

PUBLIC LIBRARY.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 1

Carnegie Library-County Museum

San Luis Obispo County, CA

Statement of Significance

Summary

The Carnegie Library-County Museum is important in San Luis Obispo under National Register Criterion A in the area of Social History for the association with library development in California, as exemplified by the community effort of San Luis Obispo during the years 1857-1905.

The Carnegie Library-County Museum is significant under National Register criterion C in the area of Architecture, as the building embodies the distinctive characteristics of the Richardsonian Romanesque style, one of three designed by master Architect William H. Weeks, of which two remain.

Criterion A

Incorporated in 1857, San Luis Obispo had several early but short-lived libraries: 1869 Sunday-school and 1871-2 and 1873 subscription, and 1874 Odd Fellows libraries. The campaign to build a public library began in 1892. San Luis Obispo *Tribune* editor Benjamin Brooks suggested organizing a subscription library. Early life members included prominent historian and editor Myron Angel; Phoebe Apperson Hearst (mother of William Randolph Hearst); land promoter Chauncey Hatch Phillips; John Michael Price, the founder of Pismo Beach; the Steele brothers of Edna, who had introduced dairy farming to the Central Coast in the late 1860's; viticulturist Pierre Dallidet, and many other important local families.

By 1894, the subscription group was able to lease space from the J.P. Andrews Banking Company. The library opened to the public on June 15 of that year.

The operation had its financial ups and downs, with funds being so low in December, 1894, that the library closed in the evening to save expenses. The proceeds from public entertainment, often held at the Pavilion at Monterey and Toro streets, were slated for the library, with some of the funds used for the purchase of books.

On September 16, 1897, the board of trustees agreed to transfer the property of the subscription library to the City of San Luis Obispo. The first years of public ownership were financially difficult because the pro rata share of taxes allowed for income was very small. Yet by the time of the fiscal year end report dated June 30,

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1904, some 12,487 volumes had been circulated to 17,653 visitors. The library had 4,403 bound volumes in its stacks.

In September 1902, the library board applied to Andrew Carnegie for a donation to erect a suitable and permanent building. In February, 1903, the board was notified that Carnegie had given the city \$10,000. The community built the library next to the San Luis Obispo Mission, on the northern slope of San Luis Creek on a site frequented by the Chumash Indians, and where in the early 1850's Captain John Wilson and his wife, Ramona Carrillo Pacheco de Wilson had built the first wood frame house of San Luis Obispo.

In October 1905, the new Carnegie Library designed by Watsonville architect William H. Weeks, and built by T. Maino Construction Co. at a cost of \$9,750, of local red bricks, Bishop's Peak granite, and Los Berros sandstone, opened to the public. Ninety Years ago William H. Weeks' design of the Carnegie Library was called a "handsome and commodious building," and served the community until 1955, when the need for additional space necessitated the construction of a larger building. Since 1956 the handsome Carnegie Library-County Museum still serves the community, providing insights into San Luis Obispo's colorful and varied past.

Criterion C

California architect William H. Weeks designed twenty one Carnegie libraries, which span the entire Carnegie period from 1902 to 1921 and demonstrate the chronological evolution of style over those years. For his first library commission, Santa Cruz, Weeks designed a building in the Richardson style. At \$20,000 it was one of the more expensive libraries he designed. Weeks' other two Romanesque libraries, in San Luis Obispo and Nevada City, were on a smaller scale but are notable for their use of natural stone in San Luis Obispo, and concrete block in Nevada City.

The Carnegie Library-County Museum is an excellent example of the dominant architectural styles of its period. William H. Weeks borrowed from the styles popular at the turn of the century including High-Victorian faces, Richardsonian Romanesque masonry, Beaux Arts classicism and Italianate quoins. The Chicago Columbian exhibition of 1893 had re-established the Neo-Classical style of Architecture for civic buildings and William H. Weeks was determined to use as many classical styles as possible.

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The use of stone arches, imposing well-crafted masonry and roofs with trim and finials were typical of this era and may be found in the architectural vocabulary of the master civic designers of this period, McKim, Mead & White. H.H. Richardson's use of multi-colored masonry with brick infill, massive arches, sculpted gables and continuous lintels were a strong influence on William H. Weeks' design of the Carnegie Library in San Luis Obispo.

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## Narrative Description

Summary

The San Luis Obispo Carnegie Library-County Museum building, designed by noted architect William H. Weeks, is an outstanding example of the Richardsonian Romanesque style. The building is complex, with a tall hipped roof above the rectangular mass of the building, visible from the front beyond two gable wings placed at right angles with a lower flat roofed portico projecting from their intersection. One story over a raised basement, the building is sited on a lot which slopes toward the front, adding the appearance of height to the gable wings. Two chimneys extend from the gable ends of the slate roof. The basement is faced with dark gray granite stone placed in ashlar fashion and topped with a granite courseline. The remainder of the building is red brick with trim of rough cut yellow sandstone for quoins, arches, lintels, and courselines below the windows and in the gable ends. In each gable end, elaborate ornamentation includes a gargoyle and encircles a small bull's eye window. The double hung sash windows are recessed, below a transom; fixed two-pane or fixed multi-pane basement windows are topped with a union jack motif. Two doors open from the basement. Granite stairs rise in two steep flights from the sidewalk to the portico entrance. There, two short stout polished gray granite columns reach to the granite courseline and support the round arch of yellow sandstone; the arch is replicated on the two sides of the portico, which had been extended in 1910, apparently by the architect. The exterior of the building is very well maintained.

A stone rubble wall constructed in the 1790's is located on the site, north of the Carnegie Library-County Museum. This massive cyclopean wall was part of the Mission complex, and believed to have once been dormitories for Franciscan monks.

The interior remains essentially intact as an excellent example of Mid-Victorian Parlor. The interior plan layout, as well as the finish are original and intact. The floor plan and layout follow the basic format of the Carnegie Library. The interior entry vestibule proceeds to a main, formal staircase leading to the library central core, which is the functional central axis of the library, emphasized by the original casework, volume and level of architectural detail. The auxiliary spaces, reading areas, reference materials and staff area all are accessed off the central

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core. The interior materials, finishes, assemblies, fixtures, casework, and cabinetry are as originally designed and constructed. Interiors are well maintained, and are original and dramatic examples of the period.

Only minor modifications have been made to the Carnegie Library-County Museum building since 1910. In 1967, the County Department Of Building seismically strengthened the entrance portico by adding reinforced concrete bond beams at the top of the walls, replacing deteriorated wood members at the roof line. This work was accomplished without disturbing any exterior or interior detailing of the building. In 1983 a 7 ft square portion of the back gallery was enclosed for an elevator to provide for future disabled access.

Exterior

The Carnegie Library-County Museum, designed by architect William H. Weeks, is an excellent example of the dominant architectural styles of the period. Materials quarried from local volcanoes combined with the craftsmanship of the last generation of great masons produced a library with unique architectural features that merit preservation. Terrace walls, foundations and basement walls are andesite dacite porphyry, a granite quarried from the west side of Bishop's Peak, the tallest volcanic peak of the ancient morros and dormant for the past 23 million years. This igneous volcanic rock is noted for low water absorption, high strength and durability. The Carnegie Library-County Museum is the only building in San Luis Obispo County combining Bishop's Peak granite with Los Berros sandstone.

The public is welcomed into the building through an elegant columned portico with archway voussoirs of golden sandstone hewn from the local quarry in Los Berros. The entry columns are highly polished granite with Ionic capitals, decorated with Ionic volutes, often called ram's horn capitals. The entry portico has torus molding at the base of the portico columns. Corinthian capitals with small Ionic volutes flank the entry doors. Patrons ascend the traditional thirteen steps between the terrace and the first floor. A rain gutter is hidden inside the belt cornice at the entry portico.

Red brick walls are ornamented with sandstone quoins at each corner. The transomed, segmented windows have continuous sandstone lintels and sills. Sculpted cartouche window frames, referred to as bull's eye windows adorn each gable. The floral designs on the rake boards is typical of the Victorian period with elaborate leaf and floral designs joyfully sculpted into the stone. The playful use of human faces sculpted in high relief on the gable masonry is another Victorian embellishment,

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serving as a reminder that libraries, and now a museum are places of enlightenment, education and entertainment.

The slate roof has aged with grace and dignity. The main hip roof is intersected with two smaller gable roofs. Bargeboards are ornamented with floral designs and block modillion brackets embellish the cornice. Wood cornice moldings have a continuous foliated design pattern. Wood trim and finials decorate the ridge line.

Interior

The casework, cabinetry, and millwork are the most significant aspects of the interior. Custom woodwork is extensive as was typical of civic buildings of the period. Casework, including window and door casings, ceiling and base treatments, wainscoting and wall rails, soffits, cased openings, and intricate carved moldings are all intact and unaltered. Finally the original library checkout desk and librarian's workstation is in daily use today as an active part of the Carnegie Library-County Museum.

The interior is an exquisite example of a Mid-Victorian parlor. Wood columns are adorned with elegant Ionic volutes heralding the Neo-Classical revival. Column capitals are a composite design of the Corinthian and Ionic orders. The carved wood modillion scrolled brackets are highly detailed. Upper wall ornamentation include decorative foliated friezes. The entry foyer has a hexagonal mosaic tile floor and above the main entrance is a semicircular transom window with a wrought iron grill. The spacious rooms are decorated with plaster relief ceilings. Two lavish fireplaces served as the central heating system. Adornments include egg and dart designs, symbolizing life and death. A dumbwaiter served the functional needs of the building. The library represents a transition in the development of municipal utilities. It was illuminated by both gaslights and electric lighting. In 1912, electric lighting was installed throughout the facility. One of the original Diamond H brand rotary electrical switches was uncovered by museum staff in 1986. Original light fixtures remain and are in use at this time. The pendant type fixtures are fine examples of contextual lighting of the period. In 1956, the County initiated a capital improvements project, upgrading the entire electrical wiring system.





# CALIFORNIA Office of HISTORIC PRESERVATION NEWSLETTER

VOL. III, NO. 3

FALL 1988

## *California's Carnegie Libraries*

The Office of Historic Preservation has launched a special project designed to identify, register, and protect California's remaining Carnegie Library buildings, which are among the state's most interesting and architecturally valuable structures. The Office has contracted with Sonoma State University Foundation to survey the structures and prepare National Register nominations for them. The libraries will be nominated as a group under the multiple property format, and a number of libraries will be nominated as individual properties. It is hoped that this project will help to bring about the favorable recognition the libraries deserve.

If your community has a Carnegie Library you would like to see listed in the National Register of Historic Places, please send a brief description and photo to the office, together with your name, address and phone number so that researcher Lucy Kortum may contact you for further information. Lucy is

presently pursuing her master's degree in history with Professor Dennis Harris of SSU. The subject of her thesis is the history of California's libraries.

At the end of the nineteenth century, California joined the movement to establish separate library buildings to house community book collections. By then, libraries had come to be viewed as a panacea for such social problems as drunkenness and prostitution. Women's clubs and groups like the YMCA were instrumental in promoting libraries for the benefit of the community.

After the turn of the century, Andrew Carnegie emerged as the major benefactor of public libraries in America and abroad. Carnegie devoted the years following his retirement at age 66 to philanthropy, which included library grants to local communities.

As a state, California was fortunate to receive the second largest number of libraries in the United States under the Carnegie program. In 1899, San Diego

received the first California grant, followed by Oakland and Alameda the same year. In all, 142 Carnegie libraries were built in 122 different California communities.

Prior to the Carnegie era, book collections were commonly housed in

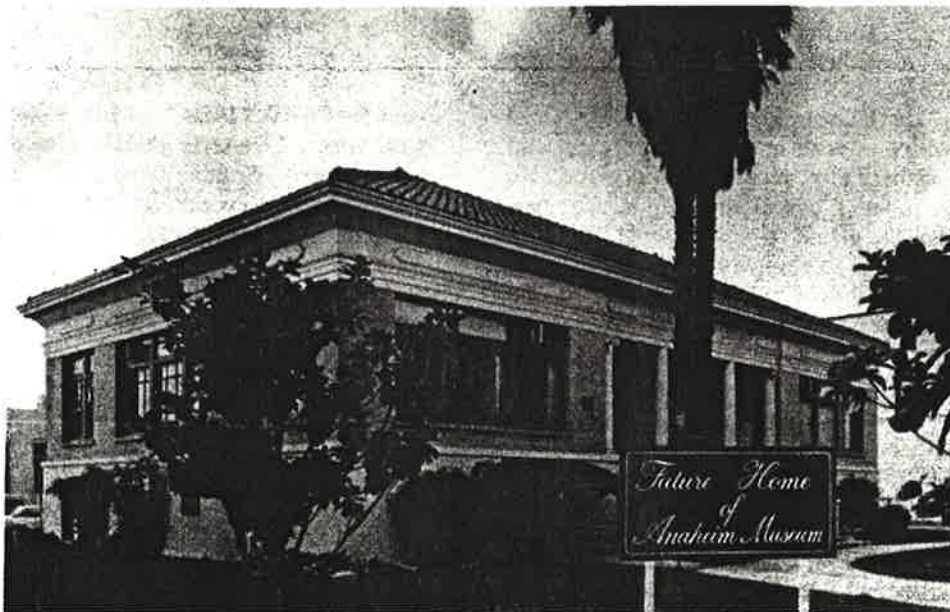


*Healdsburg Carnegie Library*

odd corners of buildings constructed for other purposes. The Carnegie libraries were often the first and the only libraries in town for many years, and among the finest buildings in their communities.

In the mid-twentieth century, ever-growing book collections required expanded and updated facilities, beyond the capability of the Carnegie libraries, which were beginning to seem outmoded. By 1967, 37 had been demolished and others were threatened. Some survived through adaptive re-use; many became museums. A number have received OHP state bond act funds for rehabilitation, fitting them for a new life as non-library buildings. If others are to be saved, it is important to identify them and to raise public awareness of their significance through National Register listing.

The Carnegie Library project is a major effort at preservation planning for the OHP. Spending federal and state dollars in the most effective way requires a fuller understanding of the historic contexts of our remaining architectural resources. Armed with this knowledge, the OHP will be better prepared to channel local, state, and federal funding where it can best preserve our most valuable historic properties. □



*Anaheim Carnegie Library*



## The Back Page

## Library opening was a big night for San Luis Obispo

Dan Krieger  
Times past



The evening of Oct. 25, 1905 was a very special moment in the history of San Luis Obispo. After more than a dozen years' effort by public-spirited citizens, the brand new Carnegie Library opened at the corner of Broad and Monterey streets.

The campaign to build a public library had begun in 1892. San Luis Obispo Tribune editor Benjamin Brooks had suggested organizing a subscription library. A subscription fee of 50 cents a month was to be assessed on all users. Life memberships were available for \$50. Early life members included: historian and editor Myron Angel; Phoebe Apperson Hearst (mother of William Randolph Hearst); land promoter Chauncey Hatch Phillips; John Michael Price, the founder of Pismo Beach; the Steele Brothers of Edna, who had introduced dairy farming to the Central Coast in the late 1860s; viticulturist Pierre Dallet; the Sinsheimer, Beebe, Castro, Branch, Warden and Call families; Judge McDowell R. Venable; and of course editor Brooks.

By 1894, the subscription group was able to lease space from the J.P. Andrews Banking Company. The library opened to the public on June 15 that year.

The operation had its financial ups and downs. For example in December 1894 the funds in the treasury were so low it was necessary to close the library in the evening to save expenses.

Public entertainment — often held at the Pavillon located at Monterey and Toro streets — was slated to raise funds for the beleaguered subscription library. In January 1895, one such "entertainment" raised \$223, of which \$50 was allocated for the purchase of new books.

On Sep. 16, 1897, the board of trustees agreed to transfer the property of the subscription library to the City of San Luis Obispo. The first years of public ownership were difficult because the pro rata share of taxes allowed for income was very small. Yet by the time of the fiscal year end report dated June 30, 1904, some 12,487 volumes had been circulated to 17,653 visitors. The library had 4,403 bound volumes in its stacks.

In September 1902, the library board applied to Andrew Carnegie for a donation to erect a suitable and permanent building. In February 1903, the board was notified that Carnegie had given the city \$10,000.

And in October 1905, the new building, designed by Watsonville architect William H. Weeks and constructed from Bishop's Peak granite, Los Berros quarried sandstone and local bricks, opened to the

public. The structure represented a transition in the development of municipal utilities. It was served by both gaslights and electric lighting. One of the original Diamond H brand rotary electrical switches was recently uncovered by museum staff.

Here's how the Daily Telegram reported the building's opening in its Oct. 26, 1905 issue.

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#### Handsome Carnegie Library Opened Auspiciously Last Night

The handsome Carnegie library opened auspiciously last evening with a public reception.

The comfortable, cosy rooms were crowded with some of the most prominent personages in the city. They presented a brilliant appearance and the effect was added to by the decorations, which consisted of chrysanthemums, palms, ferns, smilax and other foliage. The city has a library to be proud of and the trustees are to be congratulated upon the success attained.

It was a public gathering and behind the delivery desk was seated Professor H. Morse Stephens, of the University of California; the Rev. V. Aguilera, rector of the Mission church, the Rev. George Willett, pastor of the Congregational church and Mc. D.R. Venable Esq.

The opening services were presided over by Mr. Venable and he called upon the Rev. Willett for prayer. Mr. Venable then spoke in eulogistic terms of the library trustees, especially the president, Mrs. A.Z. Sinsheimer and said that it was due to her untiring efforts that Andrew Carnegie donated the money for the erection of the building.

Professor H. Morse Stephens was then introduced and for some time spoke at length on the educational features of a public library. He is not a fluent, but a rapid speaker with a flow of rhetoric and a perfect enunciation.

Professor Stephens is a strong advocate and one of the fathers of the University Extension Lecture Course and he spoke at some length upon the benefits that are derived therefrom impressing upon his audience the value of adult education and how the library aided this.

#### The Old and The New.

He then spoke of the association of the library with the old Mission saying "The old is here, let us revere it; the new is here let us cultivate it." Continuing, Professor Stephens said all should be proud of the old Misison and the new library standing side by side. He said that with the means for adult education, a polytechnic school, a new high school and the handsome library that San Luis Obispo has surely



Photo Courtesy of the County Historical Museum

The Carnegie Library, under construction in 1905, is now the County Historical Museum.

enough to make no mean city and said all should have the determination to develop into even something better in the future until it became a city of educated people, a city of educated adults.

The speaker was greeted with loud cheers and the audience was delighted at having heard one of the most intellectual lectures that has ever been delivered here.

Mr. Venable then read congratulatory letters from the Library at Pasadena and one from the Library Association of California.

Father Aguilera fervently pronounced the benediction invoking God Almighty not only to bless the building, but all those who entered therein.

Following the exercises the guests inspected the building and the ladies served light refreshments in the committee room. Mrs. W.D. Beebe, Miss Laura Graves and Frank H. Throop played a number of selections on the mandolin and guitar and everyone enjoyed a delightful social time.

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The Carnegie Library now serves as the County Historical Museum. On Feb. 26, 1986, the museum will have been open for 30 years. The museum will be celebrating this 30th birthday with special exhibits and events Feb. 19-23.

The celebration will culminate with a grand pageant featuring the San Luis Obispo County Band, dancing and costumes from the various ethnic groups who have contributed to our county's history. Japanese

and Filipino martial arts demonstrations, a Chinese Lion Dance by the Chinese Students Association and refreshments.

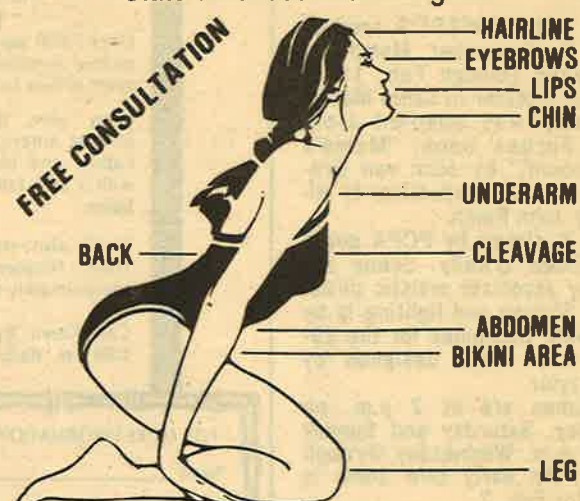
The pageant will begin at 1:30 p.m. on Sunday, Feb. 23, in the museum end of Mission Plaza.

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This article was researched and written by Dan Krieger in working with Lura Rawson, director, and Mark Hall Patton, curator of the San Luis Obispo County Historical Museum.

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C \_\_\_\_\_ D \_\_\_\_\_

### IDENTIFICATION

1. Common name: San Luis Obispo County Museum
2. Historic name: Carnegie Library
3. Street or rural address: Northwest corner of Broad & Monterey Streets  
City San Luis Obispo Zip 93401 County San Luis Obispo
4. Parcel number: 02-412-16,18
5. Present Owner: City of San Luis Obispo Address: 990 Palm Street  
City San Luis Obispo Zip 93401 Ownership is: Public X Private \_\_\_\_\_
6. Present Use: Museum Original use: Library

### DESCRIPTION

- 7a. Architectural style: Richardsonian Romanesque
- 7b. Briefly describe the present *physical description* of the site or structure and describe any major alterations from its original condition:

The County Museum is a one story, masonry structure with a raised base-ment on the northwest corner of Monterey and Broad streets. It is ir-regular in plan and has a high-pitched, hip roof, smaller gable roofs running into it. Granite was used in the walls from the ground to the beginning of the first floor. Red brick and yellow stone was used in the walls from there to the eaves. This yellow stone is primarily used for decoration ( quoining around windows and on the corners of the structure ). The first floor windows are double-hung, sash windows, with a louvered panel above them. The basement windows are fixed two-pane, or fixed multi-paned. Two chimneys extend from the gabled ends of the roof. There is also a small bulls-eye window above which is monster's face in each of these gables. The structure's main entrance is a central, enclosed entrance on Monterey Street. There are also two smaller entrances that lead to the basement. The arch over the main entrance which is supported by two polished stone columns shows Richard-sonian Romanesque influence. The main entrance is a double-door entry,



8. Construction date: Estimated \_\_\_\_\_ Factual 1904
9. Architect William H.  
Weeks \_\_\_\_\_
10. Builder Unknown
11. Approx. property size (in feet)  
Frontage 170 Depth 125  
or approx. acreage \_\_\_\_\_
12. Date(s) of enclosed photograph(s)  
October 1982

13. Condition: Excellent ☒ Good \_\_\_\_\_ Fair \_\_\_\_\_ Deteriorated \_\_\_\_\_ No longer in existence \_\_\_\_\_
14. Alterations: None
15. Surroundings: (Check more than one if necessary) Open land \_\_\_\_\_ Scattered buildings \_\_\_\_\_ Densely built-up \_\_\_\_\_  
Residential ☒ Industrial \_\_\_\_\_ Commercial ☒ Other: Parking lot.
16. Threats to site: None known ☒ Private development \_\_\_\_\_ Zoning \_\_\_\_\_ Vandalism \_\_\_\_\_  
Public Works project \_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_
17. Is the structure: On its original site? ☒ Moved? \_\_\_\_\_ Unknown? \_\_\_\_\_
18. Related features: \_\_\_\_\_

#### SIGNIFICANCE

19. Briefly state historical and/or architectural importance (include dates, events, and persons associated with the site.)

Before 1904, the only library in San Luis Obispo was a pay library in the Andrews Bank Building on Osos Street. After the City acquired the land, the library was started in 1904, with a grant of \$10,000 from the Carnegie Foundation. The City of San Luis Obispo had to raise the money for books and the land. The grant was only for the building. The library was in this structure until 1955. In 1956, the City leased it to the County of San Luis Obispo as a museum.

20. Main theme of the historic resource: (If more than one is checked, number in order of importance.)  
Architecture 2 Arts & Leisure \_\_\_\_\_  
Economic/Industrial \_\_\_\_\_ Exploration/Settlement \_\_\_\_\_  
Government \_\_\_\_\_ Military \_\_\_\_\_  
Religion \_\_\_\_\_ Social/Education 1

21. Sources (List books, documents, surveys, personal interviews and their dates).

Telegram-Tribune, various articles.  
Discovering S.L.O. County, 1971.

22. Date form prepared 3-7-83  
By (name) Jeff Roche  
Organization Cal Poly, S.L.O.  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
City San Luis Obispo Zip 93401  
Phone: 544-5608

Locational sketch map (draw and label site and surrounding streets, roads, and prominent landmarks):

