

History of Whiting Ranch

In 1842, Jose Serrano was granted 10,668 acres of land known as Rancho Canada de Los Alisos. Serrano and his sons raised crops to sell such as: corn, beans, and watermelons. However, their principle industry was cattle, from which hides and tallow were sold. Unfortunately the drought of 1863 and 1864 caused the death of Serrano's herds, forcing foreclosure of the rancho to Los Angeles banker J.S. Slauson and Associates. Slauson divided the ranch into ten parcels, the largest being more than 10,000 acres. The property was then sold to Dwight Whiting in 1885. Whiting encouraged the development of El Toro by subdividing level land, bringing the railroad through, and by planting olive trees, grape vineyards and some 400 acres of eucalyptus trees; many of these still stand throughout the current city of Lake Forest.

However, due to the arid climate and poor soil, agricultural use was unsuccessful. In 1959, the Whiting properties were sold to V.P. Parker and Associates, and residential development has since ensued. In July of 1988, approximately 1,200 acres were dedicated to Orange County to be preserved as an open space wilderness park. Since then additional acquisitions have enlarged the park to approximately 4,300 acres. An additional 87-acre parcel adjacent to El Toro Road just south of Cook's Corner, known as the Historic McFadden Ranch, houses the park's office and nature center. The house was built in 1915 by James McFadden and his brother for two purposes: one to provide housing for the ranch foreman, his wife, and his seven children, and the other was to utilize the ranch more fully for farming and livestock pasture. At one time, there were as many as 200 horses kept at the ranch.