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Camarillo family descendant donates surrey

By Hector Gonzalez
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It may have once ferried members of the city's founding family from their majestic Victorian ranch house to nearby St. Mary Magdalen Chapel, the then private church Juan Camarillo Jr. built in 1914 in honor of his parents.

Perhaps a pair of Adolfo Camarillo's famed white horses pulled the fringe-topped surrey down what is today Ventura Boulevard, with members of his family aboard, dressed in their Sunday best.

Camarillo Ranch Foundation officials don't know much at this point about the provenance of the late 19th or early 20th century carriage being donated to the nonprofit by one of Juan Camarillo Jr.'s great-great-grandsons, who has asked to remain anonymous.

"He was storing it in a garage in Ojai," foundation interim CEO Martin Daly said. "He's selling everything off, so this is a beneficial donation for him as well as for us."

It's anyone's guess whether the old buggy ever traveled the dusty roads of the former rancho's original 10,000 acres.

Before they can investigate the vehicle's background, Daly said, foundation officials first need to settle a few details, like where they'll put the four-wheeled surrey once it arrives at the Camarillo Ranch House later this month or next.

Foundation officials also will likely have to take out an insurance policy on the artifact, he said.

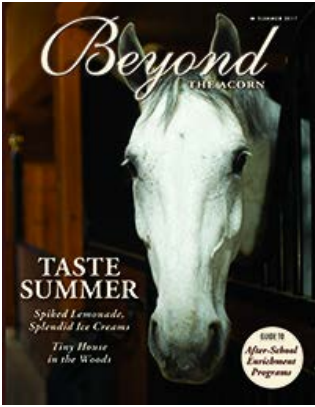
"Ultimately, we'd want to display it," Daly said.

For now, he said, the foundation will probably store the surrey in a public storage unit until officials can find a permanent place on the 4-acre property to display it.

Juan Camarillo Jr. and his brother Adolfo inherited Rancho Calleguas, the site of present-day Camarillo, from their parents, Juan and Martina Camarillo, but it was Adolfo who transformed the sleepy ranch into one of the county's most important agricultural centers.

Among the animals he raised on his ranch were pure white stallions of Arabian and Morgan descent, which came to symbolize the Camarillo family in Ventura County. The horses appeared at the Pasadena Rose Parade, opened the Oakland Bay Bridge festivities and participated in the Santa Barbara Fiesta parades.

Before cars came along, horses were the main mode of transportation, and horse-drawn surreys were considered the family station wagon of their day. Surreys typically came with rigid or fringed topped canopies and three rows of spindle-backed seats.

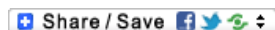


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"The surrey was an Americanbuilt family carriage that borrowed its name from a cart used in the county of Surrey, England," according to Hansen Wagon and Wheel, a South Dakota company that builds and sells authentic horse-drawn vehicles and parts.

"It's a piece of history," Daly said of the Camarillo family's surrey.

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