence upon the morals of the youths of the community. The disgruntled John hauled the table back to the ranch, where it seems to have been stored. Some time after John's death in 1887, Susan had the table installed into the room that had been her parlor, thus creating the "Billiard Room." She moved her parlor to the northwest room of the adobe portion of the house, a room that had previously served as a dining room. In domino-fashion, the dining room was moved to the easternmost room of the Stearns Wing, the room that had been the kitchen. And the kitchen was moved to the west of the new Dining Room.⁵⁹

Susan also installed a fireplace in her new parlor (the current Library). However, the new fireplace blocked the door leading between the adobe and the new dining room in the Stearns Wing. To address this difficulty, Susan had a rear hallway constructed along the length of the western wall of the adobe. This hallway connected the Front Hall with both the Stearns Wing and the south wing. In an attempt to keep the adobe light and not negate all her previous work enlarging the adobe's windows, Susan "strung windows all along the outside wall of the added hallway."⁶⁰

In later years, Susan's grief eased and she turned her attention to her children's social lives and their opportunities for meeting and entertaining appropriate peers and potential marriage partners. As her children matured, Susan became less reclusive. Both Katharine Bixby Hotchkis and Susanna Bryant Dakin write that although their

grandmother did not entertain for her own benefit, she “no longer seemed frozen in grief, warmly encouraging offspring to bring friends home Vacations at the Alamitos were enlivened by boy and girl house parties.”⁶¹

According to Hotchkis, Susan was responsible for the removal of the wooden walls that separated her parlor (the current Library) from the west bedroom of the adobe. Granddaughter Katharine, writes, “These two opposite rooms were once closed off from the hall . . . by wooden partitions, each with a small door.” After the birth of her first grandchild (Katharine) in 1899, Susan supposedly began planning ahead and decided that when this infant granddaughter married, it would be convenient if all the rooms on the west side of the adobe could be opened up to create one large room for a wedding reception. Susan therefore removed the wooden walls and installed the existing “hinged folding doors of her favorite redwood . . . then the walls could be folded back to open up the rooms and give plenty of space.” (Susan’s daughter-in-law, Florence, later had these folding walls reinforced so that they could not be opened; or more importantly, could not spontaneously fold back of their own accord.)⁶²

In spite of favorite family accounts, it is more likely that Susan Bixby installed the folding redwood walls in anticipation of her own daughter’s nuptials, rather than for the wedding arrangements for a newborn granddaughter.⁶³ Susan’s daughter, Susanna, was of marriageable age at the time of her niece’s birth and, in fact, married Dr. Ernest Bryant in the adobe ranch house in 1904. If, at the turn of the century, Susan Bixby truly was exploring ways to open up the ranch house and create larger, more comfortable space for her children’s entertaining, it is possible that the extension to the Music Room was added about this time, giving the room its current spacious configurations.⁶⁴

According to Katharine Hotchkis, one of her grandmother’s last improvements to the ranch house was the conversion of rooms at the west end of the Stearns Wing into a garage to house Susan’s 1906 White Stanley Steamer automobile. Later, around 1915, this area was remodeled by Susan’s son Fred, to serve as ranch offices. However, the grease pit is still accessible beneath the linoleum floor of Fred H. Bixby’s office.⁶⁵

American Period: Twentieth Century Ranch, 1898-1961

In 1898, John and Susan’s son, Fred Hathaway Bixby, graduated from the University of California at Berkeley by a “narrow squeak.” That summer, he married a classmate, Florence Elizabeth Green, a Berkeley native. The newlyweds moved to Rancho Los Alamitos “and came to live in the isolated, dark old adobe.” Fred took over management of the ranch and, according to his daughter, leased it from his mother Susan, while she went back to live at her house in Berkeley.⁶⁶

Fred and his new bride Florence moved into the ranch house in November 1898 after their bridal tour. They remained at the Alamitos just ten months, long enough for their first child, Katharine, to be born. In September 1900, two months before their second daughter Elizabeth was born, they moved to a shingled, Craftsman style house

overlooking the ocean on the bluff across from Bixby Park, about five miles to the west of the ranch.⁶⁷

Fred traveled to and from the ranch six days a week. Irritated at the inconvenience and tedium of the horseback commute, Fred took inspiration from his father and added yet another structure to the ranch complex atop Bixby Hill. The bluff house was sawed into sections, hauled to the ranch using teams of draft horses, and reassembled to the east of the adobe, where the tennis court stands today. Fred then moved his growing family into the reconstructed house.⁶⁸

In February 1906, Susan Hathaway Bixby died at the Alamitos adobe at the age of sixty-one. Fred and pregnant Florence moved their family of three daughters in a procession from the bluff house, across the driveway, and into the adobe ranch house. Two months later, John Treadwell Bixby was born. Filled with enthusiasm at being “El Patron” of the venerable rancho and guardian of his parents’ history-laden home, Fred and his wife began making their own improvements and renovations to the ranch.⁶⁹

Much in the spirit of her mother-in-law years before, Florence’s first concern upon moving into the ranch was its gloominess and lack of light, particularly the completely enclosed Library. Daughter Katharine indicated that the first thing her mother did was to cut a big skylight in the roof and ceiling of the Library to admit the sunlight. In terms of adding light and creating an inviting room, Florence was very successful; however, the skylight had a minor drawback, “It leaked whenever it rained, but people learned where to put the buckets to catch the drips and the cheerful room became the family’s main gathering place.” Florence eventually added skylights to the Kitchen and west bedroom of the adobe as well.⁷⁰

A number of changes were made to the exterior of the ranch house in the early years of Fred and Florence’s occupancy (c. 1906-1915). By 1911 a pair of gabled dormers had been installed on the east side of the roof, adding an almost self-conscious Craftsman element. The Front Porch on the eastern façade also was restyled. Graceful, arched openings were added in place of simple posts and open bays. The new arched openings were screened. Doors were installed at either end and also centered on the east side.⁷¹

In 1920, Fred and Florence’s fifth and last child, Fredrick, was born. To provide needed extra space, the south wing of the ranch house (which contained the children’s bedrooms), was extended to the west, hard against the existing tank house. The westernmost room of the new addition was used as a nursery, and later became a school room for the girls and their tutor. A family joke maintains that when this wing was completed, Fred concluded that he and Florence “would have to stop having children. It would be too expensive to build another tank house.”⁷²

At the same time the exterior of the ranch house was being modified, more extensive remodeling was taking place inside the ranch house. Exact dates for the changes to the interior treatments, finishes, and décor are difficult to establish. For the most part, the redecorating covers the years 1906 through 1933, with most of the changes clustered

around the years 1906 through 1910 and 1920 through 1925. Florence's changes to the Front Hall and the "public rooms" of the ranch house indicate a logical shift in taste from Susan's dark and cluttered late nineteenth century décor to one influenced by the accepted decorating styles of the early 20th century.

By the early part of the century, the California ranch house was becoming a recognized architectural style, having evolved, (as exemplified by the Alamitos ranch house), from functional, utilitarian Spanish and Mexican roots.

The California ranch house . . . was the simplest of housing structures. A single-story, asymmetrical, informally organized structure, the ranch had thick. . . adobe walls, and a heavy, slightly pitched . . . roof. One of its most seductive features was the long *corredor* . . . that ran the length of the building, covered by the roof's deep eaves.⁷³

The ranch house style became recognized for its functionalism, modest appearance, and adaptability. Architects experimenting with the style found it could absorb "any number of architectural influences." Florence Bixby may have encountered difficulties in furnishing the ranch house as described by architectural historian/writer Tim Street-Porter:

There's no easy way . . . to furnish a rancho. Part of the problem is that, unlike the Arts & Crafts home, for example, where the furnishings are an integral design element of the entire house, the rancho has no such prescribed style. Just as the architectural references were many, so were the decorating influences.⁷⁴

However, for all her perceived timidity and hesitation in making strong personal statements, Florence appears to have been in the mainstream, both in conforming with and defining the traditional décor of the classic California ranch house, from "wrought-iron grillwork, gates and lighting fixtures to large terra cotta pots filled with sage and geraniums, carved stone fountains, painted tile work, old cowboy paraphernalia, antique Navajo rugs and Mexican serapes and old Mexican and Bauer pottery."⁷⁵ Florence was undoubtedly influenced by her husband's identification with the myth and image of "The West" and also by her family's requirements for a comfortable, functional home.

In the Library, Music Room, and Billiard Room, Florence replaced the conservative Victorian mantelpieces with simple but massive oak and redwood mantles. The Victorian white paint was stripped from the woodwork and doors in the Front and Back Halls, as well as from those in the Library, Music Room, and Billiard Room. Florence finished the beautiful redwood trim in these rooms with a clear stain in order to take advantage of the naturally rich color, warmth, and grain of the wood. In the Library and billiard Room the simple redwood book shelves were fashioned by ranch carpenter and handyman Bill Lopp. The bookcases grew in height and number as Florence's library grew. The formidable redwood table and three-compartment wood box in the Back Hall

are also attributed to Lopp. It is also possible the massive wood mantelpieces in the Library, Music Room, and Billiard Room are his handiwork.⁷⁶

Fred and Florence's daughter Katharine remembers electricity being brought to the ranch around 1918 to replace the acetylene gas lighting. Florence supposedly tired of "the bare globes hanging in her face" and requested the assistance of a "budding interior decorator" and family friend in effecting changes to the ranch house lighting fixtures. Mrs. Lillian Goodhue is credited with the selection of the light fixtures in the Front Hall, Library, and Dining Room, as well as the design of the dining Room's brick mantelpiece and decorative canvas panel.⁷⁷

Sometime around 1920, Florence set about the task of installing "furnace heat" for the ranch house. The adobe was built on a grade and the foundations of the added wings were barely above the ground. In order to install steam pipes for the radiators, tunnels had to be dug under the ranch house: "The men had to scoop out the dirt . . . while lying on their backs." The boiler for the steam system was installed in a small concrete building on the north side of the Sterns Wing. Florence's daughter recalls the tedious work going on forever, "But eventually white painted radiators began to pop, band and sizzle in every room."⁷⁸

In addition to remodeling the existing fireplaces, Fred and Florence are said to have added at least two more hearths to the ranch house, one in the Dining Room and one in the Master Bedroom. Since the two fireplaces were installed relatively late (after 1925), it is likely that each of the rooms was heated with a wood-burning stove prior to the installation of the fireplaces. In the Dining Room, the north fireplace has a high brick mantelpiece framing a mural depicting an elaborate bouquet. However, there is evidence of an earlier flue on the east wall. The clinker brick fireplace in the Master Bedroom was installed at Fred's instigation long after the radiators were installed "for no reason except he loved to go to sleep watching the flames and listening to the crackling of the eucalyptus wood."⁷⁹

Time passed, and Fred and Florence's family, as well as their needs, changed. Daughters Katharine and Deborah married in 1923 and 1929, respectively, and moved away from the ranch to raise families of their own. The beloved namesake, John, died unexpectedly in 1929 from injuries sustained in an auto accident. For a while, Elizabeth continued as her father's right hand manager and Frederick continued to live at the rancho intermittently.

The nature of Fred Bixby's business operations also expanded and changed. As he acquired other ranches in California and Arizona, the Alamitos became a finishing ranch for the Bixby cattle. More and more of the valuable Alamitos ranch land was devoted to tenant and truck farming. When oil was discovered on Bixby property in the early 1920s, the ranch's financial situation was greatly eased. Fred avidly expanded his horse breeding operation, spending more time and resources on his prized Shires, Percherons, Thoroughbreds, Palominos, Appaloosas, Morgans, and the huge, sturdy, untiring mules bred from his Black Mammoth Jacks and Shire mares.⁸⁰ With more money and more

leisure Florence could enhance her beloved gardens and enlarge her comfortable home for visiting friends and grandchildren.

In the late 1920s, a second story was added above the adobe portion of the main ranch house. Previously, all additions and remodeling at the ranch had been handled by the ranch carpenters, “beginning with John Bixby himself.” However, Florence was “concerned that the second story to the ranch house not diminish the Library skylight nor alter the view of the old roof line from the front of the house.” The family’s financial good fortune allowed Florence to hire a local architect, Harvey Lockridge, to help her expand her home without interfering with those architectural qualities she treasured.⁸¹

The new second story consisted of two bedrooms, a bath, several closets, and a storage room adjacent to the attic. A stairway from the Back Hall to the second story was installed. Above the children’s rooms in the south wing, two “hobby” rooms were created. Essentially, these partially finished attic spaces were designed to accommodate Elizabeth’s woodcarving and Frederick’s amateur film-making. Some time after 1927 an upper window in the west wall of the south wing was made into a French door, and access to the hobby rooms was provided by an exterior wrought-iron stairway from the Secret Garden.⁸²

In early 1927, the tank house was demolished. On its site, Florence installed her lovely, walled Secret Garden. The ranch’s refrigeration and food storage needs were transferred to a small building on the north side of the Stearns Wing behind the kitchen. “What had been the laundry, right handy to the back door, was replaced by a small building housing the laundry, the storeroom, the meat room, the milk room, and a modern ice box was plugged into the kitchen.” It is likely that the screen enclosed Kitchen Porch also was added about this time.⁸³

The appearance of the ranch house was affected by evolving ranch operations, as well as changing needs of the family. All of Fred Bixby’s ranching and business enterprises were operated from the Alamitos, the home ranch. By 1931, the ranch offices had outgrown their two rooms in the west end of the Stearns Wing. Fred had already moved the offices once, around 1921, when he relocated them from a lean-to on the northeast corner of the Big Red Barn to two remodeled rooms at the west end of the Stearns Wing, where his mother had previously installed a garage. (The garage was relocated to the former office space in the barn lean-to.) By 1931, another office expansion was under way. The west end of the Stearns Wing was remodeled a third time and an addition was constructed on the north, to provide a bookkeeper’s office and a reinforced concrete vault. The new addition was connected by a hallway which carefully circumvented a mature pepper tree.⁸⁴

On March 10, 1933, an earthquake measuring 6.3 on the Richter scale rumbled through Long Beach along the previously unknown Newport-Inglewood Fault. Although destruction in Long Beach and its surrounding communities was unprecedented in Southern California, damage to the Alamitos ranch house and wooden barns was minimal. However, furniture within the ranch house was toppled: the hanging light

fixtures in the Library were badly twisted and had to be replaced, a crack opened in the façade of the brick mantle in the Dining Room, and adobe bricks fell out of some of the openings built by John Bixby. It is also likely, though not documented, that the ranch house lost some or all of its brick chimneys since all the present chimneys show evidence of rebuilding. After the earthquake the brick chimney on the Dining Room fireplace was reinforced with iron strapping and nearly all the interior walls of the adobe, as well as the exterior east wall, were reinforced with two inches of gunite. Steel reinforcing bars were pinned into the exterior east wall of the adobe where it intersects with the east-west adobe walls. The four pairs of reinforcing bars are visible on the Front Porch. In addition, cabinets and bookcases were bolted to the concrete reinforced interior walls.⁸⁵

Shortly after the earthquake, two alcoves were created from the end bays of the Front Porch. The north bay became an alcove for the Music Room. Designed with built in cabinets, this alcove served to display Florence Bixby's extensive pressed glass collection. The south bay of the Porch was enclosed to provide additional closets and a dressing area for the Master Bedroom.⁸⁶

Fourteen years after the Long Beach earthquake, a more disheartening disaster struck the ranch. In the summer of 1947, a fire started in the Big Red Barn that John Bixby had painstakingly reconstructed in 1882 from a disassembled warehouse. In the dry summer heat, the flames spread quickly among the stacked bales of hay and the dry 85-year-old timbers of the barn. Even with the help of the neighboring Naval Station's fire fighting equipment, the barn could not be saved. In the end the Big Red Barn burned to the ground, along with another barn and some corrals. The ranch house and the remaining out buildings were saved.

Less than a year later, a new, smaller barn (the current Horse Barn), corrals, and equipment storage buildings were erected. A double-row of pepper trees was planted to mark the footprint of John's Big Red Barn. However, the loss seemed to portend the passing of an era. Katherine Hotchkis wrote,

For seventy years a conspicuous and familiar landmark, the lively heart of Ranch Los Alamitos, it had been...a supporting, reassuring back-drop for everything...Though the damaged buildings were eventually rebuilt, no attempt was made to replace the Big Red Barn. Insurance payments can't recreate a vanished essence, a spirit of rightness and traditional security that has been swept away...Nothing was ever the same again.

In the summer of 1948, Fred and Florence celebrated their golden wedding anniversary. Ranch hand Pete Nissen presented Fred with a handful of gilded square nails retrieved from the smoldering embers of the Big Red Barn. It was all that was left of the landmark structure and family emblem.

Ranching continued until the mid-1950s, despite a series of land condemnations and forced sales. Fred H. Bixby died in 1952 and Florence Green Bixby, nine years later, in

1961. The house and gardens continued to receive the care and attention of loyal personnel and regular visits by Fred and Florence's children. In 1968, the ranch house and the surrounding seven and half acres, including Florence's beautifully mature gardens, were donated by the family to the city of Long Beach as a historic site. The Foreman's House was retained in place, while five outlying buildings, including a blacksmith shop and several barns, were moved off their foundations and onto the donated acreage. The remaining ranch buildings were demolished.

It was the family's hope that by preserving the ranch house, its gardens and barns, they could share an eloquent and treasured link to the past; tangible evidence of the traditions, ideas, and lifestyles of generations of inhabitants who called the mesa home. From the shell fragments found in the remains of the Gabrielino kitchen middens, to Juan Jose Nieto's adobe bricks, to the wide boards of Abel Stearns bunk house, to the skylights in the Library, the presence of past occupants and owners permeates the site. Florence Bixby recognized this quality when she wrote about the continuity she sensed at Rancho Los Alamitos.

It was the feeling of the life that had been lived here before she knew the old house. It was the life of those who had built the adobe who at different times, had prepared meals, and eaten them, and slept, and lived in these rooms years before. It was the life of his parents here and of his sister and himself...And it was the life of their children...and now their grandchildren, which was calling out to her...The continuity of life...That was the secret.

The long history of the ranch is one of constant growth, change, and adjustment to meet the needs of its various occupants and their place in the changing world beyond the ranch boundaries. Today Rancho Los Alamitos offers a rare island from which to look outward and consider the nature and necessity of change, yet also to turn inward and contemplate the enduring human values of heart and place called home.

¹Specific future research projects are suggested in the Historic Structures Report and Architectural Plan.

²Bernice Eastman Johnson, *California's Gabrielino Indians* (Los Angeles: Southwest Museum, 1962), pp. 35 and 122; and A. K. Kroeber, *Handbook of the Indians of California* (Berkeley: California Book Company, Ltd., 1953), p. 628.

³The last baptismal records for a Puvunga Indian was recorded at Mission San Gabriel in 1805, a short thirty-six years after initial European contact; and a year after the death of Manuel Nieto, the first Spanish grantee of the Puvunga land. "At about this time the village probably was initially abandoned by its few inhabitants. The great majority may have died of disease, and the few remaining had either scattered to other areas or been taken to work at the missions." In the following year, 1806, the first Spanish home is said to have been built on the site. Please see Keith A. Discon, "Reviving Puvunga," *The Masterkey* 46:3 (July-Sept 1972) p.2. (Reprint courtesy of the publisher, Southwest Museum, Highland Park, Los Angeles, CA).

⁴Robert Glass Cleland, *The Cattle on a Thousand Hills*, 2nd ed. (San Marino, Ca.: The Huntington Library, 1969), Robert Cameron Gillingham, *The Rancho San Pedro* (Cole-Holmquist Press, 1961: revised edition,

Museum Reproductions, 1983), p. 43 and Rose H. Avina, "Spanish and Mexican Land Grants in California" (Masters Thesis, University of California Press, 1932; reprinted San Francisco: R and E Research Associates, 1973) pp. 17, 20-22.

⁵It is possible that among those included in Fages' 1784 provisional land grants in California was Verdugo's brother, Mariano de la Luz. Fages' letter to his superiors in Mexico regarding the land grants requested land for Dominguez, Nieto, and the sons of the widow of Ignacio Carrillo (de Verdugo). Please see Cleland, Cattle, p. 7; W. W. Robinson, *Land in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1948), p. 55; and Gillingham, *Rancho San Pedro*, pp. 44 and 98. Also see Avina, "Land Grants," pp. 22-22.

⁶The descriptions of La Zanja seem to place the site of the property northeast of Rancho Los Alamitos, possibly between the San Gabriel Mission and the Spanish-period Rancho Encino (the "Oaks"). Proceedings Before the United States Board of Land Commissions, Case No. 404. "Rancho Los Alamitos," Letter from Pedro Fages to his Superior Officers in Mexico, 20 November 1784, pp. 52-53; and Spanish Archives Translations, v. 7, "Records of Unclassified Original Spanish Expedientes Relative to Land Claims," California Spanish Archives, National Archives – Los Angeles Branch, Laguna Nigel, Ca. Manuel Nieto to Pedro Fages 1784, p. 172. Also see State of California, California State Archives, Expediente 103, Agustin Zamarano to Jose Figueroa, 1 April 1833, p. p.299. (Hereafter material from Case No. 404 of the Land commission Hearings will be referred to as "Land Commission Case 404"; and material from the Spanish Archives Translations will be referred to as "Unclassified Original Expedientes.")

⁷Unclassified Original Expedientes, Manuel Nieto to Pedro Fages, 1790, p. 171; and Felipe Goycochea to Manuel Nieto, 8 March 1790, p. 171. The Encino land later was given to the Franciscan padres who erected Mission San Fernando there in 1797. Please see Robinson, *Land*, p. 55.

⁸Cleland, Cattle, p. 14 and 285, Note #35. Permission for Verdugo to use the land known as La Zanja de Zacamutin was granted at the end of 1794. Later correspondence between the priests of San Gabriel and Crown officials indicates that the land to which Verdugo retired and which became known as Rancho San Rafael was Nieto's original 1784 land concession. Please see Unclassified Original Expedientes, Felipe Goycochea to Governor Diego Borica, 28 April 1796, p. 165; Fr. Antonio Cruzado and Fr. Miguel Sanchez to Governor Diego Borica, 8-169; and Fr. Fermin Lasuen to Governor Diego Borica, 6 May 1796, pp. 171-173.

⁹Land Commission Case 404, Testimony of Jose Antonio Carrillo, 8 November 1852, p. 12; Robinson, *Land*; and W. W. Robinson, "Los Alamitos: The Indian and Rancho Phases," The California Historical Society Quarterly 45 (March 1966): 25. The paper confirming and defining the Los Coyotes grant was lost. Please see Land Commission Case 404, Opinion of the Board of Land Commissions, 15 February 1855, pp. 99-103; and Expediente 103, Juan Jose Nieto to Jose Echeandia, 19 January 1833, p. 299.

¹⁰Unclassified Original Expedientes, Manuel Nieto to Diego Borica, c. 1795, pp. 170-171; Manuel Nieto to Felipe Goycochea to Diego Borica, 28 April 1796, p. 165; and Fr. Germin Lasuen to Diego Borica, 6 May 1796; pp. 172-173.

¹¹Unclassified Original Expedientes, Manuel Nieto to Diego Borica, c. 1795, p. 170.

¹²Unclassified Original Expedientes, Diego Borica to Felipe Goycochea, 29 March 1796, p. 165; Felipe Goycochea to Diego Borica, 16 April 1796, pp.167-167; Felipe Goycochea to Diego Borica, 18 April 1896, pp. 167-168; and Borica's Resolution, 14 May 1796, p. 173; and Avina, Land grants, p.22.

¹³Land Commission Case 404, Testimony of Jose Castro, 27 February 1854, pop. 19-21; and Saddleback Ancestors, (Santa Ana: Orange County Genealogical Society, 1969), p. 118. It is uncertain when the Alamitos adobe was built on Bixby Hill. At the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, few of the Spanish colonists in California could write. Even if they could, they would have little reason for recording the construction date of a common, utilitarian adobe. Family tradition and local

folklore holds that Juan Jose Nieto built the adobe in 1806. It is possible that was built in that year, but there is scant evidence to substantiate the date. Please see discussion on pages (??) of this narrative for a more detailed explanation of the adobe's construction date.

¹⁴Expediente 103, Jose Echeandia to Jose Figueroa, 15 July 1833, p. 2298; and Juan Jose Nieto to Jose Echeandia, 19 January 1833, p. 299.

¹⁵State of California, California State Archives, Expediente 57, Patricio Ontiveras to Jose Figueroa, 8 March 1833, p. 441.

¹⁶Expediente 57, Report of the Ayuntamiento, 21 June 1833, p. 442. In the papers conferring the land-grant to Manuel Nieto, the vast property was referred to as Los Coyotes, but later references often called it Los Nietos, or, as in this case, "the accumulations of the rancho of Santa Gertrudes." The Los Coyotes property was extensive, to say the least. It appears that even before the land was legally divided among Manuel Nieto's heirs; it was unofficially divided into smaller working ranchos with names of their own. It is logical to assume that in later years the informal boundaries of these "sub-ranchos" later became the basis for the subsequent division of the land in 1834. Because Manuel Nieto built his home on the part of his property known as Santa Gertrudes, it was considered the home ranch of the Nietos' vast property.

¹⁷Expediente 57, Patricio Ontiveras to Jose Figueroa, 8 March 1833, p. 441. Ontiveras established a large, extended family in the Mexican colony of Alta California. In his petition to the Governor for the Alamitos, Ontiveras states, "The persons I intend to establish on said Rancho, are my family, my son and son-in-law with theirs, with the necessary servants..." For more information, please see Arnold O. Dominquez, "A historical Study of Rancho San Juan Cajon de Santa Ana and Its Owners Until 1957" (Masters Thesis, University of Southern California, 1950), pp. 9-18.

¹⁸Dominquez, "Rancho San Juan Cajon de Santa Ana," pp. 13-18, and 26-30. When presented with Patricio Ontiveras' denunciation of Los Alamitos, Juan Jose Nieto's response was to try to appease Ontiveras by offering another portion of Nieto land, "the place of the 'Rio de Santa Ana' ... where the Old Road crosses the river of Santa Ana." This land, along with the land awarded by the Mexican government, became the rancho San Juan Cajon de Santa Ana granted to Patricio's son, Juan Pacifico, in 1837.

¹⁹Actual papers confirming Alamitos to Juan Jose Nieto have never been found and may not exist. Supposedly, Nicolas Guterrez, the interim-governor who succeeded Figueroa, took the papers with him when he fled to Mexico in 1836. The papers are considered lost. Land Commission Case 404, Opinion of the Board of Land Commissioners, 15 February 1855, pp. 99-103; and Figueroa's endorsement of the Nieto Lands, 27 July 1833, pp. 59-60.

²⁰Land Commission Case 404, Juan Jose Nieto to Jose Figueroa, 30 June 1834, p. 95; and Cleland, Cattle p. 190.

²¹Cleland, Cattle, pp. 190-193; and Land Commission Case 404, Testimony of Jose Justo Morillo, 11 November 1852, pp. 15-24.

²²Land Commission Case 404, Manuel Dominquez Inventory of Rancho Los Alamitos, 3 September 1841, pp. 67-68.

²³Tim Street-Porter, "Home Style: The Ranch House," California 13:6, June 1988, pp. 103-104.

²⁴Land Commission Case 404, Testimony of Felipe Talmantes, 11 November 1852; Jose Justo Morillo, 11 November 1852; and Jose Castro, 27 February 1854, pp. 13-24; and Cleland, Cattle, pp. 190-192. However, this theory regarding the relative scale of operations by various owners is contradicted by Jose Castro's testimony during the Land Commission Hearings. Please see Land Commission Case 404, Castro, pp. 16-24.

²⁵The Yankee immigrants who married into prominent families became Mexican citizens, learned the Spanish language, joined the Catholic Church, hispanicized their names, and sometimes assumed the title “Don.” This pseudo-aristocratic title of respect was conferred upon the male heads of landed Hispanic family clans. In Alta California, many of the aspiring gentry and first families (and the pioneering Yankees who married into them) sometimes called themselves “Californios,” a term which denoted California birth and thereby differentiated the bearers from later Yankee and Mexican immigrants and interlopers.

²⁶Cleland, Cattle, pp. 190-193. According to some sources, Stearns’ purchase price of \$6,000 was paid \$1,500 in cash and \$4,500 in hides and tallow.

²⁷Robinson, “Los Alamitos,” p. 28; Katharine Bixby Hotchkis, Rancho Los Alamitos (Long Beach: California “State University Library Associates, 1985), p. 3; and Sarah Bixby Smith, Adobe Days 4th edition revised (Fresno, Ca.: Valley Publishers, 1974), p. 60.

At least two adobe structures, one of them the ranch house, existed at the Alamitos when John and Susan Bixby moved to the ranch in 1878 (see Smith, Adobe Days, p. 85). Research into the Abel Stearns manuscript collection held at the Huntington Library will probably yield significant information regarding Stearns’ operation of the Alamitos ranch and answer many questions about the ranch house construction. Further investigation of Abel Stearns’ operation of the Alamitos ranch and answer many questions about the ranch house construction. Further investigation of Abel Stearns is a recommended research topic in Section XX of the “Historic Structure and Architectural Plan.”

²⁸Rancho Los Alamitos (RLA) collection, “Rancho Los Alamitos,” oil painting, na (attributed by Fred H. Bixby to a Basque sheepherder, c. 1880) catalog #A68.6.3, LB City Inventory #7117. Between the ownership of Stearns and that of John Bixby, there were only tenant stockmen on the Alamitos. It is unlikely any of them would have undertaken the expense and trouble of constructing the north wing of the ranch house. Research into the history and construction of this wing is a recommended research project listed in the “Historic Structure Report and Architectural Plan.”

²⁹According to the inventory description of 1842, the gable roof on the main adobe core was not in place when Stearns acquired the property. Since gabled roofs are more typical of the American than of Hispanic building tradition, this would likely place the gabled roof within the period of the Stearns ownership. (The wooden roof is also a feature mentioned in Bixby family records as existing at the time John and Susan Bixby occupied the house and in need of John’s repairs.)

³⁰The Historical American Buildings Survey (HABS) was a part of the Works Progress Administration during the Depression. It began documenting buildings in California in 1934. Rancho Los Cerritos ranch house was measured and drawn in 1934, Rancho Los Alamitos in 1935. Some examples of one-story adobe houses that compare with the Alamitos adobe are Casa San Luis Gonzaga near Los Banos (c. 1891), Casa San Juan de Anza in San Juan Bautista (c. 1820-1840, CA-15), Casa Padillo in San Gabriel (c. 1840, CA-328), Case Ignacio Palomares in Pomona (c. 1839-1840, CA-37-25), and the so-called Hugo Reid adobe in Arcadia (c. 1839). These adobe buildings had two to four rooms arranged in a rectangular structure with access from a corridor or passageway; they had no halls. Roofs were flat and tarred or covered with variations of thatch. The Hugo Reid adobe, now restored to its original state offers a good comparison to the Alamitos adobe.

³¹Cleland, Cattle, p. 202.

³²Expediente 57, Diseno of Rancho Los Alamitos, 1833.

³³Expediente 57, Juan Jose Nieto to Jose Figueroa, 3 July 1834, pp. 444-445.

³⁴Land Commission Case 404, Castro, pp. 19-21.

³⁵Expediente 57, Juan Jose Nieto to Jose Figueroa, 15 September 1833, pp. 443-443; Dominquez, “Rancho San Juan Cajon de Santa Ana,” pp. 13-31; and National Archives, Board of California Land

Commissioners, "Records of the General Land Office, "Juan Bautista Alvarado's Grant to Juan Pacifico Ontiveras, 13 May 1837, pp. 22-23.

³⁶Land Commission Case 404, Witness Testimony, pp. 11-24.

³⁷Land "Commission Case 404, Castro, pp. 16-24; Robinson, "Los Alamitos," p. 27; George Salzar, Rancho Los Alamitos (Ramon, Ca; Acoma Books, 1975), P. 5; and Hotchkis, Rancho Los Alamitos, p. 2.

³⁸Land Commission Case 404, Inventory of Rancho Los Alamitos, 3 September 1842, pp. 67-68.

³⁹For more information on the various tenants during the Reese period, please see Smith, Adobe Days, pp. 59-60.

⁴⁰Smith, Adobe Days, pp. 31-39; and Stephen B. Dudley, The Bixby Family Reference Guide (Long Beach).

⁴¹Dudley, Bixby Family, pp. 9-12; and Cleland, Cattle, p. 141.

⁴²According to his granddaughter, Katharine Bixby Hotchkis,

After complicated transactions John was able to purchase a portion of a ranch in the Santa Ana Canyon from the heirs and legatees of Don Bernardo Yorba. (Negotiations continued until 1881 when he acquired an adjoining piece bringing the size of the stock grazing ranch up to 5,700 acres.)

Katharine Bixby Hotchkis, "Rancho Los Alamitos Chronology," Balboa, Ca., 1964, p. 6. Also see Smith, Adobe Days, p. 57; and Dudley, Family Guide, p. 12. The Rancho Santa Ana property was approximately where the community of Yorba Linda is today.

⁴³Documentation for the appearance and condition of the adobe at the time of John and Susan Bixby's occupancy, and the descriptions of their subsequent improvements and repairs, comes predominantly from the writings of John's and Susan's niece, Sarah Bixby Smith, who was a frequent and contemporary visitor; the writings of Katharine Bixby Hotchkis, a granddaughter who was born and raised on the ranch; and paintings, renderings, and photographs made between the years 1880 and 1887.

⁴⁴Smith, Adobe Days, p. 60.

⁴⁵Katharine Bixby Hotchkis, "Information and Notes Regarding Rancho Los Alamitos," c. 1968, pp. 3-4 (typewritten manuscript for docents); and Hotchkis, "Chronology," p. 8.

⁴⁶Smith, Adobe Days, p. 61.

⁴⁷Fred Bixby was quoted by his daughter as advising, "Never let facts stand in the way of a good story." Katharine Bixby Hotchkis, "Rancho Los Alamitos," talk given to the Kiwanis Club of Long Beach, 29 October 1963, pg. 1. Also see Hotchkis, Rancho Los Alamitos, p. 3.

⁴⁸Smith, Adobe Days, p. 67; and Hotchkis, "Notes," p. 4.

⁴⁹See RLA Collection, photograph, "South Façade of Ranch House," c. 1880, catalog #AHP 0047.

⁵⁰Later photographs would indicate that the South Wing was fully extended to its present length; that the bedroom alcoves were added to the adobe portion of the house and the width of the South Wing was increased proportionately. Katharine Bixby Hotchkis, "Tour of the Rancho Los Alamitos Adobe House, March 1970, Rancho Los Alamitos Associates, Long Beach, p. 8; Adobe Days, p. 61; and RLA Collection oil painting, "Rancho Los Alamitos," na (attributed by Fred H. Bixby to a Basque shepherd/artist, c. 1880), catalog #A68.6.3, LB City inventory #7117; ink wash, "Rancho Los Alamitos," initialed SB, 1890, catalog #A68.6.1, LB City inventory #7014; lithograph, "Rancho Los Alamitos and residence of John W.

Bixby, "Wallace W. Elliott and Company, 1887, catalog #A68.6.4, LB City inventory #7211; photograph, "South Façade of Ranch House," c. 1880, catalog #AHP 0047; and photograph, "South Side of Ranch House and Water Tank," c. 1890, catalog #AHP 0020.

⁵¹RLA Collection, photograph, "Parlor Fireplace," c. 1898, AHP 0058;; photograph, "Parlor," c. 1898, #AHP 0051; photograph, "Parlor," c. 1890, #AHP 0183; and photograph, "Dining Room," c. 1887, #AHP 0053.

⁵²Smith, *Adobe Days*, p. 61. Both Sarah Bixby Smith and Katharine Bixby Hotchkis ("Note," pp. 7-8) record that John Bixby built a tank house on the west end of the ranch house's south wing. Smith says one of John's first improvements to the ranch "was the building of a high tank with its cool-house underneath which has served more than forty years for the storing of food." Hotchkis records similar details in her writing. Both chroniclers seem to indicate that John's tank house stood in the same spot from around 1880 until it was demolished in the mid-1920s. Hotchkis records a demolition date of 1925, but dated photographs of her daughter held in the Bixby Collection of Family Papers at California State University Long Beach, indicate demolition took place in 1927.

The problem with Smith's and Hotchkis' recollections is that they are inconsistent with the paintings, lithograph, and photographs showing the tank house between 1880 and 1927. In the early renditions of the ranch layout and buildings, c. 1880-1902, the tank house is shown quite close to the early two-bedroom version of the south wing. It appears to rest approximately on the location of what is now the westernmost room of that wing. The tank house has a brick, single-story base with a redwood tank above. The top of the tank house barely comes to the top of the single-story south wing next to it. See RLA Collection: ink wash, "Rancho Los Alamitos," initialed SB, 1890, catalog #A68.6.1, LB City inventory #7014; oil painting "Rancho Los Alamitos," C. L. Turner, c. 1880, catalog A68.6.2, LB City inventory #7116; oil painting, "Rancho Los Alamitos," na (attributed by Fred H. Bixby to a Basque sheepherder/artist, c. 1880), catalog #A68.6.3, LB City inventory #7117; lithograph, "Rancho Los Alamitos and residence of John W. Bixby, "Wallace W. Elliott and Company, 1887, catalog #A68.6.4, LB City inventory #7211; photograph, photograph, "Bixby Children and Cousins in Front of Ranch House, Summer 1887," catalog #AHP 0079 a and b; photograph, "South Side of Ranch House and Water Tank," c. 1890, catalog #AHP 0020, and the Joan Hotchkis Collection of Bixby Family Papers, California State University Long Beach Library, Special Collections, photograph, "Sister and I." c. 1902, Album #III.

(Future references to material in the Bixby Family Papers held in Special Collections at CSULB will be referred to as "CSULB collection.")

In later photographs, c. 1910-1927, the tank house is located at the end of the fully-extended, three-bedroom south wing on what are now the flagstones of the Secret Garden. The base of the tank house appears to be wood and about two-stories high, surmounted by a wooden tank. It would, therefore seem that there were at least two generations of the tank house. One built by John (c. 1880-1910), and one constructed by his son, Fred, (c. 1910-1927). See RLA Collection: photograph, "Southwest Corner of Ranch House," c. 1915, catalog #AHP 0235; photograph, "Mr. Bell in Back Patio," c. 1923, catalog #AHP 0228; and CSULB Collection: photograph, "Sister Atop the Big Red Barn," c. 1912; photograph, "Ranch House," c. 1913, Album #II; photograph, "After the Heavy Winter Frost," 1913; photograph, "Rancho Los Alamitos," 1915; photograph, "S. Side of House," c. 1915; photograph, "Side of the House," July 1919, photograph, "South Façade," c. 1910; photographs, "Preston Hotchkis, Sr. and Kathy Hotchkis" series of four, June 1926; photographs, "Kathy Hotchkis in Secret Garden" series of four, August 1927.)

⁵³Smith, *Adobe Days*, p. 77; and Hotchkis, *Rancho Los Alamitos*, p. 6. Also see Susan Lavia, "John W. Bixby: Sheep Rancher, Farmer, Dairyman," part II in *The Branded Word*, the Newsletter of the Rancho Los Cerritos Museum, Winter 1987, p. 5; Hotchkis, "Notes," p. 1; Katharine Bixby Hotchkis, "Story of the Home Trust," February 1959, Rancho Los Alamitos Foundation Archive, Long Beach, Ca., pp. 3-4; and Hotchkis, "Chronology," p. 8.

⁵⁴Hotchkis, "*Rancho Los Alamitos*," pp. 6-8l; Hotchkis, "Chronology," p. 10; and Walter H. Case, *History of Long Beach and Vicinity*, v. II (Chicago: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1927), pp. 24-29.

⁵⁵Hotchkis, "Talk to Kiwanis," p. 5; and Dudley, Family Guide, pp. 12 and 16.

At the time of John Bixby's death, he and his partners, J. Bixby and Company and I. W. Hellman, were getting ready to dissolve their partnership which had purchased the Alamitos in 1881. John had already been planning and laying out the Alamitos Beach Townsite, a subdivision of his ranch where the land adjoined the City of Long Beach (a southwest section of the ranch). After John's death, the Alamitos ranch eventually was divided. However, the acreage of the Alamitos Townsite was incorporated into a jointly-owned family company called the Alamitos Land Company. This land, which included Signal Hill, was subdivided and developed as John had planned. The directors of the company even gave the streets the alphabetized Spanish names John had chosen for them. Today the Alamitos Land Company is owned mainly by the descendants of John Bixby, Jotham Bixby, Lewellyn Bixby and I. W. Hellman.

⁵⁶Susanna Bryant Dakin, A Scent of Violets (San Francisco: By the Author's Family, 1968), and Hotchkis, "Chronology," p. 11.

⁵⁷Hotchkis, "Notes," pp. 9 and 14-15; and Hotchkis, "Chronology," p. 9. In testimony in 1901 regarding the ranch and a neighboring sugar beet factory, Susan Bixby said she and her husband together made all the alterations to the adobe ranch house. This would indicate that if Susan alone was responsible for the second addition to the Music Room and the addition of the Back Hallway, these changes were made after 1901. See CSULB Collection, Los Angeles Superior Court Case No. 32,958, Direct Examination of Susan H. Bixby, 18 April 1901, pp. 283-284.

⁵⁸Hotchkis, "House Tour," p. 6; and Hotchkis, "Chronology," p. 9. Also see RLA Collection: photograph, "South Side of Ranch House and Water Tank," c. 1890, catalog #AHP 0020: ink wash, "Rancho Los Alamitos," initialed SB, 1890, catalog #A68.6.1, LB City inventory #7014; oil painting, "Rancho Los Alamitos," C. L. Turner, c. 1880, catalog #A68.6.2, LB City inventory #7116; "Rancho Los Alamitos," na (attributed by Fred H. Bixby to a Basque sheepherder/artist, c. 1880), catalog #A68.6.3, LB City inventory #7117; lithograph, "Rancho Los Alamitos and Residence of John W. Bixby," Wallace W. Elliott and Company 1887, catalog #A68.6.4, LB City inventory #7211; and CSULB Collection photographs: "Sister and I," c. 1902; ad "The House," c. 1911, Album I.

⁵⁹Hotchkis, "Notes," p. 11; and Hotchkis, "Talk to Long Beach Kiwanis," p. 5. In an essay titled "The Old Room," Florence Bixby reminisced about the history of Rancho Los Alamitos using the objects in the Library as a vehicle for her reverie. Mrs. Bixby said that at one time the northwest room of the adobe "had been a room for the preparation of food. Again, it had held a dining room and a small adjoining bedroom. But for many years now, it had been the living room of this family." Florence Green Bixby, "The Old Room" Is There a Thing Called Spring? (Pasadena: by the Author, 1936), p. 58.

⁶⁰These windows may have been obtained by cannibalizing some of John Bixby's triple-hung windows from elsewhere on the ranch. Hotchkis, "Notes," pp. 3, 4, 9 and 11; and Smith, Adobe Days, p. 61.

⁶¹Hotchkis, "Chronology," p. 11; Dakin, Scent of Violets, pp. 14-15; and LASCC No. 32,958, Susan Bixby, p. 289.

⁶²Hotchkis, "Notes," p. 2.

⁶³Susan Bixby was not even present at the time of Katharine's birth, having left for Europe two weeks previously with her daughter Susanna. See LASCC No. 32,958, Susan Bixby, pp. 253-254.

⁶⁴Susanna Bixby Bryant's daughter later recoded of her mother's wedding that Susanna "transformed the thick adobe-walled...living room, where the Congregational service would be read, into a tropical bower, with long stemmed, pink Rubrum lilies and large leafed plants." Dakin, Scent of Violets, pp. 21-11.

⁶⁵Hotchkis, "Chronology," p. 14. See CSULB Collection, photograph, "John and His Chaps, etc." May 1912, Album I: photograph, "Trying to Show His Spurs," May 1912; photograph, "Summer of 1912" (Back Patio), 1912; and Last Will and Testament of Susan P. H. Bixby, 2 February 1905.

⁶⁶Hotchkis, "Chronology," p. 12; and Hotchkis, "Talk to Kiwanis," p. 6. During the Sugar Beet Trial, Susan Bixby testified that Rancho Los Alamitos became her permanent home in 1898, once Fred had graduated from Berkeley and Susanna had left her Berkeley school for a finishing school in Boston. Susan Bixby does say that after 1898, she traveled extensively. LASC NO. 32,958, Susan Bixby, p. 253.

⁶⁷Hotchkis, "Chronology," pp. 11-12; Hotchkis, "Talk to Kiwanis," p. 6; and LASC No. 32,958, Fred H. Bixby, 17 April 1901, pp. 220-224. Katharine Hotchkis, in an interview with her daughter, indicated the property for the bluff house was a gift from Susan Bixby to Fred and Florence (or perhaps just Florence).

I think Grandmother gave the lot to Mother, I'm not sure, but Mother had a lot down there and I think Grandmother gave it to her. And they built this house. Big House. And they moved in and Sister was born there, so it must have been about 1900 or 1901. The barn was where Bixby Park is now...

CSULB Collection, Interview with Katharine Bixby Hotchkis, by Joan Hotchkis, p. 2. Also see interview with Joan Hotchkis by Pamela Seager, Long Beach on 3 March 1987. It is possible that Fred and Florence lived in the ranch house only while Susan was traveling in Europe and while they were waiting for their own house on the bluff to be ready.

The bluff house original location was near Jotham Bixby's house across from Bixby Park – a park created largely by the generous and philanthropic efforts of Fred's father, John Bixby. An article in the Press-Telegram (c. 1925) by Martha N. Hathaway (Susan Hathaway Bixby's sister) entitled "Bixby Park Start Forty Years Ago Told by Pioneer," credits John Bixby with the inspiration for creating Bixby Park and planting its initial trees. The park was owned and maintained by the Alamitos Land Company for the benefit of the people of Long Beach. Later it was donated to the City.

⁶⁸The date the bluff house was moved to Rancho Los Alamitos is unknown; it was sometime after 1901 and before 1906. However, photographs show the bluff house standing as late as 1913 and Katharine's dairy entries indicate the tennis court was installed in 1921. David Streatfield, "Historical Overview of Rancho Los Alamitos Gardens," (in Garden Restoration and Landscape Maintenance Plan of the Master Plan for the Rancho Los Alamitos Foundation, 1987), pp. 32, 35-36. See RLA Collection: photograph, "Old Garden," February 1909, catalog #AHP 0035; photograph, "Old Garden," February 1909, catalog #AHP 0844; photograph, "John, Deborah, and Frederick on East Lawn," March 1913, catalog #AHP 0849; and photograph, "Katharine Leading Horse with Frederick in Saddle," March 1912, catalog #AHP 0722. Also see CSULB Collection photograph, "Mother, Sister and Me," c. 1901; photograph, "Frederick and Dog," March 1913; photograph, "John, Sister, and Deborah on Pony with Frederick Holding Reins," February 1913; photograph, "Sister and Boozer," February 1913; and photograph "Frederick in Tree," March 1913.

⁶⁹The many changes Fred and Florence Bixby made to the ranch house over the fifty-odd years of their residence reveal not only a respect for John and Susan's remodeling and a sentimentality for family tradition but, at the same time, a desire to transform the ranch house into their own home. As new owners, Fred and Florence took pleasure in making changes which suited their own tastes and pattern of living, as well as reflecting accepted contemporary fashions and style. Fred and Florence appear to have made a great many decorative changes to the interior almost immediately upon moving into the ranch house in 1906. The fact that Susan Bixby left all of her furnishings and personal effects to her daughter Susanna must have been a significant factor in motivating the refurbishing frenzy. In part, Susan's will read:

All other of my personal property, including carriages, harness, horses, cattle, household furniture, pictures, library, silver, clothing, jewelry, and all other personal property...I give to my daughter, Susanna P. Bryant, to select there from so much and such parts thereof as she desires to have, and any of the said property that she does not wish to keep, I direct her to give to my son, Fred H. Bixby, to dispose of as he may see fit.

Records indicate that the Turkish chair in the Library, the Master Bedroom wardrobe, the china cabinets in the Dining Room, the billiard table, some Oriental carpets, a few knick-knacks, an assortment of American Indian artifacts are the only furnishings passed on to Fred from his parents through his sister. (Fred also inherited the 1906 White Stanley Steamer automobile.) See CSULB Collection, Last Will and Testament of Susan P. H. Bixby, 2 February 1905 (admitted to probate in Los Angeles Superior Court, 9 March 1906, No. 9460); Hotchkis, "Notes," pp. 12-13; Bixby, "The Old Room," p. 60; and Joan Hotchkis, "The Enchanted Ranch," chapter 3, CSULB, Box 5, date ?

⁷⁰Hotchkis, "House Tour," p. 5; and Hotchkis, "Chronology," p. 13. Susanna Bryant Dakin, in her book, "Scent of Violets (p. 21) credits Susan Bixby with installing the Library skylight. Being less familiar with the Alamitos ranch house and its history, it is likely that Dakin made a mistake on this point. Katharine Hotchkis' account of the skylight is probably more accurate. Also see CSULB Collection: photograph, "John When Very Young," c. 1909; and photograph "Icky," (John Bixby Jr., with Florence and Fred Bixby), 1911. Both photographs show the library and bedroom skylights in the west sloping roof of the ranch house before the second story was added.

⁷¹See CSULB Collection, photograph, "The Lawn," 1911; photograph, "Margaret Huntington, Mother, Frederick and John" (standing in front of the porch), 1910/11; photograph, "Front Porch Interior," c. 1910, catalog #AHP 0059; and photograph, "Front Porch Interior," c. 1925, catalog #AHP 0059.

⁷²Hotchkis, "Chronology," p. 12. Please see footnote #52 for further information on the construction of the south wing and tank house.

⁷³Street-Porter, "The Ranch House," p. 103-104.

⁷⁴Street-Porter, "The Ranch House," p. 105.

⁷⁵Street-Porter, "The Ranch House," p. 106.

⁷⁶Hotchkis, "Notes," pp. 5 and 13.

⁷⁷Hotchkis, "House Tour," p. 7. According to Katharine Hotchkis, the Library fixtures" were so badly twisted in the a933 earthquake that they had to be replaced." Hotchkis, "Notes," p. 10.

⁷⁸Hotchkis, "Notes," p. 9.

⁷⁹Hotchkis, "Notes," p. 9. Circular holes for stove flues are still visible in the east wall of the Dining Room and the floor of the attic above the Master Bedroom.

⁸⁰Hotchkis, Trip with Father (San Francisco: California Historical Society, 1971), p. x; and Hotchkis, "Chronology," p. 19.

⁸¹Hotchkis, "Notes," p. 11; and Hotchkis, "Chronology," p. 19.

⁸²Hotchkis, "Notes," p. 11. Also see RLA Collection, photograph, "Secret Garden" c. 1927, AHP #0266; and Works Progress Administration, Historical American Building Survey, "La Casa de Los Alamitos," West Elevation, 1935, Project No. 265-6907, p. 3 of 4.

⁸³Hotchkis, "Notes," p. 8. See CSULB Collection; photograph, "John and Frederick with Housekeeper and Governess by Laundry Building," Winter 1912; and photograph, "Governess and Housekeeper in Front of Laundry Building," Winter 1912.

⁸⁴RLA Collections, "Specifications for Additions To and Alterations In Offices at Rancho Los Alamitos," Harvey A. Lochridge, Structural Engineer, Long Beach, 8 July 1931; drawings for same: "Planting Plan for

Fred H. Bixby,” Paul J. Howard, Landscape Architect and Horticulturist, Los Angeles, January 1921; and Hotchkis, “Chronology,” p. 14.

Although Hotchkis, in her “Chronology,” places the conversion of the garage to offices between 1906 and 1910; Paul J. Howard’s plan of the site still shows a garage at the end of the Stern’s wing in 1921.

⁸⁵Lary L. Meyers, Long Beach: Fortune’s Harbor (Tulsa, Oklahoma: Continental Heritage Press, 1983), p. 111; Hotchkis, “House Tour,” p. 8; and Hotchkis, “Notes,” pp. 3 and 10.

⁸⁶In floor plans prepared by Katharine Hotchkis and William Lockett around 1968; Katharine dates the alcove as being constructed in 1931. However, the alcove walls are constructed over the 1933 reinforcing bars installed after the earthquake.

⁸⁷Katharine Hotchkis, “The Story of the Home Trust: The Home Trust and How It Came About,” San Marino, Ca., February 1959, p. 6; and Hotchkis, “Chronology,” p. 20.

⁸⁸Hotchkis, “The Story of the Home Trust,” p. 6; Hotchkis, “Chronology,” p. 20; and Hotchkis, “Notes,” p. 1.

⁸⁹See Architectural Resources Group, “Site and Outbuildings,” (In Historic Structure Report and Architectural Plan in the Master Plan for Rancho Los Alamitos Foundation, Long Beach, 1987).

⁹⁰Bixby, “The Old Room,” pp. 63-64.

