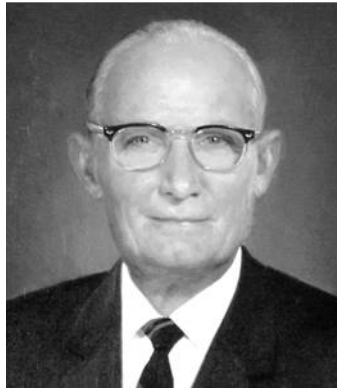


## Captain G. Allan Hancock

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Capt. G. Allan Hancock was a sea captain, oilman, explorer, developer, banker, aviator, scientist, businessman, farmer, railroad engineer, musician, and philanthropist.

He is perhaps best known in the Santa Maria Valley for the college that bears his name. Allan Hancock College stands on the site of the former Hancock College of Aeronautics founded by Capt. Hancock, where thousands of pilots trained for service during World War II.

Capt. Hancock's involvement with the Santa Maria Valley began in earnest in the 1920s when he started an experimental crop irrigation program on a 400-acre farm, raising corn and alfalfa as feed for cattle. The farm eventually was expanded to more than 5,000 acres.

Capt. Hancock also bought and expanded the Santa Maria Valley Railroad, which was originally constructed in 1911 for transport of asphalt from a refinery at Betteravia to Guadalupe and the connection there to the main railroad line. Hancock developed a 29-mile system of railroad right-of-way and tracks and turned the Santa Maria Valley Railroad into the busiest short line railroad system in the country. The railroad still operates between Santa Maria and Guadalupe, used for transportation of feed to Rosemary Farm, Hancock's egg-production facility that lies just east of Santa Maria, which he founded in 1925 and named for his daughter.

His passion for aviation developed while he still lived in Los Angeles. That led to the founding of the Hancock College of Aeronautics—not long after he financed the 1928 flight of the "Southern Cross," which made the first historic non-stop flight across the Pacific Ocean. Hancock built the aviation school and private airport on 200 acres within Santa Maria's city limits, opening it in 1929.

In 1939, Gen. Henry "Hap" Arnold, chief of the Army Air Corps, requested that Hancock's school be used to train pilots for the Army. Germany's Luftwaffe then ruled the skies over Europe, and the U. S. had few pilots and no aviation training facilities.

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Between July 1, 1939, and June 30, 1944, more than 8,400 aviation cadets and student officers were trained at the Hancock College of Aeronautics.

After the war ended, the school was rented for \$1 per year to the University of Southern California (USC), which then offered a four-year degree in aeronautical engineering at Hancock's aviation school.

In 1954, Hancock leased the aviation school site to Santa Maria Junior College for \$1 per year. Before then, the college, founded in 1920, had conducted cramped classes at Santa Maria High School. Four years later, voters approved a bond measure that financed the purchase of the land and facilities, and construction of the first new buildings at the college campus, which was renamed Allan Hancock College.

### ***Looking Back***

In 1857, Capt. Hancock's maternal grandfather, Agoston Haraszthy, a Hungarian count, founded California's first winery, Buena Vista Winery, in Sonoma County. In the early 1860s, Hancock's father, a Harvard University-educated attorney who came to California to mine gold, purchased the 4,438-acre Rancho La Brea land grant near Los Angeles for \$2.50 per acre. The property later became Hollywood and Los Angeles' well-known Wilshire District. The La Brea tar pits were part of the Hancock homestead in an area that is today called Hancock Park.

Capt. Hancock was born July 26, 1875, in San Francisco, one of three sons of Maj. Henry Hancock and Haraszthy's daughter, Ida. Not long after that, the family moved to Rancho La Brea. Hancock was just eight years old when his father died, leaving his mother to run the family ranch and raise two young boys. In those days, the ranch was far removed from Los Angeles' more civilized areas. The young Hancock helped meet family expenses by digging tar and hauling it from the tar pits for roofing.

In 1900, Ida granted a 20-year lease to the Salt Lake Oil Company for 1,000 acres of Rancho La Brea. Millions of barrels of oil were produced annually. The family's finances improved greatly. In 1907, with the assistance of William Orcutt (for whom the community of Orcutt—just south of Santa Maria—is named), Hancock drilled 71 wells of his own near the family's ranch house. Every well produced oil, and the Rancho La Brea Oil Company was born. The wells produced millions of barrels of oil annually and the family became very wealthy. With that wealth, Capt. Hancock was able to pursue myriad interests and began a life of philanthropy.

Among his many interests was an appreciation for transportation of various types. He was the second person in Los Angeles to buy an automobile, and was one of nine founders of the Automobile Club of Southern California. He also was a locomotive engineer.

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During his youth, Hancock rowed a flatboat on lakes at the tar pits in Los Angeles, and later designed and built several elite ocean-going vessels. After he bought his first yacht, he passed the exam in San Francisco for a master mariner's license, which authorized him to captain a vessel of any size. Thus he became Capt. Hancock.



Capt. Hancock stands with the Southern Cross, which he bought and overhauled to make the first trans-Pacific flight. After a stop in Santa Maria, the plane took off from Oakland on May 31, 1928. After stops at Hawaii and Fiji, it arrived in Brisbane, Australia—8,000 miles later—on June 8. In 1930, the plane came home to a hero's welcome in Santa Maria.

Four of his ships, all named Velero (Spanish for sailboat), were used for scientific expeditions along the coasts of Central and South America and other areas over the span of several decades. Some of the earliest expeditions to the Galapagos Islands were made aboard Velero III, and Velero IV, built in 1948, was used to pioneer some of the first deep-sea photography and test runs for the first deep-diving benthoscope, a device developed for deep undersea exploration. Velero IV was still in use by USC researchers more than 30 years after its maiden voyage.

Hancock had a long association with USC, still home to the

Hancock Institute of Marine Studies. He served as president and chairman of the USC board of trustees from 1939 to 1954 and later was elected a life member of the board.

Oil and the wealth it generated provided Hancock with the means to pursue many interests. In 1909, he put up capital used to incorporate the Hibernian Savings Bank, which became the United California Bank. In 1913, he donated the La Brea tar pits to the Los Angeles County Museum of History, with the stipulation that the museum would be free to the public.

Hancock's interest in music started when he was a boy. His first instrument was a harmonica. He became an accomplished cellist, and played cello for many Los Angeles Symphony Orchestra concerts. He later founded the Hancock Ensemble, which played hundreds of concerts up and down the Pacific Coast, from as far north as British Columbia to as far south as Peru.

Hancock gave an informal morning concert at his home on Rosemary Farm property hours before he died in his sleep of heart failure on May 31, 1965.

His wife, Marian Hancock, for whom Allan Hancock College's Marian Theatre is named, continued his legacy of public service for many years. She died in 1993.

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