

June 10, 1987

Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society
P. O. Box 875
Newhall, California 91322

Re: The Mitchell Adobe Schoolhouse

Dear Ms. Harris and members of the Society:

At your request, we made a site visit to the above adobe on June 5, 1987, to make recommendations for its reconstruction. Present: Marilyn Neil-Harris, President, SCV Historical Soc.
Tom Mason, Builder
Members of the Historical Society
Gil Sanchez, A.I.A., Architect
Daryl Allen, Associate, Sanchez Architects

We viewed a small adobe structure, approximately 11'-9" wide by 21 feet long, which was in the process of being reconstructed. Walls were about three feet high on the day we viewed it. The structure was unfortunately damaged in a demolition attempt by a developer who planned to demolish it. Total demolition was prevented by the Historical Society. All roof framing was destroyed, although a large quantity of adobe blocks from the walls and door and window frames were saved. Adobe blocks were disassembled, marked as to which wall they came from, and were moved to their present site. New adobe block was manufactured to supplement the old block as needed.

The small building was built in 1860 by Thomas Mitchell and was used as a school building on his ranch beginning in 1872. A photograph of the building taken in 1960 reveals roof framing and window and door placement on the front facade. An earlier photograph also gives useful information regarding the historic appearance of the adobe plastered walls.

Tom Mason, volunteer in charge of construction, showed the construction drawings to Gil. The structural system was designed by an engineer according to recommendations of the County of Los Angeles building department. Steel reinforcing bars were installed in a concrete slab and project upward on the interior walls. The adobe walls will be covered at the interior with welded wire mesh and covered with 4" of gunite trowelled to a smooth finish. Exterior walls will be plaster with adobe (mud) plaster and whitewashed. An examination of existing historic adobe block revealed a very thin layer of mud plaster adhering to the block.

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Recommendations

1. We recommend continuing the reconstruction in the most historically accurate manner possible. Granted, the authenticity of the interior will be compromised by the application of a thick cement plaster, but the exterior can strive to appear as it did in the historic photographs. The idea is recreate what the building looked like without being tempted to "pretty up" or improve on its actual appearance. The only improvements should be structural and should be concealed from public view.

An "interpretive period" is typically chosen, usually the period deemed most important or most interesting in a building's chronology. The building is then researched for photographs or drawings to document its appearance during that time frame. For this building, however, we recommend staying with its latest appearance in the available photographs, and not going back to an earlier time (for which there may be no documentation). It is better to do a good job with the information available than to try to guess at a building's actual appearance. Thus, the interpretive period for this building would be the latest years the school occupied it. It is recommended practice for the interior period of interpretation to match the exterior.

- a. Match the roof framing system and fascia to that which shows in the 1960 photograph (appears to be joists at 2' on center. Use tar paper roofing as that is what shows in the photographs.
 - b. Reinstall existing windows. Do not sand and repaint, but clean lightly with a brush. A watered-down coat of whitewash may be applied, or leave windows as they are. Wood preservative is not necessary. Renail loose pieces. Reinstall existing door if it is available, or reconstruct a new one as per 1960 photograph.
 - c. Replaster exterior with a very thin (1/8' - 1/4") layer of mud plaster to a smooth finish. Whitewash.
2. Install a ceiling of 1 x planking on top of ceiling (roof) joists. On top of that install plywood sheathing (as per drawings, for structural purposes), so that 1 x board ceiling is what will be viewed by someone standing inside the room. The contemporary plywood ceiling will not be visible. Lightly whitewash new 1 x board ceiling and brush with a wirebrush to take away the new appearance.

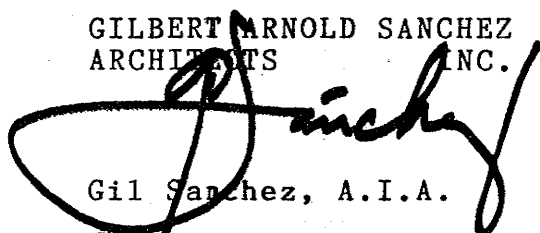
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3. Install an underground drainage system at south and west sides--sides nearest hill. A gutter could be installed on the south (back) side--not historically there, but would not be obvious on that side and is important to protect the walls.
4. The concrete footing and its vertical and horizontal reinforcement, and the vertical reinforcement in the chimney should be installed as per current Uniform Building Code requirements.
5. Document your reconstruction process with black-and-white photographs and notes. Describe historic fabric and what you did to it as you put it in place. These notes will become important documentation for anyone later studying the building. Save construction drawings. Date everything.


Your historical society and your builder Tom Mason are to be congratulated for salvaging this little adobe which is important to your area's history. Good luck on your reconstruction.

Sincerely,

GILBERT ARNOLD SANCHEZ
ARCHITECTS INC.



Gil Sanchez, A.I.A.



Daryl Allen, Associate

P.S. Regarding information on getting properties on the National Register, call the State Office of Historic Preservation, Department of Parks & Recreation, P. O. Box 2390, Sacramento, CA 95811. (916) 322-8596 (I was not able to get an answer to your question regarding registration without knowledge of the owner at the conference, but you could ask a Historic Preservation Officer, starting at the above number.)