

RESPONSE TO COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ, HISTORIC RESOURCES COMMISSION, AGENDA
ITEM #7A, REVIEW OF HISTORIC INTERPRETATIVE INSTALLATION FOR 1500 CAPITOLA
ROAD (MERRIMAN HOUSE)

FROM: JOE MICHALAK AND JUDITH STEEN
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PROPOSED ART WORK

We think that photographs would make for a more powerful and meaningful presentation with a de-emphasis on Hemingway and more focus on Merriman. In our opinion the proposed art doesn't accurately convey visual information about him or the site. Is there visual documentation to support the artist's interpretation of the depictions in any of the historical themes? Any representations should be historically accurate and would be best conveyed through photographs.

At 6' 4" Merriman had a commanding presence and a charismatic personality. John Kenneth Galbraith, fellow graduate student at UC Berkeley, and later adviser to President Kennedy, commented that Merriman was, "... the first hero of World War II."⁶ He went on to call Merriman, "the most popular of my generation of graduate students at Berkeley Later he was to show himself the bravest." Numerous photos of Merriman and fellow combatants exist at archives at UC Berkeley and other institutions.



See:

https://www.google.com/search?q=%22robert+hale+merriman%22&sxsrf=ALeKk038w1kqenQg3fSHuTFXMdFTBFF5qw:1602518445292&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj_zrW1tq_sAhXEvp4KHTeJAIQQ_AUoAnoECCYQBA&biw=1357&bih=983#imgrc=Ag0WzOhBPYTABM

EARLY "RANCH HOME" SUBDIVISIONS

In terms of Live Oak and the "ranchettes," a picture from the Wilson Bros. advertisements would convey a better idea of Live Oak at the time of its peak development. There could be

more development of the poultry industry and its significance. In the 1920s Santa Cruz was second only to Petaluma in terms of egg production and shipments. In 1925 at 111 Madrone Street, the Poultry Producers of Central California built a packing and shipping depot for small poultry ranches in Santa Cruz County, adjacent to the Southern Pacific tracks. The Madrone property on the City of Santa Cruz's Historic Building Survey has been adaptively reused as an industrial/commercial facility. It now serves as Dominican Hospital's Outpatient Rehabilitation Center.

Shorter version 2 of the "Early Ranch-Home Subdivisions" more adequately conveys the essence of Live Oak and its occupants.

MERRIMAN TEXT

In general we don't think the text or proposed murals and convey adequately the essence of Robert Hale Merriman. Merriman became a heroic symbol through his leadership in fighting fascism and his perceived selflessness in championing a "cause greater than oneself."

We think there should be more emphasis on Merriman's life in Santa Cruz and the need to focus on the attributes and personal qualities exhibited by Merriman that might explain why he is considered an American hero. Though he had no allegiance to Spain, he volunteered to defend their democratic institutions during a civil war. He wanted to be a professor of agricultural economics. He was an idealist and saw first hand the effects of widespread destruction, starvation, and the bombing of civilians in a conflict that was the precursor to World War II.

During the 1930s President Roosevelt instituted a policy of neutrality so that the United States wouldn't be drawn into war in Europe. Despite numerous requests to support the forces fighting to preserve the democratically elected government of Spain, the U.S. refused to provide arms or materiel. However, there were those who believed that if one didn't fight Hitler, Franco, and Mussolini in the battlegrounds of Europe that the conflict would eventually come to America. Many Americans were horrified and believed that they had an obligation to act—hence the establishment of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and its 3,000 volunteers. It was a cause, "greater than onself."

California historian Kevin Starr wrote, "Like his fictional counterpart [Robert Jordan], Robert Hale Merriman lost his life to fascism on the field of battle. Because he was so talented, and because he died so young, and because Hemingway immortalized him, Merriman must be given the first position in any roll call of Californians in battle against the ultra-Right."

Though Merriman lived for only a short time in Santa Cruz from 1923–1928, he maintained his relationship with his family, friends, and community and corresponded with them, even when he was a combatant in the Spanish Civil War in 1937–1938.

When Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* debuted in 1940 as a book, and later in 1943 as a movie starring Ingrid Bergman and Gary Cooper, citizens of Santa Cruz were not aware that the character Robert Jordan was based on Merriman. It wasn't until the 1980s, fifty years later with the publication of his widow's memoir, that the community learned of the

contributions of Robert Merriman (See *Santa Cruz Sentinel* reporter Mary Beth Varcados interview with his widow, April 5, 1987).

Merriman's courage, compassion, and persistence, as personified in Robert Jordan, the hero in Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, still resonates today as a role model for selfless public service. Throughout his life, the late U.S. Senator John McCain referred to Robert Jordan as his lodestone. At the age of twelve, during his formative years, McCain became mesmerized by the heroic character of Robert Jordan. He found the Hemingway novel in his father's library. "For a long time, Robert Jordan was the man I admired above almost all others in life and fiction. He was brave, dedicated, capable, selfless, possessed in abundance that essence of courage that Hemingway described as grace under pressure, a man who would risk his life but never his honor." At the end of his life, McCain remarked that, "Jordan was his hero when he was young and his hero today. Nothing is better than the story of someone who sacrifices for causes greater than themselves and Robert Jordan was that." "[President Barack] Obama told *Rolling Stone* that Hemingway's novel, published in 1940, is one of the three books that most inspired him.

We recommend that the date of the demolition of the house be noted.

Source notes are available upon request.