

April 27, 1961

SJC-53

Mr. Wallace Akerlind  
801 North Spurgeon  
Santa Ana, California

Dear Mr. Akerlind:

We would like to submit the following to appear in the special May 7 issue of the Orange County Section of the Los Angeles Times.

In the files of the Coastline Dispatch is a sample of an old letterhead - a job of printing done for the Chamber of Commerce in 1923. Perhaps it will come as a surprise to later residents of the Mission town to learn that there was an original Chamber of Commerce.

The old letterhead reveals that R. W. Whitaker was president of the original Chamber of Commerce. He was the town banker in the now closed California State Bank of San Juan Capistrano, then doing business in the present hotel building.

Burt Otstot was the vice-president. He had his drug store on the Capistrano Hotel corner. Ferris Kelly, who built the bock of buildings now housing Bob Calhoun's Mission Garage, Coastline Dispatch, Mission Drug, Whalen's Café, and the former Conner's Department Store, was the treasurer, and S. L. Pancoast was secretary. Ferris Kelly and Carl Romer were partners in a grocery store in Conner's latter location.

Directors in 1923 were J. B. Malcom, C. L. Congdon, Dr. Paul Esslinger, C. A. Hankey, O. J. Guilbert, Harlow Hallady, F. A. Stoffel and J. Roy Smith. Also Father St. John O'Sullivan of the Old Mission, George A. Ferguson, C. E. Crumrine, H. J. Larking, W. H. Griswold, Norman Bottger and D. P. Morgan.

This Chamber of Commerce was a flourishing organization supporting worthwhile projects. One project was that of town beautification.

The Chamber of Commerce purchased 200 palm trees, which they stored on Bill Speer's property. These trees were sold to any resident wanting them at a cost of \$1.00 each. Some of these palms may still be seen in various spots around town such as La Matanza Street, high on the Robert Honeymoon property and the Stoffel property off of Los Cerritos. Last summer when it was necessary to move two palm trees from the San Juan Capistrano Forestry parkway on La Matanza to make a driveway, they were transplanted at the new Capistrano Beach Fire House.

Mainly through the support of this Chamber of Commerce and the work of its individual committeemen, the more important project was to accomplish the building of the Ortega Highway.

It seems strange today that there could have been opposition to the building of this road. But there was and much of it bitter. Petitions to the County Supervisor were circulated in San Juan Capistrano demanding that the project be abandoned. Many of the names appearing on this petition are the same as those seen on various petitions of current times.

The then Fifth District Supervisor, George Jeffrey, was against the project, and no help could be expected from him. But the San Juan Capistrano Chamber of Commerce backed the project. In fact, it was one of the main reasons the original Chamber of Commerce was organized. Carl Hankey was named chairman of the project, and he recalls today that week after week he went before the Board of Supervisors, or drove all the way around through Santa Ana Canyon to meet with Riverside officials who were pushing the project from their side of the big hill. John S. Malcom, President at the time of the early Chamber of Commerce was a steadfast supporter. Ferris Kelly, Father St. John O'Sullivan and many others worked tirelessly.

Carl Hankey recalls that he was often weary of the highway. "Five years is a long time to push", he said. In fact he did resign as chairman, handing over the job to Fred Stoffel, another ardent worker. Even though no longer officially chairman, Hankey continued to work for the road, despite the demands of his young family and the work involved in make his orange groves pay.

In Riverside the road was referred to as the Elsinore-Capistrano Road. In San Juan Capistrano it was termed the Capistrano-Elsinore Road. Difficulties in naming the road loomed.

One day Father St. John O'Sullivan of the Old Mission, called Carl Hankey. Together they hit upon an idea. They would suggest the name Ortega Highway. Well, politicians today might take notice. For the plan worked like a charm and best of all, from that day on their best worker was Supervisor Jeffrey. His wife was a direct descendent of the early day explorer Ortega.

Orange and Riverside Counties together raised fifty percent of the cost and the State raised the other half. The final cost of the Ortega Highway was \$750,000.

So finally what was one a primitive trail, often only to be traveled on horseback, washed out by floods in 1916, and never repaired, became a road.

Seldom overtaxed by its traffic burden, yet driven day in and day out by a substantial number of motorists in summer, snow seasons and on weekends, the Ortega Highway is may things to its travelers.

For some, it opens up once inaccessible property, it links Riverside and Orange Counties and their towns and businesses; it is a scenic trip through stunning rugged mountain land for others and it brings the people of the hot inland areas closer to the cooling ocean.

At the highest point of the road there is an observation point, where travelers may stop and look out over a gorgeous panorama of valley floor far below. This lookout spot is called severally "Inspiration Point" or "Jamison's Point". Set into the rugged stone walls outlining this point are two bronze plaques. One recalls that the explorer Jose Francisco Ortega was the first white man to set foot onto this rugged country. On the second plaque is inscribed the name of Carl A. Hankey, for it was largely through his untiring efforts that the building of the Ortega Highway was accomplished.

During the depression the original Chamber of Commerce was discontinued.

It is a privilege for the new City of San Juan Capistrano to have in residence descendants of the original Jose Francisco Ortega. Elarion M. Hernandez, the Great, Great, Great Grandson of Ortega, his wife Dorothy and their daughters.

History tells us that Sgt. Ortega with Portola's expedition as a scout was the first European to see the great bay of San Francisco. Ortega came to California on at least three expeditions the first around 1723. He came with the Portola group as a sergeant. Another trop was as a captain in charge of bringing Father Juniper Serra's party to California, setting forth from the island of Majorca in Spain.

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He made a third trip, also with Father Serra, to continue the spread of the missions of California. It is said that he took an actual part in the construction of the Old Mission Capistrano.

In this manner the name Ortega continues to be conspicuous in the present day history of California.

Sincerely,

SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Frances N. Smith, Secretary  
(Mrs. Harold A. Smith)

Source of Information: Dorothy and Elarion M. Hernandez

Enclosure

Brief Treatise of San Juan Capistrano

#### A Brief Treatise on San Juan Capistrano

Before the Franciscan Friars came from the college in Mexico City to visit San Juan Capistrano, there were approximately three thousand Indians living here. In the annals of Indian history, the Acjachema tribe (one of the Mission Indian tribes) a peaceful loving people, with a religious culture very similar to Christianity with respect to the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule. Their language consisted of fewer words than most languages today and sometimes it was convenient to use sign language. Their domestic life was harmonious and tranquil, the men hunting and fishing for food, growing potatoes and other vegetables. The women prepared and cooked the food, wove cloth and blankets, made baskets and everyone in the family, including the older children, making pottery.

When the Franciscan Friars arrived in San Juan Capistrano the Indians were shy of strangers speaking a different language (Spanish) but they soon became acquainted with the kind Friars, and friendship blossomed between them. The Friars nick-names the Indian "neophytes" as they were new to the Catholic religion which the Friars taught to them.

When it came time to plan and build the Mission, the architect master mason arrived from Lower California, and with the work of the Indians over a period of thirty years, build the "Jewel of the Missions" as it was called. Six years after the Mission was blessed, the earthquake of 1812 destroyed the chapel and forty Indians lost their lives. Much has been written about this San Juan Capistrano area during the following seventy years, but we will by-pass that era to shorten this narrative.

The first Protestant meeting house was at the South West corner of Acjachema and El Camino Real. The roads were less than half the present width. In the 1880's there was a

thriving canning business, with quite a few men working it, located on a portion of the Buchheim property near the railroad. Before the turn of the century there was a slaughter house where Bonnie Bloom Carnation FARM is now located. However, there is a street (on Mission Flats) named La Matanza which means "The Slaughter House" in Spanish.

During President Lincoln's second term in office, he signed a document giving the Missions to the Catholic Church. The "Jewel of the Missions" is well known all over the world, as well as the legend of the swallows. It is the mecca for thousands of tourists each year. We are very fortunate to live in this beautiful valley with such historical heritage.

Antonio M. Olivares