



**BEER AND BARBECUES,  
THEN  
BRANDEIS**



Would you like to learn more about the area where the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District Activity Center at 4201 Guardian Street is located? It's hard to imagine that an industrial building built in 1997 would have an interesting story...but the land where that building is located has a very colorful history.

The earliest inhabitants of Simi Valley were the Chumash people, but the Chumash way of life was quickly changed when the Spanish land grant, or mission era, began in the late 1700s.<sup>1</sup> In 1795,<sup>2</sup> Santiago de la Cruz Pico was given permission by the Spanish Governor, Diego de Borica, to occupy a 113,000 acre land grant which was officially known as San José de Nuestra Señora de Altagracia y Simí.<sup>3</sup> The Pico family sold the land grant to José de la Guerra around 1832.<sup>4</sup>

By the mid-1860s, American investors had gained control over much of the valley. The Simi Land and Water company was formed in around 1888, and the huge Rancho Simí lands were divided and sold.<sup>5</sup>

In the late 1890s the Haigh brothers, John Grenfell, and Henry came to the Valley of Simi from England.<sup>6</sup> John "Jack" Haigh purchased 1825 acres of land in Simi that he used as a stock ranch.

On the right is a story that takes place on the Jack Haigh ranch, recounted by his nephew, Gerald Haigh, in his book Straw Roads.

- 1 John R. Johnson, Ph. D, and Patricia Havens, Simi Valley, A Journey Through Time, (Simi Valley Historical Society, 1997) 9-12
- 2 Patricia Havens, Simi Valley, A Journey Through Time, (Simi Valley Historical Society, 1997), 23
- 3 Havens, 30
- 4 Havens, 39
- 5 Havens, 65
- 6 Gerald Haigh, Straw Roads - A Story of Simi Valley from 1908 to 1960, (Simi Valley Historical Society, 1975), 49 and back cover

*"My Aunt Evelyn Haigh, that was Jack Haigh's wife, my drinking aunt, heard someone in the kitchen and called, thinking Jack had gone to attend the bees over at the apiary. She called again, and no answer. About that time she heard the back door slam, so she took a double barrel shotgun from the gun rack and went to the door. A tramp was hot-footing it across the yard with a sack over his shoulder. My aunt yelled for him to stop, but he kept going, so she raised the dust out of the seat of his pants with that scatter gun. He jumped in the air about four feet and took off. She yelled, "Stop!" The tramp, thinking she would shoot him again, stopped. She said "Come back here." She locked him in the woodshed until Jack returned. Then Jack took him to Simi and had Sporty Willard lock him up in the jail behind the blacksmith shop."*

Story (pg. 27) and photo (pg. 89) from Straw Roads - A Story of Simi Valley from 1908 - 1960 by Gerald Haigh



*This group was assembled at the Jack Haigh ranch, now the setting for Brandeis Institute. Front row, l. to r.: Mrs. Jack Haigh, Mrs. Walter Thurman, Bud Taylor, Jack Haigh (holding ribs), Mrs. Clayton Gillibrand, daughter Helen, Clayton Gillibrand. Back row: Bill War, Arthur Thomas, John Easley, Judge Draper, Steve Easley, Hallet Thurman w/his father, Walter Thurman.*



Eddie Maier, owner of Maier Brewery  
Photo Courtesy of California Historical Society  
Hearst Newspaper Collection, Special collections,  
Title Insurance & Trust Collection USC Library

In 1910, Jack Haigh sold his land to E.R. (Eddie) Maier,<sup>7</sup> who owned a brewery, as well as the Vernon baseball club.<sup>8</sup> The land that Eddie Maier bought from Jack Haigh was called Rancho Potrero Del Burro, to which he added the Cañada Aliso (Sycamore Canyon). *“He built a magnificent estate with stables, swimming pools, dancing pavilion, and quarters for the baseball team he sponsored. To this place Mr. Maier brought conventions of Masons and Elks, furnishing barbecues and entertainments. On one occasion when the members were to walk the two miles from the station to the ranch he had beer piped along the way which was available for the marchers by simply turning the spigot.”*<sup>9</sup>

Author R.E. Harrington recounts what the ranch was like when Maier owned it, in his book Early Days in Simi Valley; *“Thus it will be seen that by 1912 Santa Susana had grown from four to nine buildings. About this time Eddie Maier bought the Haigh ranch in Sycamore Canyon and built a large house on it...he was a large and wealthy brewer in Los Angeles, owning the brewery which now makes Brew 102. He was a Shriner and owned a ball team bearing his name. He gave lavish parties at his ranch in Sycamore Canyon. On one particular occasion he put on an especially large barbecue bringing out several thousand Shriners from Los Angeles on a special train. For this event the fence was taken down along the railroad so that the Shriners could embark directly opposite*

*the road leading up Sycamore Canyon. Lester Reed tells me that he and Ed Dodds worked all night on the road to prepare it for the special occasion.”*<sup>10</sup>

Gerald Haigh, Jack Haigh’s nephew, worked for Eddie Maier on his ranch after his uncle sold the land to him. He described his memories of the Maier Ranch in its heyday; *“The ranch at that time was beautiful. Birds of all kinds, two buffalo, monkeys in cages, dogs in kennels, a large swimming pool, beautiful horses. A man was hired to exercise the driving horses; trotters hitched to a cart sped along the vine covered lanes. All oak brewing wagons and horses were brought to the ranch after the trucks replaced the teams at the brewery. I worked at the Maier ranch years later in 1924. At this time Lester Reed was the superintendent on the ranch, and at that time, the Maier ranch extended out to LA Avenue. This strip of land was planted in oat hay. My job was hauling baled hay from the field to the large barns on the ranch.”*<sup>11</sup>



Gerald Haigh, nephew of Jack Haigh. Pulling roots from an apricot orchard on the Eddie Maier Ranch when he worked there -note the brewery horses.

Photo from Gerald Haigh, Straw Roads

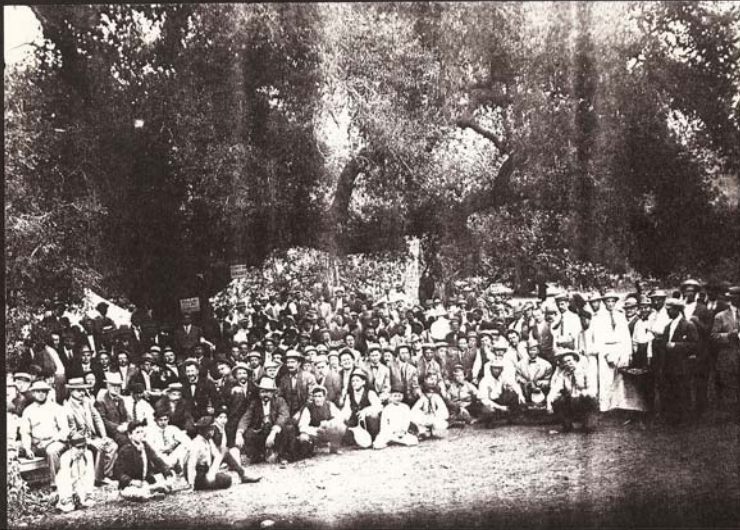
7 Janet S. Cameron, The Story of Simi - Simi Grows Up, (Anderson, Ritchie & Simon, 1963) pg 113

8 “Eddie Maier Will Retain Vernon Club,” The Los Angeles Times, Aug. 25, 1921, Pg. IIII

9 Cameron, 66-67

10 Robert E. Harrington, Early Days in Simi Valley, (Alert Letter Shop, 1961) pg 33-36

11 Haigh, 89



*Elks Barbecue at Santa Susana Ranch  
Given by Eddie Maier May 1, 1910*

Barbecue on May 1, 1910 attended by 400 Elks  
Photo by Graham of Los Angeles, Courtesy of  
Simi Valley Historical Society & Museum

The newspapers of the time loved to report on the many lavish barbecues and parties given by Eddie Maier. In May 1912 the Los Angeles Times reported: "At his ranch in Santa Suzanna (sp) ER (Eddie) Maier was host to about 1800 members of Shriner Patrols and bands Wednesday....Joe Romero, noted Spanish chef who has presided at all big barbecues for the last 20 years with his sons, Frank and Edward Romero, cooked the feast. They used 4000 lbs of beef, 50 yearling lambs, 40 bulls heads, 500 lbs of chili con carne, 200 Spanish tamales, 2000 tortillas, 15 sacks of baked potatoes and 15 gallons of chili sauce."<sup>12</sup>

The photo to the left shows a picnic that was held at the Maier ranch on May 1, 1910, where 400 Elks attended, celebrating a membership of 1500 for the Los Angeles B.P.O.E.<sup>13</sup>

The photo below shows a gathering of 600 wholesale and retail liquor dealers who attended a party at Maier's Ranch on June 29, 1913. "Ten coaches haul liquor men to Santa Susana ranch to enjoy fine programme of sports, - ball game, foot races, Spanish feed and flag raising are features."<sup>14</sup>

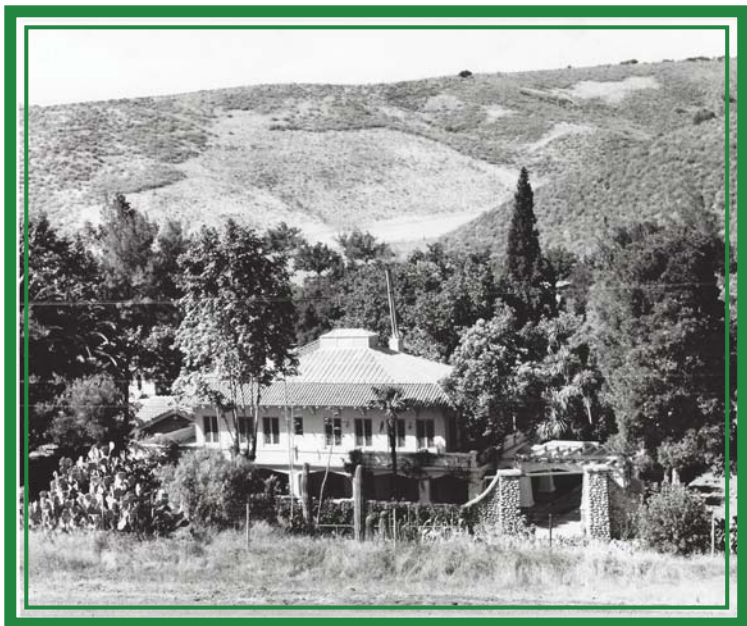


Barbecue On June 29, 1913 attended by 600 liquor distributors  
Courtesy of Simi Valley Historical Society & Museum

12 "Zem Zem, Spanish Fare and Games for Nobles," The Los Angeles Times, May 11, 1912, Pg. III8

13 "Elks Cavort in the Wilds," The Los Angeles Times, May 2, 1910, Pg. 19

14 De Witt Van Court, "Sports Have Fun at Maier's Ranch," The Los Angeles Times, Jun. 30, 1913, Pg. III2



*Las Delicias - House of a Million Delights, Maier's 22 Room Mansion*

After great fortune, and hosting remarkably lavish parties from 1910<sup>17</sup> through 1929, Eddie Maier suffered a series of set backs. In March of 1932, the Maier Brewery was seized by prohibition agents claiming that he was selling beer of higher than legal alcoholic content (4%).<sup>18</sup> Maier's brewery was forced into bankruptcy that same year.<sup>19</sup> Maier's wife was killed in a traffic collision in 1933.<sup>20</sup> He would fight to regain control of his brewery, but would not do so until 1940.<sup>21</sup> Eddie Maier passed away in a fire three years later, in 1943.<sup>22</sup>

On October 27, 1913, a Los Angeles Times article reported a housewarming party for the twenty-two room mansion that Maier built for himself and his mother on his ranch known as El Selecto Rancho. Maier dubbed his mansion: 'Las Delicias-house of a million delights.'<sup>15</sup>

The last known published mention of a lavish party hosted by Maier was on June 6, 1929, when between 3000 and 5000 Shriners were entertained at the ranch. On that particular occasion a dirigible (blimp) from Arcadia landed in a grain field.<sup>16</sup>



*Shriners marching along Peppertree Lane toward Eddie Maier's Ranch c1915.  
Los Angeles Avenue is along the row of trees in the background.*

15 "Princely Opening of a California Wonderplace- The Wonderful Housewarming at "Las Delicias," the Foothill Palace of Edward R. Maier," The Los Angeles Times, October 27, 1913, Pg. III3

16 "Nobles Feast Like Old Days. Barbecued Meats Supplied at Maier Ranch, Boxing Bouts Given While Fezzed Guests Dine, Landing of Huge Dirigible Creates Interest," The Los Angeles Times, June 7, 1929, Pg. A9

17 "Elks Cavort in the Wilds," The Los Angeles Times, May 2, 1910, Pg. I9

18 "Maier Brewery Seized by Drys," The Los Angeles Times, March 31, 1932, Pg. A1

19 "Petition Filed Against Maier -Claimants Take Involuntary Bankruptcy Action," The Los Angeles Times, June 14, 1932, Pg. A19

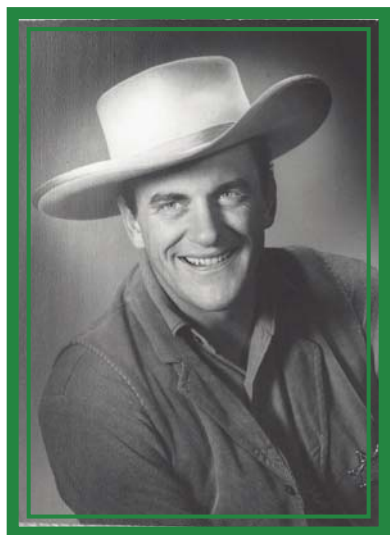
20 "Wife of E.R. Maier Dies After Traffic Collision," The Los Angeles Times, March 25, 1933, Pg. A1

21 "Maier Rewins His Brewery," The Los Angeles Times, December 12, 1940, Pg. 14

22 "E.R. Maier, Sportsman, Dies in Fire, Ex -Head of Brewery Killed Battling Beach Cottage Blaze," The Los Angeles Times, December 13, 1943, Pg. III8

After his legal financial set backs, the famous Maier Rancho Selecto was broken up into smaller farms and ranches, and purchased by the Runkles, Easleys, and other well known long time Simi families.<sup>23</sup>

The Brandeis Institute from New York acquired a site in Simi Valley that was once a part of the ranch owned by Eddie Maier in 1947. The Institute purchased the 2000 acre parcel from Mrs. Maude E. Lane for a reported sum of \$150,000.<sup>24</sup>



James Arness owned part of the former Maier Ranch from 1959 through 1972.  
Photo courtesy of Johnny Varble Collection

In 1959, Looking for an investment on the advice of his law firm, James Arness, who portrayed Marshall Matt Dillon on the television show *Gunsmoke*, acquired a 950 acre parcel of land that was another part of the former Maier ranch.<sup>25</sup> Arness raised crops, cattle and horses on his land, which was next to the Brandeis Institutes' property. In 1972, Arness donated his 950 acres to Brandeis. The donated property was said to be worth \$2 million at the time.<sup>26</sup> After Arness donated his land to Brandeis, the property that was formerly the Maier ranch was once again reunited.<sup>27</sup>

Brandeis Camp Institute of the West was incorporated in 1947; by 1950, all camp operations were consolidated into the Southern California location. Now known as American Jewish University, Brandeis-Bardin campus, it is home to the Marilyn and Sigi Ziering Brandeis Collegiate Institute, and Camp Alonim.

In part, the Brandeis-Bardin institute seeks to *“inspire Jewish people through their intellect and emotion, to enhance their connectedness to the Jewish people through the arts as well as academics, and to make a contribution to the advancement of Jewish culture as a means of Jewish identity.”*<sup>28</sup>

On July 14, 1981, the ‘The Main House, Brandeis Bardin Institute,’ which was once the grand 22 room mansion known as ‘Las Delicias’ built by Eddie Maier in 1913, was designated Ventura County Landmark Number 68.<sup>29</sup> This building was used by the Brandeis Bardin Institute as their main offices and primary gathering place. Tragically, when the 1994 Northridge Earthquake occurred, the ‘Main House’ was damaged beyond repair. Three buildings were constructed to replace those damaged, at an estimated cost of 4.4 million.<sup>30</sup>

23 Interview with John Varble, foreman on Arness Ranch, then Brandeis Institute, documented during Historical Trip to Brandeis on March 16, 1996

24 “Brandeis Camp Institute of the Pacific Coast Corrects Errors Through Moorpark Newspaper,” The Moorpark Enterprise, July 24, 1947, Pg. 1

25 James Arness with James E. Wise, Published by Jr. McFarland, James Arness: An Autobiography, Sept. 10, 2001, Page 123

26 “James Arness Donates Ranch,” Lawrence Daily Journal, December 22, 1972

27 Havens, 203

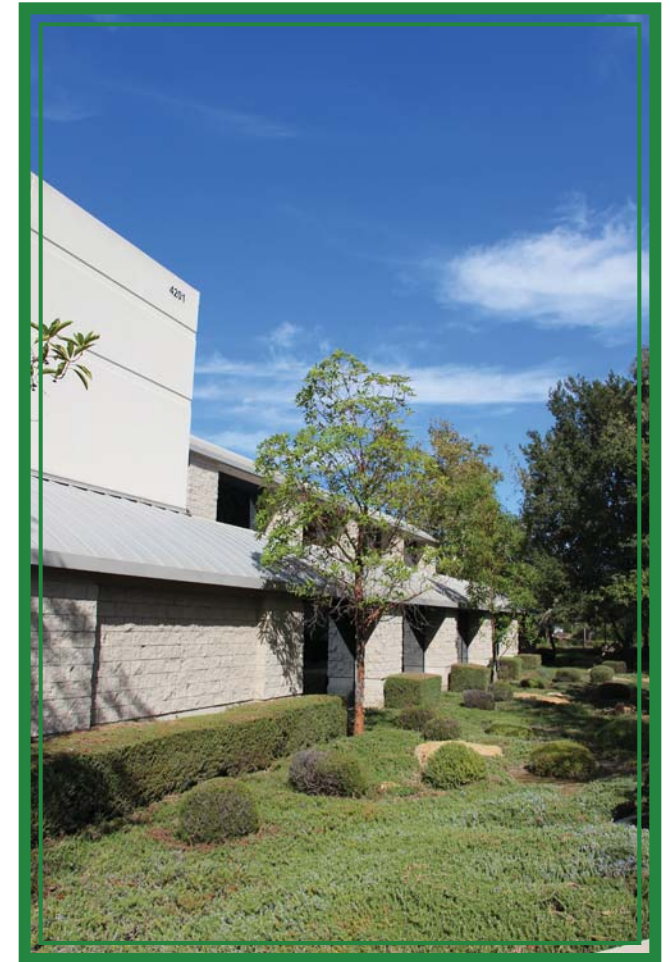
28 American Jewish University Website, <http://www.aju.edu/>

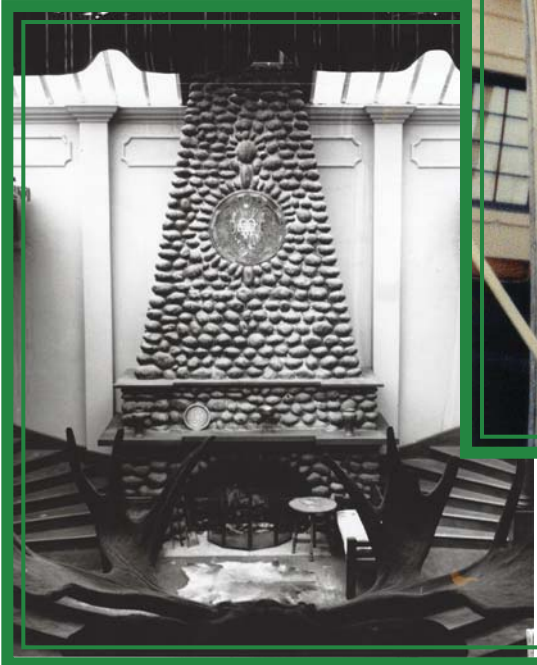
29 A Resolution of the Board of Supervisors, County of Ventura, passed on July 14th, 1981

30 “Institute Rebuilding, Keeping the Past in Mind : Earthquake: Brandeis-Bardin near Simi Valley hopes its new facilities will incorporate bits of old structures destroyed in ‘94 temblor.” Scott Hadly, The Los Angeles Times, March 22, 1995

Likely in part to finance the reconstruction of the Brandeis Institute's buildings, 200 acres were sold by Brandeis to developers, just outside their front gate. On this land industrial parks and buildings were built, one of which was the Tapo Canyon Industrial Park.

Standard Abrasives, a company which moved to Simi Valley after its Chatsworth facilities were damaged in the Northridge earthquake, built new facilities and moved into 4201 Guardian Street in the Tapo Canyon Industrial Park in the Summer of 1997.<sup>31</sup> 3M eventually purchased Standard Abrasives, and operated in the building until around 2013. After being vacant for over a year, Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District purchased this building for \$8.6 million in 2015. This building is now known as the 'Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District Activity Center.' A new chapter of history in our valley has just begun.





*(L) The interior of the main house before the earthquake.  
(Center)-Interior of main house destroyed in 1994 Northridge earthquake.  
(R) The round glass design was inset in the chimney, and was salvaged after the earthquake by Johnny Varble, who had a long history at the Arness Ranch and Brandeis. It is now at the Strathearn Park Museum Collection.*



*An Eddie Maier branding iron, also in the Strathearn Park Museum Collection, along with a bar, and an intercom system once used at the Maier Ranch.*



*Photo above, and photo on cover; Peppertree Lane in the 1980s. What is now Tapo Canyon Road, south of Los Angeles Avenue, was formerly known as Peppertree Lane.*



*Early view of Santa Susana airport, 1960, looking in a westerly direction. An auto wrecking yard was located south of the dirt airstrip, at the end of Tapo Street. Beyond that, smoke can be seen coming from a community dump where trash was burned as it accumulated. The location of the RSRPD Activity Center on Guardian would be just above the smoke, where it crosses the arroyo.*

*Photo by Mel Aldrich, courtesy of Simi Valley Historical Society.*