

Barham Ranch History

The Carpenter and Serrano Irrigation Districts, that provided water to the first Orange groves in the Orange and Villa Park area, jointly acquired Barham Ranch in 1886 from the Barham family.

The aim of the districts' was to safeguard the watershed that replenished the aquifer behind the historic submerged dam at the narrows of Santiago Creek that still exists within Santiago Oaks Regional Park.

Just downstream of this historic dam is a concrete rectangular box with a partition inside. The groundwater is still captured in a large pipe behind the old dam and diverted into this concrete box. The partition inside divides the water into equal shares for the old Carpenter and Serrano Irrigation Districts.

With the growing suburbanization and the demise of the orange groves in this part of Orange County, Serrano Irrigation District committed its half of the ground water to the Villa Park drinking water supply.

Approximately thirty years ago, the revered water attorney, Roger Howell, with the firm of Rutan & Tucker, handled the dissolution of the Carpenter Irrigation District.

He is the one who engineered the transfer of Carpenter's assets to the Orange Unified School District, which then became the joint owners of Barham Ranch with the surviving Serrano Irrigation District.

Serrano later sold its interest in Barham Ranch to the Orange Unified School District.

In 1976 the County of Orange began the process to establish Santiago Oaks Regional Park by negotiating the purchase of property from Harold Blome.

Then in 1979 the County succeeded in getting the proposed Weir Canyon Wilderness Park included in the County General Plan.

When the first 210 acres of Weir Canyon was dedicated in Anaheim Hills, many began to see that Barham Ranch was going to be the missing link between three regional parks (Irvine, Santiago Oaks, and Weir).

Since the early 1980s, the County worked to acquire Barham Ranch to connect Irvine Regional Park, Santiago Oaks Regional Park and Weir Canyon Wilderness Park.

The residents of Orange County now have a 509-acre addition of land to Santiago Oaks Regional Park that contains Coastal Sage Scrub, Chaparral, Oak Woodlands, and the magnificent Willow Woodlands behind Villa Park Dam.

These habitats are home to diverse native wildlife that will continue to share Barham Ranch with the recreational trail users this magnificent addition to the County's Harbors, Beaches & Parks system.