

Ortega Adobe Historic Residence

215 West Main Street • Ventura, CA 93001

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A unique example of an early working-class adobe home

Spanish and Mexican adobes once lined Ventura's downtown streets but only the Ortega Adobe survives today due to its continuous occupation as a residence or business.

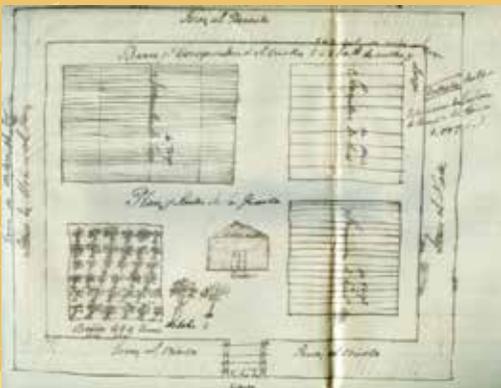
Emigdio Miguel Ortega (1813-1893) built his adobe around 1857 on this 200' x 200' lot, once mission property. Though illiterate, he did leave a few historic records (mainly deeds of sale) showing a series of pre- and post-statehood land swaps of this parcel between



Emigdio Miguel Ortega
(1813-1893)

Ortega's family and prominent ex-Mission Ventureño Chumash, granted this lot after the mission's dissolution in 1836.

In 1845 Lino María Anucuahuit, older brother of Juan de Jesús Tumamait, submitted this *diseño de terreno* to



Lino Maria's *diseño de terreno* (parcel map)

Courtesy California State Archives

accompany his land grant petition to Pio Pico, the last governor of Alta California under Mexican rule. His property may be the "Indian Rancho" marked on the 1855 Coast Survey Map where Main Street meets the Ventura River.



1855 Coast Survey Map

While census records list Ortega's occupation as laborer or vaquero (cowboy), he came from a pioneer Californio family. His grandfather José Francisco Ortega (1734-98), as chief scout for Gaspar de Portolà on the first Spanish exploration of California in 1769, is cited as the first European to set eyes on San Francisco Bay. José became Santa Barbara Presidio's first commandant and accompanied Junípero Serra on his 1782 expedition to found Mission San Buenaventura. Upon retirement in 1795 José received an early Spanish land concession rancho for grazing cattle called *Nuestra Señora del Refugio* at Gaviota in Santa Barbara County.

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Photographs courtesy Museum of Ventura County



Ortega Adobe pre-1900

Sala (living room)

The *sala* (living room), used for sleeping, meals, chores and prayer, contains no Ortega heirlooms but its current furnishings of handmade and imported objects evoke Ventura's transition from Mexican territory to California statehood (1850) when charcoal braziers heated adobe homes.

A 1970 restoration removed later additions of floor tiles and paint, so visitors today see a dirt floor, timber ceiling and interior walls of ¼" thick adobe plaster whitewashed.



*Maria Concepción Jacinta
Dominguez Ortega
(1817-1905)*

On the far wall are portraits of Emigdio and his wife, Maria Concepción Jacinta Dominguez Ortega. They raised 8 of their 13 children in the adobe.

Above the wall are niches for rafters removed in 1897 and nailing blocks to attach a muslin ceiling to catch falling roof debris. Cobbles and lime mortar plug the door to the room lost to floods in 1862 or 1866.

Altar



The Native Daughters of the Golden West, Poinsettia Parlor No. 318, maintain the Ortega Adobe as a community service and donated the home

altar to the right with three statues – Our Lady of Guadalupe, Saint Joseph and Saint Francis – evoking period domestic Catholic shrines of Spanish and Mexican heritage.



Our Lady of Guadalupe

Cocina (kitchen)

The brick adobe stove, a predecessor to the wood-burning iron stove, was originally located outdoors on a thatch-roofed *ramada* (porch) with no chimney or flue, and burned charcoal from iron pans suspended from its square holes. Ortega later opened the adobe wall for a flue for indoor use.

employing a dozen men to put up about 1,000 cans per day. Operations moved to larger quarters in Los Angeles in 1900 or 1902 and the Ortega family sold the business in 1946.



Birthplace of the Ortega brand

The story of a major company specializing in Mexican food begins here.

—Gustavo Arellano, author of *Taco USA: How Mexican Food Conquered America*

Emilio Carlos Ortega (1857-1942), the eleventh child of Emigdio and Maria, brought the cultivation of mild “Anaheim” peppers to California from New Mexico, invented a method for roasting and canning them in his mother’s kitchen



Emilio Carlos Ortega (1857-1942)

for sale, and established the state’s first commercial food enterprise in 1897.

His **Pioneer Green Chili Packing Co.**, later the E.C. Ortega Co., operated in a wood-frame shed just east of the adobe,



Pioneer Green Chili Packing Co., 1898

The Adobe’s Many Uses

Archeologists, during a site upgrade in 1984, uncovered remains of a pottery kiln and fragments of traditional *casuelas* (crock), *ollas* (pots) and Anglo-style flower pots indicating another small business occupied this site in the decades prior to Ortega’s. The adobe passed from the Ortegas in 1905 to a member of the nearby Chinese community, Ung [also Ong or Sing] Hing, who played a key role in its preservation by the Ventura



Ung Hing and family

Chamber of Commerce in 1913. Acquiring the property in 1921, the City of Ventura leased it to various tenants as a restaurant, saloon, gas station, VFW Hall, Shell Oil office, temporary police headquarters and boys club before its 1970 restoration, designation as City of Ventura Historic Landmark No. 2 in 1974, and application as The Ortega Adobe Historic Residence, number 785 for the National Register of Historic Places (CA VEN 785H).

Adobe Construction

The Ortega is skillfully built with a river cobble stone foundation and almost two-foot-thick walls of plastered adobe block. Typically, the 25-pound bricks—12" by 4" by 16"—were made from a thick compound



School children learning to make adobe bricks at the City of Ventura Interpretive Outreach Program at the Olivas Adobe.

of soil and water plus a little sand and chopped straw, all packed tightly into a wooden mold. The bricks—with molds removed—hardened as they dried in the sun for many days.

Ortega's son Emilio recounts that his father in 1859 roofed his modest 20-by-40-foot structure with round log rafters and a hewn redwood

beam salvaged from the Carlos Carrillo Adobe of Rancho Sespe, an abandoned Fillmore ranch, covering them with a

perpendicular mat of the bamboo-like canes of *Arundo donax* (Giant Reed or Cane), tied with rawhide, a grass layer, mud cap and coating of tar from local natural seeps. Emilio relates that Emigdio upgraded the cane mat to *tejas* (roof tiles) purchased from the Mission, when its tile roof, quake damaged in 1857, was replaced.

Recámara (bedroom)

In the decades after winter floods destroyed the adobe's second room to the west, Ortega, added two rooms to the north: a *cocina* (kitchen) and *recámara* (bedroom) into whose wall he inserted openings for (probably) a drain and, above it, a stove pipe.

