

ORANGE COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION
13042 OLD MYFORD ROAD
IRVINE, CA 92602-2304

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING SIGNIFICANT HISTORIC SITES
(Adopted 1972 and Revised 1999)

A. HISTORICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. Are the properties, sites, and structures connected with significant in cultural, political, economic, military or social history?

Yes. The site with its original bunkhouse, old barn, leaning wood sheds, and metal shed, as well as a century-old cactus and some antiquated farming implements and ranching equipment are significant for their direct association with the cultural, economic, social, and agricultural history of Orange County. What is now called the Aliso Viejo Ranch site, was once part of a vast ranch owned and operated by Lewis Fenno Moulton (1854-1938) in South Orange County. The site is the last physical remnant associated with the former 22,000 acre L.F. Moulton Ranch, much of which was originally part of Rancho Niguel.

The historic ranch site physically represents the Moulton family's rich ranching history in the area, along with the rugged cowboys, the hardworking self-reliant farmers, and others involved in the day-to-day management of livestock ranching and farming during the early years of operating the ranch. The Ranch site contains the oldest structures in the City, and represents the last physical evidence of the region's late-19th and early 20th century agricultural and ranching history. While other features of the site have been lost over time, the remaining structures, vintage farming equipment, and rural landscape are a tangible link to the origins not only of the City of Aliso Viejo, but of the surrounding communities that have been developed on portions of the original Moulton family ranch land, including Laguna Hills, Laguna Niguel, and Laguna Woods.

2. Were the properties or places related to significant activities of notable people?

Yes. The property is associated with pioneering South Orange County rancher Lewis F. Moulton and his wife Nellie Gail. Lewis Fenno Moulton was born in Chicago, Illinois on January 17, 1854, son of John Tilden and Charlotte Harding (Fenno) Moulton. Lewis Moulton moved to Boston, Massachusetts with his mother when he was around ten years old. As a youth of fifteen he worked on the old Daniel Webster farm in Marshfield, Massachusetts. In 1874, he came to California via a ship to the Isthmus of Panama where he crossed the land by train and sailed his way to San Francisco. He caught another ship headed south to San Diego, but disembarked at Wilmington (near Long Beach), where he proceeded by stagecoach to Santa Ana in Orange County. Once settled, he began work on the San Joaquin Ranch, also known as Irvine Ranch, near Santa Ana and subsequently engaged in the sheep business for several years in association with Charles E. French. Moulton later married, but divorced in 1899.

Over a few short years, Moulton's livestock ranching business prospered greatly. Just after the turn of the 20th century Lewis Moulton met Nellie M. Gail at her father's shop in El Toro (now Lake Forest). Lewis courted Nellie for several years prior to their marriage in 1908. The couple honeymooned in Honolulu before making their permanent home on the Moulton Ranch adjacent to the L.F. Moulton & Company headquarters (near present-day Laguna Hills Mall). Nellie Maud Gail was born in Irving, Kansas on December 8, 1878, the daughter of the El Toro Postmaster and storekeeper John L. Gail and his wife Prudence. Nellie later moved to Washington near Seattle where she became a school teacher in the early 1900s. She often visited Southern California during the summer months to visit her family and it was during one of those visits that she met and fell in love with Lewis Moulton.

Lewis and Nellie Moulton had two daughters, Charlotte (1910-2006) and Louise (1914-2014), who grew up on the homestead ranch and later educated themselves in animal husbandry. In 1938, Lewis F. Moulton passed away at the age of 83. Nellie Gail Moulton then became the principal owner and operator of the L.F. Moulton Company. She continued to successfully manage the ranch and farm business (along with the Daguerre family) for another 12 years before turning over her share of involvement to her two daughters. Nellie was never the rancher like her husband Lewis, but rather was very involved with the arts and was an accomplished painter. She studied her craft under the auspices of Laguna Beach artist Anna Hill, who was a founding member of Laguna's College of Art and Design. She remained a well-respected philanthropist and generous supporter of the arts until her death on August 23, 1972 at the age of 94.

3. Do the sites or groups of structures represent the development patterns of historic eras such as early settlement, agriculture, seaports, railroads, and pre-1940 highways?

Yes. In the 1890s, Lewis F. Moulton, a pioneering South Orange County rancher from Boston, took title of the "Rancho Niguel" land originally granted to Juan Avila by the Mexican government in 1842. With additional land purchases made in the 1890s and early 1900s, his ranch holdings eventually totaled roughly 22,000.

L.F. Moulton became a peer to James Irvine having been significantly associated with the early ranching and farming of Orange County land (South Orange County) during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Lewis F. Moulton, and his family after his passing in 1938, owned and operated the largest ranch in the South Orange County area for over 90 years (period of significance 1884-1976). Eventually, the Moulton family began subdividing the historic ranch land in 1954 for residential and commercial development. The last 6,600 acres of the former Moulton Ranch property were sold to the Mission Viejo Company in 1976, and were then developed into the master-planned community of Aliso Viejo. The Aliso Viejo Ranch site is a tangible link to the origins not only of the history Aliso Viejo, but reflect historical development patterns of South Orange County and the surrounding communities that were later incorporated from this vast land holding. Portions of the Moulton family ranch land were developed into Laguna Hills, Laguna Niguel, and Laguna Woods. In addition, Lewis F. Moulton's historical influence in the development of the City and neighboring communities is still evident today in the streets and sites that bear his name. As an example, Moulton Parkway, a wide thoroughfare that

traverses through Aliso Viejo, Laguna Hills, Laguna Woods, and Laguna Niguel was named after rancher Lewis F. Moulton. The Laguna Hills neighborhood of "Nellie Gail Ranch" encompassing over 1,350 acres was also named after Nellie Gail Moulton.

4. Do the sites represent a historic business or activity?

Yes. Today, the original bunkhouse, old barn, leaning wood sheds, and metal shed, as well as a hundred year old cactus and some vintage farming implements and ranching equipment remain on what was once one of the largest, most expansive and thriving ranches in South Orange County. The extant historic buildings on this ranch are the oldest structures in the City and date back to the 1920s and 1930s. Their presence and the stories left behind by the Moulton family, the tenant farmers who leased land, and those who worked on the ranch help provide a perceptible glimpse into the region's rich agricultural and ranching history from the late-19th and early 20th century and, thereby, represent an important historic business (and activity) that no longer exists throughout much of South Orange County and Orange County in general.

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Initially, Moulton leased a large portion of the Rancho Niguel property in 1884, which was owned by Cyrus B. Rawson at the time. In 1895, he purchased Rawson's 17,000 acres and a few months later formed a partnership with Jean Pierre Daguerre, a Basque sheepherder, who took one-third interest in the business known as Moulton Ranch (later operated under L.F. Moulton & Company). Moulton subsequently acquired additional land adjacent Rancho Niguel bringing the total size of the ranch property to around 22,000 acres. The Moulton-Daguerre partnership grazed sheep and cattle as well as secondary livestock such as hogs, and also farmed the property producing beans, grains, hay, barley, wheat, and an assortment of smaller crops.

The Moulton-Daguerre partnership changed when J.P. Daguerre was tragically killed in a farming accident in 1911. Despite his death, the Daguerre family, which included widowed Maria Eugenia, her son Domingo and daughters Juanita, Grace, and Josephine, continued managing their partnership with Lewis Moulton for many years. The Daguerres lived in a house that was adjacent to the Moulton's homestead. They were often considered as family to each other for which the Moulton sisters referred to Maria Eugenia Duquet Daguerre as "Grandma Daguerre."

Lewis and Nellie Gail Moulton operated their ranch through the L.F. Moulton Company headquarters, which along with their homestead, was located in what is now a portion of Laguna Hills near the modern day Laguna Hills Mall. Originally, the ranch was devoted to raising sheep and some agricultural products. In 1912, the use of the ranch changed

to cattle and also land was leased to tenant farmers who raised grain and beans, and in some instances small livestock. The Moulton Ranch was highly successful in its cattle business and was known for its high-quality Durham beef, which was brought to market in El Toro where Moulton had a large warehouse adjacent the railroad tracks and near the train depot.

By the early 1950s, the ranch business partnership with the Moulton and Daguerre families had been dissolved. The initial subdivision of the Moulton ranch property began when the Daguerres sold their portion in 1954. Other sections of the ranch would be sold for development during the next two decades. In 1976, the Mission Viejo Company purchased the last 6,600 acres. They continued to operate the site for a period of time through a subsidiary called the Aliso Viejo Company. The Aliso Viejo Company set out to create a new master-planned community. The County of Orange approved the master plan in 1979, and the early part of the 1980s saw the beginning of home sales in the area. During the mid-1990s, community members pushed to turn the community into a full-fledge city. Aliso Viejo became Orange County's 34th city on July 1, 2001, the only city in Orange County to be incorporated since 2000.

5. Have the properties or sites yielded or are they likely to yield significant information in cultural or natural history?

No. At this time, there is no evidence to indicate that the Aliso Viejo Ranch site has the potential to yield important information in prehistory, cultural history or natural history; nor has it yielded such information.

B. ARCHITECTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. Do the structures represent the work of architects or builders who have made major contributions to the history of architecture, engineering or building technology?

No.

2. Is the structure one of the few remaining examples in the county of a particular architectural style or period?

No.

3. Is the structure a unique architectural curiosity or does it represent a unique or indigenous building style or form?

No.

4. Does the structure retain the integrity of the original design or has it been substantially altered?

Yes. The current 7-acre Aliso Viejo Ranch site is a remnant of the almost 22,000-acre L.F. Moulton Ranch, which was subdivided beginning in 1954. The last 6,600 acres of the Ranch grounds were sold to the Mission Viejo Company in 1976, and ultimately developed into the City of Aliso Viejo. On site, a couple of barns, the foreman's residence (house), water tank, windmill, garage, wood fencing and corrals, and most of the original rural landscape and hardscape features were removed following the sale

of the property. A few additional ranch-related structures were located just outside the boundary of the current property, but were also removed for surrounding development. These improvements included a large barn to the north and a smaller barn to the east, as well as a few small animal corrals and property fencing. It appears the current Aliso Viejo Ranch site, with its original old barn, bunkhouse, leaning wood sheds, metal shed, century-old cactus, and some vintage farming implements and ranching equipment, is the last remaining undeveloped parcel associated directly with the historic 22,000 acre L.F. Moulton Ranch, Lewis F. Moulton, and the L.F. Moulton Company. Because of its rarity of property type and important historic associations the collective grouping of resources retains its integrity of location, design, workmanship, materials, association, and feeling from its period of significance (1884-1976) sufficient for County landmark recognition. The reconstructed big barn, corrals, and foreman's house also add in-kind historic value and character to the Ranch site.

5. Is the structure part of a concentration of higher quality landmark buildings where its presence, even though it is of lesser quality, is still necessary to support the architectural composition?

No.

6. Is the building a good representative example of a particular architectural style or period?

Yes. Collectively, the historic resources at the Aliso Viejo Ranch site are considered good representative examples of a particular period in Orange County's history of development. The original bunkhouse designed in the California bungalow style is a good extant rare example of its type and period dating from the 1920s. The two vernacular wooden sheds also date from the 1920s while the old barn and metal shed date from the 1930s. They reflect their historic character, use, and period through the in-kind conservation and retention of their original exterior cladding, roofing material, construction framing, and features.

7. Is the structure an outstanding example of workmanship or materials?

No. While the original structures at Aliso Viejo Ranch retain their historic integrity of workmanship and materials (among other integrity qualities), they are not considered outstanding examples of these two quality assets.

8. Has the structure been moved from its original site?

No. None of the original structures at the Ranch or the century-old cactus near the reconstructed Foreman's House have been moved from their original site (location). The vintage farming implements and ranching equipment on site have been moved, which was (and is) typical for such tools. Despite them being considered "moveable" objects, they remain on site as contributing elements to the historic Ranch.

9. Is the property a visual landmark that establishes and embellishes the county's image?

No.

C. SITE CONSIDERATIONS

1. Is the property a visual landmark that establishes and embellishes the county's image?

No.

2. Does the property identify a neighborhood?

No.

3. Are the properties or buildings significant and important because they form a building grouping which, because of its collective impact, becomes more significant to the site or area?

Yes. As mentioned, the original bunkhouse, old barn, leaning wood sheds, and metal shed, as well as a hundred year old cactus, and some vintage farming implements and ranching equipment remain on what was once one of the largest, most expansive and thriving ranches in South Orange County. Aliso Viejo Ranch possesses a significant concentration, linkage, and continuity of buildings, structures, objects and landscape united historically by physical development. It is the collectiveness of these resources that together help to convey the historic nature of the ranch site and its significance with the region's rich agricultural and ranching history from the late-19th and early 20th century.

4. Are there significant plant materials such as a row of boulevard trees, or specimen plantings of exceptional size or beauty?

Yes. The ranch site also features a very large, multi-trunk century-old Elephant cactus (*Pachycereus*) located in the front yard of the Foreman's House. It is visible in a number of historic photographs of the site and is considered a contributing historic element to the cultural significance of the property.

5. Is the property a fixed work of art, commemorative sculpture, wall mural, graphic or an item of street furniture such as clocks, lamp posts, etc., that depict an era of the county or give it distinction?

No.

6. Is the property or structure easily viewed by the public?

Yes. The Aliso Viejo Ranch site is now a City-owned public historic venue and open regularly to the general public. Its location and siting along Park Avenue adjacent a public school, park, and residential neighborhood allow it to be prominently visible from the public right-of-way.

7. Do(es) the structure(s) form an important visual and aesthetic background and scene for a noted gathering place, square or plaza?

No.

8. Is the site important because of the presence of a significant cultural or natural object?

No.