



*a multi-faceted
cosmopolitan destination
with something
for everyone*



Long before the county became synonymous with beaches, shopping, and Disneyland, the area was home to Native Americans. In 1769, Gaspar de Portola was appointed governor of Lower California. Portola called upon Father Junipero Serra to assist in securing the Spanish claim to the vast frontier against any invasion from Russian trappers or British colonizers.

In July of 1769, European explorers reached the boundaries of present-day Orange County, naming the region "The Valley of Saint Anne" (Santa Ana). Father Serra dedicated the Mission of San Juan Capistrano, Orange County's first permanent settlement, on November 1, 1776.

In 1801, Jose Antonio Yorba, a volunteer in the Portola expedition, returned to Santa Ana. He established the county's first rancho (Santiago de Santa Ana) in what today are the cities of Villa Park, Orange, Tustin, Costa Mesa and Santa Ana. Later the extensive land holdings of the Capistrano Mission were subdivided and awarded to a number of distinguished war heroes, ushering in the romantic rancho era of Orange County.

Irish-born James Irvine established in 1876 sole ownership of a 110,000-acre sheep ranch that is today one of the most valuable pieces of real estate in America. In 1887, silver was discovered in the Santa Ana Mountains. Land speculators and farmers came by rail from the East to settle in such boomtowns as Buena Park, Fullerton and El Toro.

Orange County was formally organized as a political entity separate from the County of Los Angeles in 1889. A year-round harvest of Valencia oranges, lemons, avocados, lima beans and walnuts made agriculture the single most important industry in the fledgling county. As orange groves began to proliferate throughout the area, the new county was named for the fruit, becoming Orange County.

The twentieth century brought with it many industrious individuals such as Walter Knott, a farmer turned entrepreneur, who founded the Knott legacy in Buena Park. During the years that followed, Orange County witnessed the discovery of oil in Huntington Beach, the birth of the aerospace industry on the Irvine Ranch, and filming of several Hollywood classics in the Newport area. In 1955, Walt Disney opened his Magic Kingdom in Anaheim.

Today, Orange County is the home of more than three million diverse residents and a vast number of housing developments, shopping centers, major companies, small businesses, service organizations and much more. Visit www.costamesahistory.org for more details.

Costa Mesa Historical Society & Santa Ana Army Air Base Wing

The museum and library are open to the public every Thursday and Friday between 10:00am and 3:00pm, and at other times by appointment. For more information visit www.costamesahistory.org or call 949-631-5918



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