

Annie Murphy

Item 8A.

From: Annie Murphy
Sent: Thursday, April 20, 2017 11:51 AM
To: Paia Levine
Subject: FW: Hemingway's S.C. Hero
Attachments: Merriman PDF.pdf

From: Ross Gibson [mailto:rossericgibson@comcast.net]
Sent: Monday, April 17, 2017 12:58 PM
To: Annie Murphy <Annie.Murphy@santacruzcounty.us>
Subject: Hemingway's S.C. Hero

Dear Commissioners

I served on the Live Oak Landmarks subcommittee of the County Historic Resources Commission in 2006, seeking overlooked landmarks to add to the county's inventory. Our committee was unanimous in our desires to protect the Bob Merriman Ranchette (1438 Capitola Road, near Live Oak Market). Here was the home of the Santa Cruz man who from 1936-1938 headed the "Abraham Lincoln Brigade" in the Spanish Civil War (the earliest international Anti-Fascist Movement to oppose Hitler and Mussolini), and who inspired his friend Ernest Hemingway to write the novel "For Whom the Bell Tolls," basing the novel's hero Robert Jordon on Robert (Bob) Merriman.

In 2006, the Bob Merriman Ranchette was owned by the County of Santa Cruz, representing the People of Santa Cruz County. The Andraes Ranchette next door to it was already listed on the county historic resources inventory, even though it was less historic than the Merriman Ranchette. But because the site was being considered for housing by the Redevelopment Agency, county leaders didn't want to consider the Merriman House for landmark status at the time. However, we received vague assurances that it *might* be retained on the site as a clubhouse for the complex, or moved to another site.

Today, however, the fate of the Merriman House is again up for debate, with redevelopment still framing the discussion. The only time we hear about Bob Merriman locally is in connection with this house, proving the building is the most viable interpretive tool for honoring those who foresaw World War II, and stood up for Democracy under the leadership of Merriman. Below is a PDF of my 2006 report "Ernest Hemingway's Forgotten Santa Cruz Hero: How Bob Merriman Inspired *For Whom the Bell Tolls*."

Please find a way to preserve this landmark.

Sincerely

Ross Eric Gibson

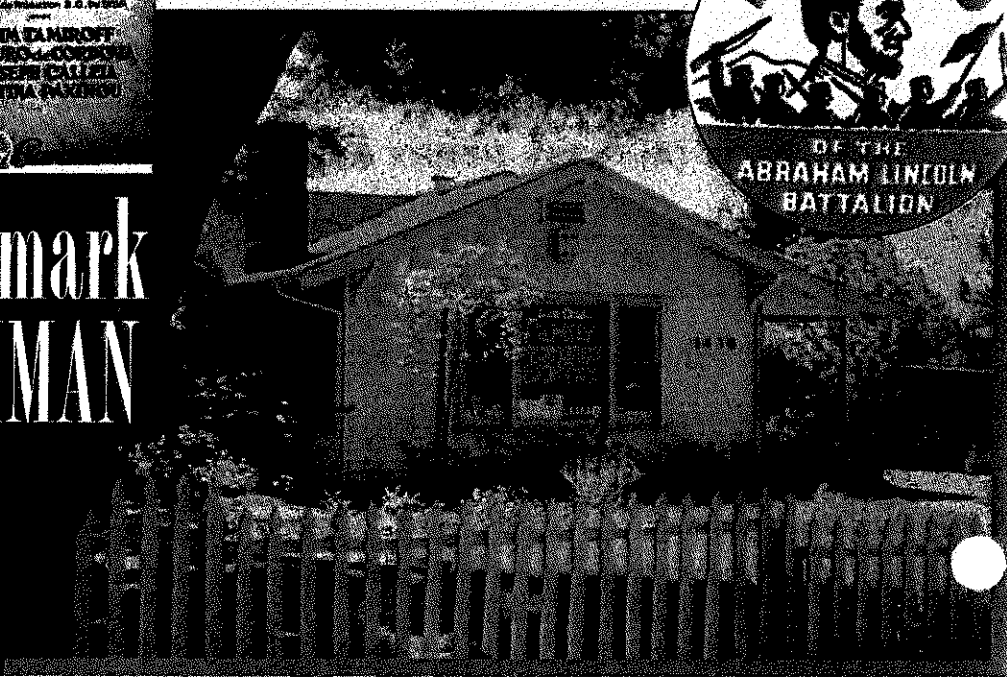


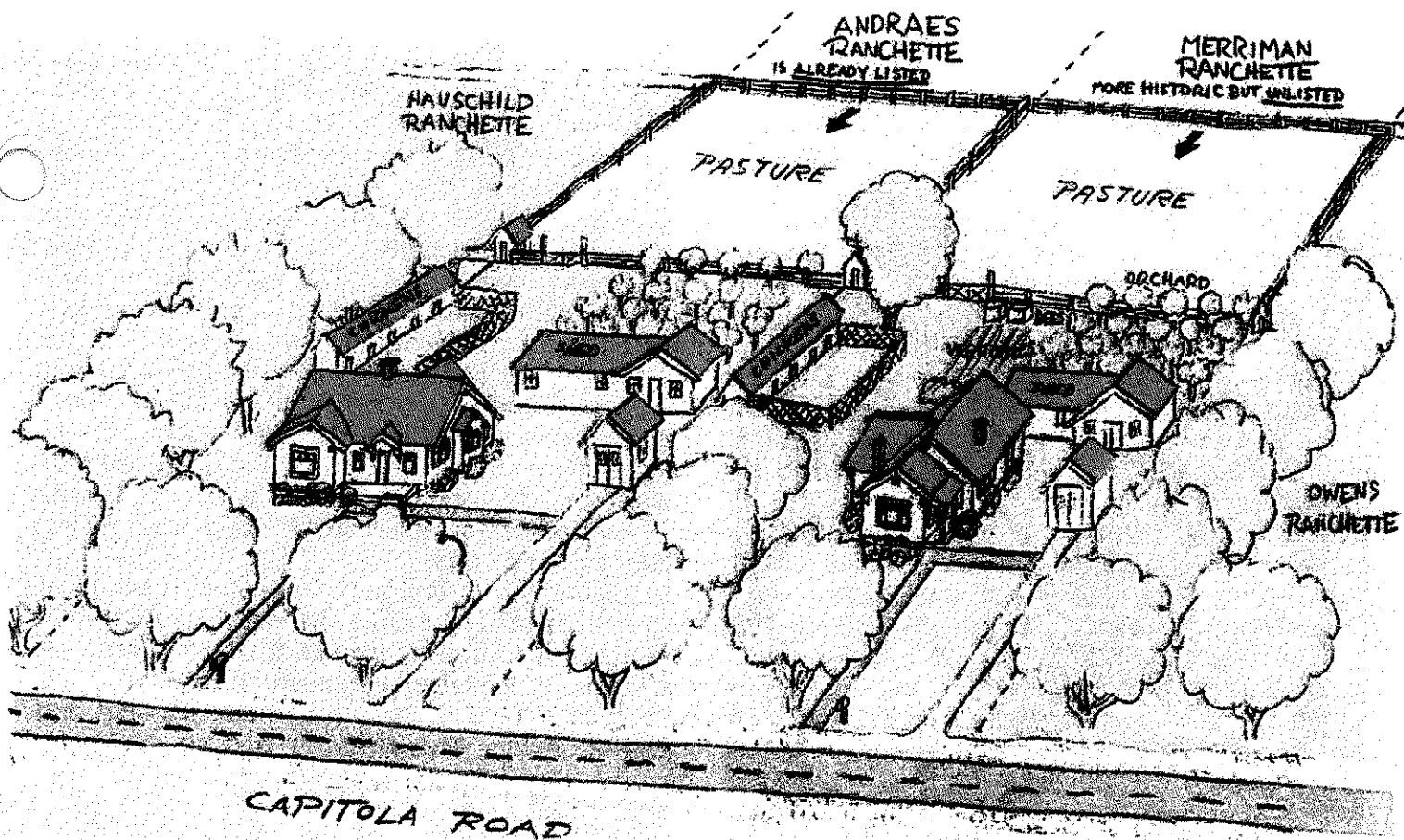
Ernest Hemingway's FORGOTTEN SANTA CRUZ HERO



The Last Landmark of BOB MERRIMAN

by
Ross Eric Gibson





ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S FORGOTTEN SANTA CRUZ HERO: How Bob Merriman Inspired "For Whom the Bell Tolls"

By

Ross Eric Gibson

With Research Information from Phil Reader

In 1908, Robert Hale Merriman (called "Bob") was born to Henry and Faye Merriman in Eureka, California, where his father was a logger. The family later relocated to San Jose, then in the summer of 1922 they moved over the hill to Santa Cruz where they had relatives. Henry's mother -Mrs. J. Merriman Johnson- lived in town, while the Merrimans stayed at the Live Oak poultry farm of Henry's sister and her husband, Clarence E. Freitas. This was only a few doors west of the Live Oak Market on Capitola Road. Henry worked in an auto repair shop, and Faye wrote popular romance novels under several pseudonyms for lending libraries.

Live Oak looked like your typical suburban neighborhood, with craftsman homes in rows along the street, spaced about 20 feet apart behind a corridor of native live oak trees. But what made Live Oak unusual was that all the lots were deep three-acre ranchettes, mini-ranching subdivisions for raising poultry or

flowers. Unlike most rural areas with isolated farmhouses, the ranchettes placed the homes side-by-side for a sense of community.

The concept was born during the depression of the 1890s, when the failure of a single industry could throw hundreds of people out-of-work, creating a burden for the community. Santa Cruz County responded by encouraging backyard industries selling to a central co-op, so that if any individual failed, it wouldn't impact the industry as a whole. Santa Cruz became the state's *Queen City of Poultry* (second largest after Petaluma), and even developed its own Santa Cruz breed noted for prolific egg production. Chicken manure was used as a desirable fertilizer for the companion flower industry. By World War I, a stem nematode infestation on Holland bulbs resulted in an embargo on imports, and Santa Cruz became the *Bulb Capital of the Pacific*.

While attending Santa Cruz High School,

Pageants, which became an annual event for over half a century. Yet the first was steeped in controversy, as the skin-tight bathing suits were deemed indecent by some, and presenting progressive women's roles that emphasized college and career, was seen as "turning out innocent daughters into wanton Flappers," who were "losing their femininity by aspiring to do men's work." To answer the preposterous idea that beauty queens were considered too "manly," Bob's class put on their own "Follies" fund raiser, consisting entirely of boys in drag. The debate over women's roles in the modern world would have a major influence in Bob's feelings about female equality.

The seniors staffed the yearbook, and Bob was its business manager, directing the sales of print ads to local merchants, and the sales of yearbooks. His friends also served on the yearbook staff, such as Don McHugh as assistant editor (later to be a firebrand journalist), Gorman Woody as art editor, and John Helms as sports editor. John and Bob attended all the games, John as a team member, and Bob as a yell leader but not an athlete. Home games were held at the high



SANTA CRUZ MORNING SENTINEL

ASSOCIATED PRESS DISPATCHES

DAILY EXCEPT MONDAY

SANTA CRUZ, CALIFORNIA, FRIDAY, JANUARY 2, 1925.

EIGHT PAGES

FOUR P.M.
A.P. SERVICE

SANTA CRUZ NEWS

LATEST
NEWS

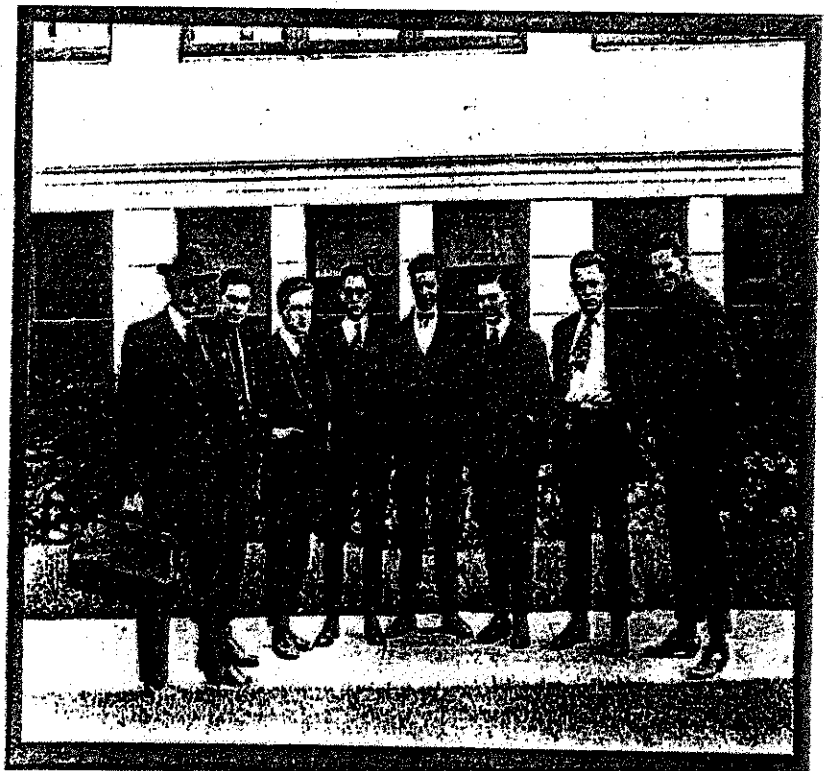
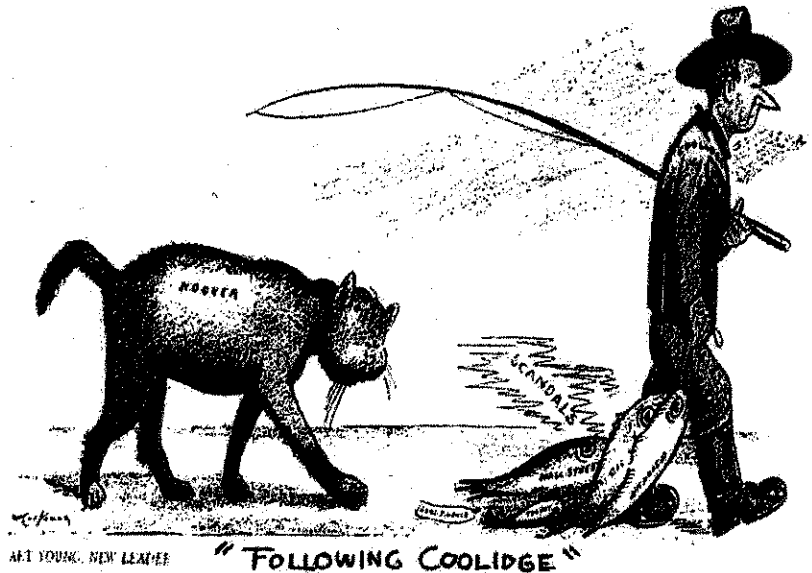
TWO EDITIONS

SANTA CRUZ, CALIFORNIA, SATURDAY, JANUARY 3, 1925

time. Coolidge was Vice President to Warren G. Harding in 1921, becoming president when Harding died in office August 2, 1923, then was reelected in November 1924. Santa Cruz felt a personal tie to the Harding/Coolidge administration because their Secretary of Commerce was Herbert Hoover, whose relatives owned the ranch at Waddel Creek, with Dorothy Hoover just a grade behind Bob at the high school. This branch of the Hoover family were strong conservationists in the Teddy Roosevelt tradition.

But the Merriman and Frietas families disliked the administration. Coolidge had become Vice President due to his national reputation as a strike breaker. Harding and Coolidge were politically stingy, cutting taxes while refusing to honor bonuses for the recent World War I veterans, and opposing Federal aid to farmers. As they maintained high import tariffs and National Prohibition, the administration pointed to Robber Barons getting richer and the climbing Stock Market as a sign of the nation's economic health (a false indicator built on unsustainable speculation). Then just before the election, their Secretary of the Interior, Albert B. Fall, was indicted for taking a \$100,000 bribe to sell to private operators the public oil-reserve lands in Teapot Dome, Wyoming, and Elk Hills, California.

Bob became a champion debater, able to see all sides of a subject, simplify complex issues, and present a convincing argument. But he was also starting to develop political positions that required an ethical justification. In 1925, one of the topics for debate was "Should Santa Cruz adopt the managerial form of government?" Bob was undefeated in



INTERSCHOLASTIC DEBATERS

joined the Sigma Nu fraternity, was active in the yearbook, debating, and plays, and flew airplanes with his buddies.

When he met Marion Stone at a dance hall in Verdi (near Reno), she found the 6-foot 4-inch tall Bob to be dashing and adventurous. Marion was a Santa Barbara native just a year younger than him, a popular member of Gamma Phi Beta sorority, but employed as a live-in domestic to earn her way through college. When she graduated from the university in 1932, Bob married her, and took her to Lake Tahoe for their honeymoon. That summer they visited Bob's relatives in Santa Cruz, and enjoyed an outing to Paradise Park, a Masonic resort.

Bob became a U.C. Berkeley professor, and spent vacations in Soquel and at the Frietas Ranchette. He taught economics during the depths of the Great Depression, a subject that was a matter of life and death to many. The Hoover Administration seemed preoccupied with preserving "police state" Prohibition, while following a Do-Nothing "Be-Patient-for-Prosperty-Is-Just-Around-The-Corner" approach. This radicalized many who needed help right away, and legitimized fringe groups that seemed responsive to public needs.

Bob supported the famous San Francisco General Strike. In the face of penniless Dust Bowl refugees pouring into California, Bob started taking the lessons of the Live Oak Ranchettes seriously, the product of the previous depression, and investigated other farming models as well. His work soon won him the Newton Booth Traveling Fellowship, to study first-hand the agricultural problems of various European countries that were also experiencing hard times.

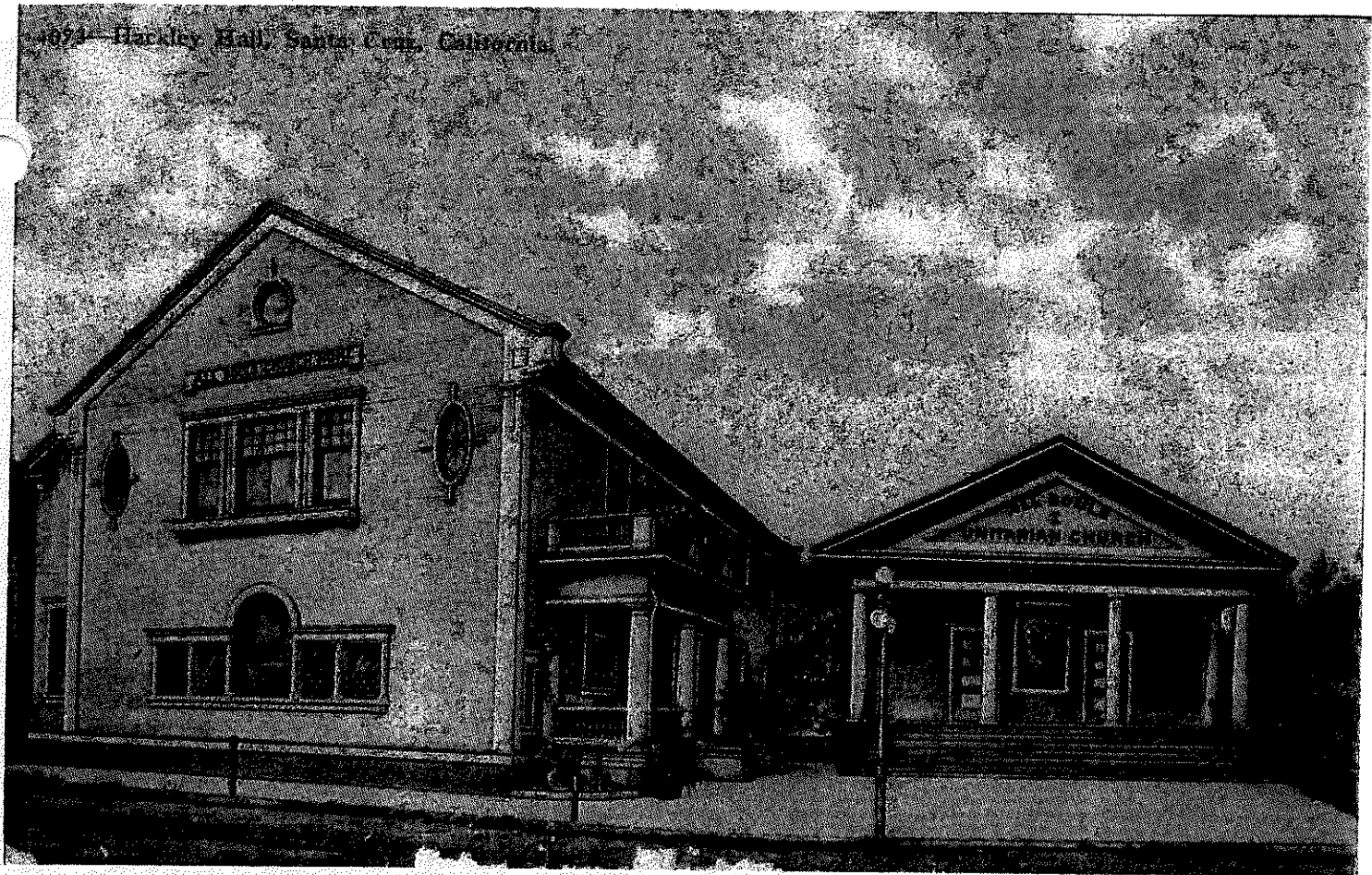
The Merrimans went to Europe together and toured the continent. Bob was studying the economics of the Soviet Collectivist experiment in 1936 when the Spanish Civil War broke out. But



Merriman & friend at Paradise Park in the summer of 1932.



The "California Farm Bureau" building on Pacheco Ave. was the University of California's official Egg-Laying Contest headquarters



describe the deprivations under which the Loyalists fought. Later, as conditions got worse, Bob couldn't convince Marion to return to the U.S. for a rest, even though she was suffering from dental pain. Marion feared if she went home, U.S. authorities wouldn't allow her to return to a forbidden battle-zone. But Bob finally convinced her that his forces desperately needed financial support, and sent her home on a fund-raising tour. Marion took the precaution of having her passport identify her as providing humanitarian medical support, the only aid to Spain not banned by the U.S.

Marion arrived in the States in November, 1937, stopping in San Francisco, where the "Friends of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade" were headquartered. This support group had been created because friends and relatives were not permitted to send parcels to individual brigade soldiers; but by mailing in bulk, their supplies periodically got through. Marion was joined on a statewide speaking tour by the executive secretary of the "Friends," Miss Lee Levy of San Francisco, and by Mrs. Ann Hawkins of Berkeley, the wife of a Lincoln Brigade officer.

Meanwhile, the Frietases were actively involved in (if not the founders) of the Santa Cruz Chapter of the "Friends of the Lincoln

Brigade," and were growing concerned from newspaper reports and Bob and Marion's correspondence, of the brigade's activities and needs. In February, 1938, Marion, Levy and Hawkins brought their fund-raising drive to Santa Cruz county, and stayed with Marion's in-laws.

On February 24, Marion's trio appeared in Santa Cruz at the Unitarian's Hackley Hall, under the sponsorship of the "Women's Alliance of the Unitarian Church," the "Women Today Club," and the Santa Cruz Friends of the Lincoln Brigade. Bob's grandmother and the Frietases were featured at the local events. The speakers were treated to a noon luncheon at the Hall, sponsored by the women's groups, before the evening lecture.

Because of widespread curiosity and misinformation, Marion asked for time after the talk to answer questions. Many of Bob's local classmates were surprised at his involvement, not having regarded him as politically active, much less a Communist. Marion explained that while over 50% of the brigade were Socialists or Communists, she and Bob were not, and they made no distinction with those fighting Fascism to save Democracy. Kasper Bauer offered the first donation, which produced an outpouring of

financial support. They spoke next in Salinas on their southward lecture tour.

Eight weeks later, the situation had changed radically. Bob disappeared in the battle of Gandesa in April. Early reports were that he had been captured by Franco, and held as a prisoner-of-war. Marion was again in Santa Cruz seeking public support to petition the U.S. government to negotiate his release. Then word came from the Franco regime that there was no paperwork showing he'd ever been logged into prison. The big fear was this meant Franco had executed him, although conflicting reports also suggest he died in battle.

Ernest Hemingway turned Robert Merriman into the character *Robert Jordan*, in his novel "For Whom the Bell Tolls." The message in the title was that the Spanish Civil War wasn't announcing the lone death of Spanish democracy, but our own as well, if we didn't defend democracy even in distant lands from the rising tide of totalitarianism. The

ERNEST HEMINGWAY



• FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS •



MARION MERRIMAN IN SANTA CRUZ IN 1987

Spanish Civil War was won by the Fascists, yet as the dress rehearsal for World War II with the same cast of dictators, the fight itself may have changed the course of history. Franco sat out the war rather than give the axis powers a third front against America and England. And when the United States entered the war, it followed the same strategy as the Lincoln Brigade of allying with Soviet Russia, even after Stalin had briefly been an ally of Hitler.

Yet when World War II ended, and the Cold War with Communism began, Lincoln Brigaders were subject to the first angry "Viet Nam home-coming" type experience. They were targeted in Joseph McCarthy's Communist Witch Hunts, which made Brigade veterans and their supporters (a number from Live Oak) fearful to speak of their experiences for half-a-century.

In the 1980s, Marion Merriman Wachtel was convinced by Pulitzer-prize-winning Reno journalist Warren Lerude to co-author "America's Commander in Spain—Robert Hale Merriman and the Abraham Lincoln Brigade." She said it was far more candid than if she'd written it right



(PROPOSED 2006
APPLICATION FOR COUNTY
LANDMARKS PLAQUE. NEVER
SUBMITTED, BUT STILL VALID)

Submitted _____

Action Taken _____

APPROVED _____

NOT APPROVED _____

HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION FORM

Address: 1438 Capitola Road, Santa Cruz

Popular Name/Designation If Any: "BOB MERRIMAN RANCH HOUSE"

CONTACTS:

Owner: The People of Santa Cruz County Phone: _____

Email: _____

Address: 1701 Capitola Road, Santa Cruz

Owner's Signature: _____

If the building is NOT owner occupied:

Building Occupant(s) Name: Live Oak Family Resource Center Phone: _____

BASIC INFORMATION ON BUILDING:

Date Built: June 6, 1916 (Definite ☒ Approximate _____)

Architect: Wood Bros. Style: California Bracketed/Craftsman

Builder/Developer: James Morrissey's "Wilson Bros. Tract #1"

Original Use: Chicken Ranchette

Original Owner If Known: John & Susie Goetsch

Additional information about architect, use, style, original or subsequent owners, other features i.e. major exterior remodeling:

The C.E. Freitas Chicken Ranchette was part of a unique chicken farm suburban subdivision of deep lots, with ranch homes aligned like a suburban neighborhood.

Proposed Landmark
Page 2

DOCUMENTATION:

Nomination Prepared By: Ross Eric Gibson
Phone Number: (831) 423-1932 Email: rossericgibson@comcast.net

- ☐ Chase's "Sidewalk Companion"
☐ County's "Survey of Historic Resources"
☐ City's "Historical Building Survey"
☒ Other published source (s), old or new: "Ernest Hemmingway's Forgotten Santa Cruz Hero--The Last Landmark of Bob Merriman," by Ross Eric Gibson, 2006
☒ Specific research (photos, title search, old newspapers, etc.)

Info. on Bob Merriman: "American Commander in Spain--Robert Hale Merriman and the Abraham Lincoln Brigade," by [his wife] Marion Merriman and Warren Lerude, 1986

SUGGESTED WORDING FOR PLAQUE: Wording (see attached sample)

1916
"BOB MERRIMAN HOME"
Led Abraham Lincoln Brigade
in Spanish Civil War,
Inspired Hemingway's
Signature "For Whom the Bell Tolls" Date _____

RETURN THIS FORM WITH A CURRENT PHOTO AND ANY ATTACHMENTS TO:
The Museum of Art & History, 705 Front Street, Santa Cruz, CA 95060
Attn: Marla Novo

Questions? Call (831) 429-1964 ext. 7019

Supplementary material in the form of photocopies, newspaper clippings, etc. is encouraged.