

Reagan Ranch Visit April 2018

by Kenneth W. Barbi

Summary

I had the opportunity to visit the Reagan Ranch (Rancho del Cielo) on April 21st as a guest of Young America's Foundation to see the preservation efforts of Ronald Reagan's Santa Barbara White House where many of us worked in the 1980's. The Ranch was purchased from Ronald and Nancy Reagan in 1998 to provide the family financial resources to care for President Reagan's health. Its new owner, Young America's Foundation WWW.YAF.ORG, is a conservative youth centered political action organization.

Background

Quoting from author Brad Thor, "Young America's Foundation is the largest youth outreach organization in the Conservative Movement and the only group that uses the power of the Reagan Ranch to shape future generations. The Foundation is the exclusive owner and operator of the Reagan Ranch, having worked with Ronald Reagan and the Reagan family since 1962 to advance freedom. Today, Young America's Foundation hosts conferences and seminars at the Reagan Ranch to inspire young people and policy makers with President Reagan's freedom philosophy of limited government, free enterprise, and a strong national defense."

The foundation hopes to make Rancho del Cielo the Mount Vernon and Monticello of the 20th Century. When the Ranch originally came on the market in the mid 1990's before Young America's Foundation purchased it, there were unsuccessful efforts to have the Federal or California State Government buy it to preserve it as the real life home of a great US President.

My April Visit

When WHCA folks worked in Santa Barbara and at the Ranch, we learned a great deal about our humble President and no doubt have many fond memories of those days. I had not been back in over 30 years as my Air Force career progressed, and after retirement moved on to other interests. I was thrilled to be invited to the 20th Anniversary celebration of the purchase of the Ranch by a close friend and member of the Young America's Foundation. Currently, the Ranch is not open to the public except by special invitation.

Meeting people we had worked with as customers such as Ed Meese, T. Kenneth Cribb, Jr., Becky Norton Dunlop, Dennis LeBlanc, and Frank Donatelli was refreshing. Meeting current Trump administration supporters such as Governors George Allen and Scott Walker; and White House Assistant to President Donald Trump, Marc Short (Director of Legislative Affairs at the White House), was very rewarding. Because of my professional association with President Reagan as one of his WHCA Trip Officers, I was well received at the receptions and dinners along with former Naval Military Aide, Rear Admiral JJ Quinn

(back in 1987 he was a junior officer); and John Barletta, President Reagan's chief lead Secret Service Agent and riding friend who oversaw Ranch Security. John is on Young America's Foundation Board of Directors. Very few Foundation members ever met President Reagan personally as many of us did.

Preservation Efforts

From my recollections, the Ranch has changed little since the 1980's although the building WHCA used at the Ranch has been torn down, but our phones (all labeled up as we used to do) and a few Secret Service radios are still present!

The El Escorial Delux Hotel (which provided us accommodations; and served as our nerve center and communications center) is no longer a hotel, but rather El Escorial Villas.



El Escorial Villas Viewed from the Harbor



El Escorial Villas Pool

The road up the mountain is still narrow and in terrible condition.



The 8 lock gate is still there, however, Rancho del Cielo's lock has been replaced by a remote control bolt.



8 Lock Gate off the Mountain Access Road



Rancho del Cielo Remote Gate Opener



Main Gate to Rancho del Cielo

The helicopter pad was replaced by a field of Garania flowers at the Reagan's request after he left office.



Garanja Flowers in place of the Helicopter Pad

The secret service command post has been fully restored to the way it looked in the 1980's



WHCA Provided Secret Service Radios



Old Faithful Brick

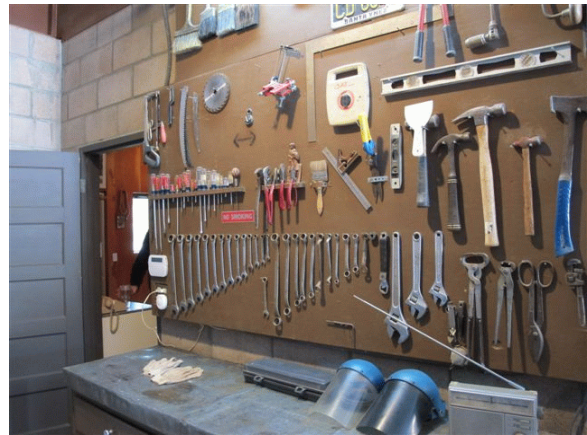
The Hay Barn is the same.



The Tack Barn is the same.



President Reagan's Misc Food Jars filled with important working hardware - nuts, bolts, screws, etc.



President Reagan's Very Neat Work Bench





The bell Ronald Reagan used to call Nancy to mount up is still operational.



The home is virtually unchanged along with the patio, lake, and wooden phone pole fences that Ronald Reagan personally built while he lived there as President.





Among other things in the house is a wine cooler he purchased while living there as President. He dutifully filled out the warrantee card with his name, address, and phone number; and filled in the block - Occupation - **Public Employee**. That's why we liked him so much!





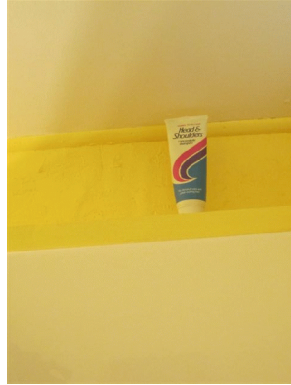
A WHCA Phone - - No Dial Tone!!



In the bedroom pictured here, is a phone switch that I can't identify. It appeared to either switch to different lines or turn them off. It is now inactive. ***Perhaps one of you folks can shed some light on this.***



In the bathroom is the President's famous Liberty Bell shower head, and a partially used bottle of *Head and Shoulders* he last used there.



The guest house has been remodeled on the inside.



The Pond and Dock that President Reagan built is in great shape. He gave the canoe to Nancy and it is still there.



Conclusion

I have been asked if I would be willing to sit down and provide an oral history of my days working with Ronald Reagan. I learned some other WHCA members have already done this, and Young America's Foundation is looking for more volunteers to come forward and be interviewed.

I was also promised an opportunity for other 1600 Communications Association members to visit the Ranch for personal tours (the Ranch is not open to the public) in Santa Barbara, so this is an open point if some of you can visit Santa Barbara.

My only regret with this unique preservation effort is that **very little of the actual WHCA communications equipment we deployed to the Ranch is on display**. Remember, the 1980's were the years of great change in techniques of Presidential Communications - - DES secure Motorola radios, E Mail, dial-in access, Grid computers; DSCS, Fleet SAT, and Ku-band satellite terminals to name a few - - no more Kleinschmidts! Can some of that equipment be recovered and provided to the Ranch for future generations to see? I don't know the answer to that yet, and hope to see something develop through the 1600 Communications Association in the coming years.

Ken is an Electrical Engineer who graduated from the City College of NYC in 1968. He received his commission in the Air Force in 1968, and came to WHCA in 1983 as a major. He served as a Plans Officer when in town, and as a Trip Officer on the road. In the Plans Office, he implemented new DSCS Satellite Terminals and was the first to establish commercial Ku-band satellite support for the President. He retired after 26 years in the Air Force as a Colonel, and now lives in Annapolis, Maryland, with his wife Susan (also a retired Air Force Nurse Corp Colonel). He can be reached at kenbarbi@verizon.net, or 410.757.5044