

# **Salisbury Canyon Ranch, Cuyama Valley, California**

*A brief history prepared for a visit to the ranch by a Fourth Grade class*

The Salisbury Canyon Ranch was started in the late 1800s, probably the 1870s, by sheep ranchers. At that time the land was part of the public domain, meaning it was owned by the federal government. The ranch was once part of the Chumash people's home for many thousands of years. It was part of Spain from the 1500s until the 1820s, then part of Mexico until 1848 with the American conquest. It became part of the new State of California which was admitted to the USA in 1850. The area of the ranch was not part of a Mexican land grant, but the front gate of the ranch is on the southern boundary line of one of the Cuyama Rancho land grants given to the De la Guerra/Lataillade family by the Mexican government.

European descendants began moving to southern California after it became a state. At that time these mountains were uninhabited. We think that the first settlers here were the Saulsbury family, originally from England, two brothers and their wives. They probably settled in the 1870s, but it could've been in the 1880s, we're not sure. They built an adobe when they settled (there is a 1910 photo of the original adobe in one of the guest houses). That adobe was taken down and the adobe bricks were used to build the current, larger, adobe house, which was built in 1926 and 1927.

The Saulsburys ranched sheep, they grazed them on this ranch in the foothills in the winter and up in the adjacent Sierra Madre mountain range to the south, in the summer. There is a large mountain meadow several miles south of the ranch at the top of the mountain range that is still called Salisbury Potrero, after this original ranching family. At some time in the past, the popular spelling of "Salisbury" became more common than the correct spelling, "Saulsbury." Saulsbury family descendants still live in the County.

The Saulsburys sold the ranch right after 1900 to Charlie James. He built the old barn, which is the oldest structure on the ranch and is over 100 years old. Charlie and his wife had three children, the daughter didn't stay on the ranch but their two sons, Jimmy and Ed, did. Between these various James families, they homesteaded several parcels and bought other homesteaded parcels. By the time the current owners bought the ranch in 2004 it was over 2,000 acres and came in over a dozen separate parcels. James family descendants still live in the Santa Maria area and own adjacent land.

In the 1930s the owners sold off the mountain pasture "potrero" and this affected the economic viability of the ranch. Today it is a cattle ranch and neighboring ranchers run the cattle on the ranch. At one time it was farmed by the James family for wheat.

The ranch buildings today consist of the 1927 adobe, two smaller houses built about 1935, and the old barn, tractor shed, garage and tack room.

There is much wildlife on the ranch, other than the cattle and horses which are the only domestic animals other than an old tomcat and a few occasional dogs. We have bears on the ranch – one has sat in the olive tree next to the adobe and one broke into the garage. We also have bobcats, mountain lions, badgers, coyotes, deer, cotton tail rabbits, jack rabbits (with the big ears) and lots of birds such as roadrunners, dove, owls, eagles, hawks, buzzards and many California quail, the state bird. It is also the homeland of the California Condor, the bird with the largest wingspan in the world and an endangered species. The ranch is particularly known as a very fine quail hunting region.

The families who owned the ranch are principally the Chumash, then the Saulsburys from the 1870s until 1900 or so, then the James family until 1966. From 1966 to 1981 the ranch was owned by a group called The Cuyama Land and Cattle Company, from 1981 to 2004 it was owned by Mr. and Mrs. Young of Los Angeles who used it as a rural retreat and for bird hunting. The current owners purchased it in 2004.