

Espiritu Chijulla and the Leonis Adobe:

Susan Kinkella's Sabbatical Proposal for Fall, 2011

Since 2007, I have been conducting research at the Leonis Adobe Museum in Calabasas. The Leonis Adobe was built in the 1840's and survived the transformations of early California, ultimately being designated Los Angeles Historical Cultural Monument #1 in 1962. It is one of the few historic museums in Southern California still located today on its original land. I was immediately intrigued by the dramatic and extraordinary history of the Adobe and surrounding property's survival during the tumultuous transitions from Spanish to Mexican and then American control. The history contained in the documents and artifacts associated with this building are of vital importance to studies of early California life, and I would like to have the opportunity to continue my work more thoroughly on a one-semester sabbatical.

As a professor of American Women's History and Native American History, I am especially interested in one of the Adobe's original owners - Espiritu Chijulla. Chijulla was a Native American woman living during times of great transition and upheaval in California. She was born the daughter of a Chumash chief named Odon Chijulla and she was baptized in the Mission San Fernando in 1836. Odon Chijulla had worked as a rancher on the lands of the Adobe, which were originally part of the San Fernando Mission. After the secularization of the San Fernando Mission, Odon was one of the few Native Americans to actually receive title to a land grant from the Mexican Government under Governor Pio Pico, which Espirtu later inherited. After the death of Espiritu's first husband, she married Miguel Leonis in 1860, which gave him title to the land. Leonis was a Basque born in the French Pyrenees with an infamous reputation in the San Fernando Valley. He amassed huge tracts of real estate in the San Fernando Valley and at the time of his death in 1889, he was one of the richest men in Los Angeles. "El Basque Grande," as he came to be known, claimed in his will that Espiritu was his "housekeeper" and she lost title to her familial lands. After

several years of legal battles, Espiritu eventually regained title to some of the lands in 1905. She died the following year.

Espiritu Chijulla's story has never been fully explored by historians, because she was not literate and therefore left no written primary source accounts of her life or perspectives. Nonetheless, the holdings of the Leonis Adobe include documents written by her friends and relatives, as well as legal documents and newspaper articles. With these tools, I will be able to reconstruct a history of a fascinating and unique character. If granted a sabbatical I would also have the time to conduct additional research on Espiritu at the San Fernando Mission. Scholars have only recently begun to include adequate attention to the roles of indigenous women in the diverse history of California. Espiritu Chijulla is a woman that led a life worthy of such investigation and her story is one that should be shared in order to deepen our understanding of the ways women of California negotiated within and beyond the "appropriate" roles of gender and race. My sabbatical will allow adequate time to continue my research on this topic, culminating in a published work for the museum on Espirtu Chijulla's life and her significance in American History.

While my main focus of work has been to conduct independent research on the museum's primary source document collections, I also facilitated an internship with Moorpark College student Michelle Covello in 2008. Ms. Covello's internship was so successful that she was offered a permanent job and is now the assistant curator at the museum. My association with the museum and Ms. Covello also enabled me to incorporate a service learning project into my History 7B course in the fall of 2009. My students had the valuable experience of working with the museum's primary document collections and holdings. This project was highly successful and mutually beneficial for both Moorpark College and the Leonis Adobe Museum.

In addition to completing a published work on Espiritu Chijilla, the research I will conduct during a sabbatical will also allow me to develop new curricula for my American History, Native American History and Women in American History courses. I am planning to start teaching California History in the future and the Leonis Adobe is a perfect “case study” of California’s Native American, Spanish, Mexican and American past. As I did in the Fall of 2009, I will also continue my work with the museum curator during my sabbatical in order to “fine tune” our service learning projects for future Moorpark College students. Additionally, I will continue to facilitate internships for students at the museum, and Moorpark College students will continue to benefit from these connections with the Leonis Adobe Museum. My courses will be enriched by my research and I will continue to be able to offer hands-on experiences for students that are considering a career in History.

The partnership between Moorpark College and the Leonis Adobe made possible through my research and service learning project has already been recognized by the Leonis Adobe Association in their quarterly newsletter *The Grapevine*, and was covered in an article in the Ventura County Star in November of 2009 (these articles are included in my application packet). It is through these kinds of programs that Moorpark College continues to distinguish itself from other community colleges as a leader in teaching and learning strategies.