Olivas Adobe Interpretive Signs

(Revised 9-4-10)

City of San Buenaventura Historic Landmark #1 Plaque
Location: Mounted on the left stucco post at the entrance to the fountain from the parking lot – facing the parking lot.

HISTORIC LANDMARK
No. 1
"Olivas Adobe"

This two-story Monterey style adobe was the heart of Rancho San Miguel. Built in 1847 by Don Raymundo Olivas, a prominent cattle and sheep rancher, it was owned by the family until 1899. Restored in the late 1920s by millionaire Max Fleischmann, of Fleischmann Yeast and Margarine fame, for use as a hunting lodge, the historic house was given to the City of San Buenaventura in 1961. Now a historic museum, it is dedicated to Ventura's rancho heritage.

City of San Buenaventura
Historic Preservation Commission
February 11, 1974

Rancho San Miguel - The Original Land Grant
Location: Just outside the entrance to the courtyard in the location where a donation box and brochure box are currently located – facing the walkway into the courtyard.]

Illustration caption: Historic 1860 survey map of Rancho San Miguel

Raymundo Olivas and his friend Felipe Lorenzana, received a land grant of 4,693 acres in 1841 in return for their service to the Mexican Army. Lorenzana sold his half of the land during the drought of 1864, for $1,000 in gold and a silver studded saddle. Through hard work and keen business sense, Don Raymundo Olivas became one of the wealthiest *rancheros* in Ventura County.

Building the Olivas Adobe
Location: At the base of the stairway – facing the courtyard.

Photo caption: The Olivas Adobe, circa 1890. Balcony: Doña Teodora Olivas with her daughter Francesca Olivas Suytar; ground floor: son Raimundo Olivas Jr., daughter Rebecca Olivas De La Riva holding child, and pet deer.

Construction began as early as 1841 for the smaller adobe buildings on the site and in 1847 for the first floor of this larger two-story Monterey style adobe home, with the second floor added and completed between 1850 and 1852. Chumash Native American workers, skilled in adobe making, did much of the construction work. The Olivas family lived here until 1899, raising 21 children – eight girls and 13 boys.

Small Adobe / Courtyard
Location: To the left of the new entrance walk to the small adobe – facing the courtyard.

This small adobe, as it now stands, and the courtyard walls were built sometime after 1855, at the height of the rancho operation. An archaeological excavation conducted through the floor of the small adobe found the remains of an older adobe structure possibly built in the 1840s, as well as artifacts related to rancho life. Although there were likely other small adobe buildings on the site when the Olivas family lived here, this is the only small adobe structure remaining. The courtyard served as the center of family life and ranch business. Lavish fiestas were held here, lasting as long as a week."

Fleischmann Period
Location:To the left of the Bell Gate – facing the courtyard.

Photo caption: 1. Portrait of Max Fleischmann
and second photo of the bell gate with duck carvings

In addition to serving as the Olivas family home, the adobe has been a dairy and a hunting club. Max Fleischmann purchased and restored the house in 1927, building this distinctive bell arch over the main gate to the courtyard. Mr. Fleischmann maintained the property as his private duck-hunting lodge. The adobe was given to the City, after the death of Max Fleischmann in 1951, by the Fleishmann Foundation in 1961 and made into an historic park in 1972, highlighting the many contributions of early Latino pioneers.

Adobe Building Material
Location: On the fountain side of the courtyard wall just before the step back – facing the fountain garden… near the exposed original bricks behind framed glass.

Sub- heading: 19th Century Adobe Bricks: Text: The exposed bricks in this wall (behind the framed glass) are the original adobe bricks used in constructing the wall sometime after 1855. Adobe bricks are basically mud bricks, traditionally made from a mixture of mostly soil and water, with a small amount of added sand and chopped straw (or recycled straw in the form of horse dung). The thick compound was then packed tightly into a wooden frame. When the frame was removed, the brick was left to dry in the sun for many days.

A typical adobe brick from the original construction measures approximately 22" by 11" by 4.5" and weighs about 25 pounds. The nine rooms of the main house are composed of about 2,000 bricks per room.

Adobe Repair Work
Location: The following sign is for the glassed-in display frame that has been moved to the inside courtyard wall near the main courtyard entrance (on the kitchen side of the entrance).

Traditional materials: Text: Special care was given to using traditional materials of adobe construction during the 2010 renovation and seismic strengthening of the historic house and courtyard walls. Contemporary plasters and paint can damage adobe bricks by trapping moisture, while use of traditional mud and lime materials allow the adobe bricks to breathe.

Layers: Text: Behind this glass you can see the various layers of repair work on this wall. Portions of the wall had deteriorated and needed to be replaced. (1) The replacement adobe bricks are made of soil mixed with water, and small amount of sand and organic material (chopped straw). Adobe mud mortar consisting of sand, soil and water was used to fill the void between the new adobe bricks and the existing adobe wall. The outer layer of replacement adobe bricks on this wall was attached to the existing 19th century adobe wall with stainless steel rods in a rectangular grid pattern (see metal cap). (2) A thin whitewash with bonding agent was then applied to the new adobe bricks. (3) Finally, two coats of white lime plaster were applied, which consists of hydrated lime (made of crushed limestone heated in a kiln), sand and water –one rough coat and (4) a second smoother finish layer made with finer grain sand. The outer courtyard wall surfaces were repaired with mud mortar applied to the 19th century adobe brick surfaces, and then covered with two layers of lime plaster.

The repair process for the two-story house was slightly different, using the traditional construction methods originally used for the house: The adobe brick surfaces were repaired with mud mortar and then covered with two layers of mud plaster (a rough layer and a smooth finish layer). This was followed by four coats of a thin whitewash finish made of finely ground lime and water, with a small amount of a binder added (either from cactus juice or a glue-like binder).

Seismic Strengthening of the Adobes

The Large and Small Adobes have been strengthened to improve safety and reduce potential damage in the event of an earthquake. The main approach was to tie the adobe walls and wood-framed floors and roof together so that they move in similar ways in response to any ground motion.

Attaching the roof to the walls: Two-foot long vertical steel rods were driven into the top of the adobe walls and bolted to the rafters.

Attaching the walls to the floor: Brackets attached to the second floor framing were anchored to a horizontal steel rod recessed into the plaster on the outside of the wall, just under the second floor porch. The floors were also bolted together through the interior walls between rooms.

The roof was strengthened by adding plywood sheathing over the framing. The walls were also strengthened along the top, either with steel straps attached to the roof framing and adobe wall, or with a reinforced concrete cap, called a “bond beam” installed on the adobe just under the roof framing.

Horno

The horno (oven) served the baking needs for the Olivas family. On days when baking was required, a fire was built in the oven early in the morning. When the fire had burned down to coals, the coals were raked out and the dish to be baked was placed inside. The wooden door was set in place to trap heat until the dish was cooked. Once heated, the horno could be used to bake bread, enchiladas, and other dishes all day long.

Cauldron

:In the early days of the rancho (1841-1848), cattle were raised primarily for the trade value of their dried hides and fat, not their meat. Fat was trimmed from the carcass and placed in this cauldron and boiled. Impurities were skimmed from the top of the boiling mixture until the rendered fat was pure. The resulting purified fat (*tallow*) was baled and traded for manufactured goods with merchant ships that anchored off the coast. Tallow was used to make soap and candles and to lubricate machines. Later, during the days of the Gold Rush, cattle were raised mainly for their meat. They were driven north to the gold fields and sold to the hungry miners.