THOMAS HOPE MANSION

LANDMARK NUMBER: 10

KNOWN AS: Hope House

PHYSICAL ADDRESS:
399 Nogal Drive, Santa Barbara

LOCATION: West side of Nogal Drive across from Vieja Valley School

TYPE OF SITE: Residence

RESOLUTION NUMBER: 69-436

LANDMARK DATE: August 4, 1969

DESIGNATION OBTAINED BY:
Letter to Santa Barbara County Landmark Committee from Vivian H. Obern dated Dec. 5, 1968 asking the committee to consider it a county landmark

PAST OWNERS:
Thomas and Delia Hope (1875-April 1887)
Pacific Improvement Company (April 1887-1919)
Maurice Heckscher (1919-1924/25)
Santa Barbara Estates, Inc and La Cumbre Estates Corp. (1924/25-1962)
E. George and Vivian Obern (1967-present)

CURRENT OWNERS:
Obern Trust 1991, Credit Shelter Trust and descendents of E. George Obern
4140 Marina Drive, Santa Barbara, CA 93110

CHANGES/ALTERATIONS:
See Description

CONDITION: Very Good
DESCRIPTION:
This historic ranch home was built on ranchland known as “Las Positas y La Calera,” owned by Thomas Hope in 1875 at a cost of $10,000. He was a native of Ireland, he settled in Santa Barbara in 1850 to raise sheep. He became one of the wealthiest men of the area, owned race horses, and donated land to the county for Hollister Avenue and property to the Catholic Church for a cemetery. He died in 1876 shortly after the house was completed. His widow and six children lived there another 12 years before she sold it to the Pacific Improvement Company (a holding company for the Southern Pacific Railroad) and moved to San Francisco.¹

The architect of the Victorian redwood house was Peter Barber who also had designed among other buildings the county courthouse (which no longer stands), the first Arlington Hotel, the Fernald House, and the Upham Hotel. The interior sports a central staircase with four rooms on each side of the hall, an octagonal newell post, and a coal burning fireplace (no longer).²

Other owners were the Pacific Improvement Company until 1919, Maurice Heckscher, a private owner, and then two entities organized mainly by Harold S. Chase who purchased the ranch and planned Hope Ranch as it is today. The ranch house served as the headquarters for Hope Ranch Park until 1962.³

When Mr. and Mrs. Obern purchased the home in December 1967, it had been severely vandalized, condemned by the county, and threatened with demolition. Restoration started the following spring which included new wiring, plumbing, and gas installation. It also needed a new kitchen, bathrooms, and a furnace. Renovation was completed by December 1968. Furnishings and fixtures authentic to its inception were hunted down in antique shops, demolition sites, and old houses.⁴

RESOURCES:
“Thomas Hope House, 1875, County Historical Landmark No. 10, Dedicated August 2, 1969”

¹ Thomas Hope House (August 2, 1969)  
² Ibid  
³ Ibid  
⁴ Ibid
RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF THE
COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA, STATE OF CALIFORNIA

A RESOLUTION DECLARING THAT THE
THOMAS HOPE MANSION IS AN HISTORICAL
LANDMARK WORTHY OF PROTECTION UNDER
ORDINANCE NO. 1716 AND PRESCRIBING
CONDITIONS TO PROTECT AND PRESERVE
THE HOPE MANSION

WHEREAS, the Thomas Hope Mansion located near the Vieja Valley School at 399 Nogal Drive in Santa Barbara County has great historical significance and interest to the general public as a landmark and is a reminder of pioneer days in Santa Barbara County; and

WHEREAS, on July 12, 1969, the Santa Barbara County Advisory Landmark Committee declared the Thomas Hope Mansion to be an historical landmark pursuant to the provisions of Ordinance No. 1716 of the County of Santa Barbara; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Supervisors of the County of Santa Barbara deems the Thomas Hope Mansion to be worthy of protection and preservation as such historical landmark,

NOW, THEREFORE, IT IS RESOLVED as follows:

1. The Board of Supervisors, having duly set a public hearing for August 5, 1969, has heard all interested parties and has closed said public hearing, adopting the conditions set out in paragraph 2 of this Resolution.

2. The Board of Supervisors hereby declares the Thomas Hope Mansion to be an historical monument pursuant to Ordinance No. 1716 and hereby imposes the following conditions on the Thomas Hope Mansion pursuant to said Ordinance:

   a. Demolition, removal or destruction, partially or entirely, is prohibited unless express consent in writing is first had and obtained from the Santa Barbara County Advisory Landmark Committee.
Such consent may impose all reasonable conditions deemed appropriate by the Committee to accomplish the purposes of Ordinance No. 1716.

b. No alterations, repairs, additions or changes (other than normal maintenance and repair work) shall be made unless and until all plans therefor have first been reviewed by the Santa Barbara County Advisory Landmark Committee and approved, or modified, and reasonable conditions imposed as deemed necessary, and that all such work shall be done under the direction and control of the Santa Barbara County Advisory Landmark Committee or other qualified persons designed by it.

PASSED AND ADOPTED by the Board of Supervisors of the County of Santa Barbara, State of California, this 4th day of August, 1965, by the following vote:

AYES: George H. Clyde, Daniel G. Grant, Francis H. Beattie and Curtis Tunnell

NOES: None

ABSENT: Joe J. Callahan

FRANCIS H. BEATTIE
/s/ F. H. Beattie
Chairman, Board of Supervisors

ATTEST:

J. E. LEWIS (SEAL)
Clerk

STATE OF CALIFORNIA )
COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA )

I, J. E. LEWIS, Clerk and ex-officio Clerk of the Board of Supervisors in and for the County of Santa Barbara, do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of the original now remaining on file and of record in my office.

In WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of said Board to be affixed this 4th day of August, 1965.

J. E. LEWIS, County Clerk
Thomas Hope House
1875
County Historical Landmark No. 10
Dedicated August 2, 1969

LOCATION
Hope House is located at 399 Nogal Drive, Santa Barbara, Calif. North of Santa Barbara, from Hwy. 101, take the San Marcos-State St. off ramp to State St. Turn west on State St. to the RR overpass where the road becomes Hollister Ave. Proceed one block and turn left on Nogal Drive. Hope House is located one block south towards Hope Ranch Park.

HISTORY
This historic ranch home was built in 1875 by Thomas Hope at the cost of $10,000. Approximately half of his extensive ranch is included today in Hope Ranch Park. “Las Positas y La Calera” totaled 6663 acres extending from the present West Valerio St. to More Mesa. The La Calera (lime kiln) portion was a Mexican land grant from Governor Micheltorena in 1843 to a Lieutenant at the Santa Barbara Presidio, Narcise Fabrigat. Thomas Robbins, who also owned Catalina Island, purchased the ranch and was also granted the adjoining Las Positas (little springs) ranch by Governor Pico. His widow, Encarnacion Carrillo de Robbins, sold the ranch to Thomas and Delia Hope in 1861 for $8,000.

Born in Ireland, Hope came to Texas when he was 16. He passed through Santa Barbara, which reminded him of his native land, on his way to northern California and returned around 1850 with his wife.

A cowboy and sheepherder, he had 5000 sheep here and was the Indian agent. The former Mission Indians lived on the ranch, where their ancestors had
lived for thousands of years. Although he could not write, he became one of the richest men in the county, owned famous race horses, gave the county the land for Hollister Ave. and the property for the Catholic Cemetery. He died in 1876 shortly after the house was completed. However, his widow and six children lived there 12 years until she sold her half of the ranch to the Pacific Improvement Co., a holding company organized by the Southern Pacific Railroad, for $255,000. The family moved to San Francisco and no descendents are known.

The architect of the Victorian redwood house was famed Peter Barber, the first professional architect to work in Santa Barbara. He also designed the old County Courthouse, the first Arlington Hotel, the Dibblee House, and still standing, the Historical Society's Fernald House, the Upam Hotel, the Mortimer Cook house, and Hunt-Stambach house. Similar to other Peter Barber interiors, there is a central staircase with four rooms on each side of the hall; octagonal newell post; and coal burning fireplace (originally).

There are a number of references to Hope Ranch in books and newspapers of historical interest. In Harold S. Chase's book, *Hope Ranch*, there is a copy of a letter written by Mrs. Hope in 1887 telling of the sale of her property. The Wright Abstract Co. did a thorough search for the Pacific Improvement Co. in 1909 and in the public library is a volume of photos published in 1908. Katherine Bell's book, *Swinging the Censor*, refers to the Hope family. A UCSB student wrote a paper on the ranch and house finding much original material. It was later published in "Noticias" by the Santa Barbara Historical Society, Spring, 1972, issue.

Certain of the large trees are evident in early photos and were planted about 1904 including the big arborvitae, the Monterey cypress, and the date palms. Many live oaks and eucalyptus are also on the 7½ acres.

In 1919 the Pacific Improvement Co. sold Hope Ranch to Maurice Heckscher. In 1924-25 Santa Barbara Estates, Inc. and La Cumbre Estates Corp., organized largely by Harold S. Chase, the brother of Dr. Pearl Chase, purchased the ranch and planned Hope Ranch as it is today. The ranch house was the headquarters of Hope Ranch Park until 1962.

**RESTORATION**

When acquired by Mr. and Mrs. E. George Obern in December, 1967, the house had been vacant for two years, severely vandalized, condemned by the county, and threatened with immediate demolition. Restoration started in March, 1968, which included new wiring, plumbing, and gas installation. A new kitchen, bathrooms, and a furnace were also necessary. With the cooperation of many friends and interested organizations, authentic materials were salvaged from old
houses, antique shops, and wrecking concerns. Seven missing doors were replaced. Victorian chandeliers, 29 door knobs, 105 spindles, the original front door, newel post, and marble mantel for the fireplace were located. Every window had to be taken down and re-glazed. A family moved in during July. It was first opened to greet friends and neighbors in December, 1968.

On Aug. 2, 1969, the house was dedicated as County Landmark No. 10. A plaque was donated by the two local chapters of the Native Daughters of the Golden West. It has been open to the general public about twice each year. Numbers of school children, college classes, and organizations have had special tours. During the open houses, members of historical groups have served as hostesses in Victorian costume.

Many of the 13 rooms have been furnished with authentic Victorian pieces including bedroom furniture which came from the estate of W.W. Hollister. In the parlor reserved for the museum collection are many documents pertaining to Hope Ranch such as the original deed and the Abstract of Title. Military relics, household items, musical instruments, books, pictures, silver, china, and clothing are displayed.

The brands of "Las Positas y La Calera"