



General view of the city of El Cajon and a portion of El Cajon valley. The name, from the Spanish, means "The Box," applicable because the virtually level valley is surrounded by hills and mountains.

**The Best Town in San Diego County . . .**

# EL CAJON, IN HEART OF RICH FARM AREA, ENJOYS BOOM

**Editor's Note**—This is the eighth of a series of articles on San Diego county towns. Additional articles are in preparation.

By J. C. SAFLEY

El Cajon is booming—and with a capital B. The population is increasing rapidly. New business structures are rising. Many residences are being constructed. Manufacturing is being established. Retail trade is brisk. Real estate is changing hands. Agricultural and horticultural crops in El Cajon valley are abundant.

The people are prosperous and they are enthusiastic over their city and valley and their prospects for the future. Families are arriving daily in quest of homes and business locations, in this beautiful and verdant valley east of San Diego.

**NAME MEANS 'THE BOX'**

The name, El Cajon, from the Spanish, means "The Box." It is applicable particularly to the valley in which the city is located, because the valley, almost as level as a floor, and approximately 15 miles square, is hemmed in by hills and mountains, broken by an occasional pass, through which highways lead to the east, south, west and north. In other words, the valley resembles a box. The city is 460 feet above sea level.

And do not mispronounce the name. To do so would bring a chuckle from the residents and immediately would brand one as a tenderfoot. The name is pronounced "el cah-hone," with long "o" and accent on the last syllable. "El" in Spanish means "the" and "cajon" means "box." Also, one

The valley originally was part of a Mexican land grant, consisting of more than 48,000 acres, made in 1845 to Maria Antonio Estudillo de Pedroarena, who was the wife of Miguel de Pedroarena, and which was known as El Cajon rancho.

It was not until 20 years after California became a part of the United States, following the war with Mexico in 1846-48, that settlement of El Cajon valley began. It was about 1869 that the valley was opened to settlement, and as late as 1877 only 25 white families had located there.

**HOTEL BUILT IN '70s**

In the 1870s, Amariah L. Knox, a native of Maine, built a hotel and livery stable at what is now Main and Magnolia sts., the heart of El Cajon, and the place became known as Knox's Corners. Knox came to California in 1859, but spent 10 years in Alpine county, prior to locating in San Diego county.

About that time, John Rhea opened a store and D. B. McFadden started a blacksmith shop.

The hotel was the center of early-day life in the community and was the stopping place for stagecoaches and for freighters, who drove 10 and 20-horse teams between San Diego and Julian, Descanso and other points in the mountains.

**FLUME PAYROLL LARGE**

Knox's Corners was a lively though small place in those days. Besides the gold mining activity at Julian, in the 1870's, there came construction of the wooden flume to carry water from the mountains to San Diego. Large numbers of

ings, to oranges, lemons, walnuts and olives. Crossroads stores developed into towns. Churches and schools were built and retail business assumed a wider scope.

**AUTO SPEEDS SETTLEMENT**

And then came the automobile, with the demand for paved highways. These highways opened up much of the interior country to more intensive settlement, and this became especially true of El Cajon valley, where many who have business in San Diego now reside.

The farms were divided into smaller tracts—five acres, two acres, one acre—on each of which a family resides in comfort and contentment.

In 1930, the town's population was 1050, and even as late as 1940, it was only 1471. It was during the war years that the town and valley made their greatest strides, with the 1945 census showing a population for El Cajon city of 3175, while Postmaster Jackson C. Roether estimates 10,900 persons were served by the postoffice as of March 1, 1946.

**CAME FROM EVERYWHERE**

From where did all these people come? They came from everywhere in the United States. Many were workers in San Diego's mammoth war plants, crowded out of San Diego by lack of housing. Soon all available houses in El Cajon were occupied, and numerous new residences were built. Some of these places were small—a room or two—but they emphasized the

**MANY SERVICEMEN RETURN**

Soldiers were held in the valley as replacements for troops in San Diego and elsewhere along the coast, in event of heavy casualties among the defenders, should the Japanese have invaded these shores.

Of this army of soldiers and marines that filled the valley, only two men remain. They are guards at deserted Camp Gillespie.

Many servicemen who were stationed here have returned as civilians to reside in the valley. Numerous G.I. homes are in evidence. Here several houses built of lumber from abandoned Camp Callan already are nearing completion.

While El Cajon experienced an extraordinary wave of prosperity

during the war years, because of the heavy military payrolls and the large portion of the city's population which earned big money in airplane factories, it has not experienced a letdown since the end of hostilities.

**IMPORTANT TRADE CENTER**

The only commercial center of consequence between La Mesa and El Centro, in Imperial valley, El Cajon, as the gateway to the vast mountain hinterland of San Diego county, is a supply point for many hundreds of ranchers in the back country.

Among communities from which El Cajon derives extensive trade are Suncrest, La Cresta, Harbison Canyon, Jamul, Dehesa, Jamacha, Ramona, Jacumba, Alpine, Descanso and Campo.

A dozen or more retail stores recently were opened or soon will be established in El Cajon. For these new buildings are required, and they are rising as fast as materials are obtainable. Several have been completed. Branches of San Diego stores are being opened and four or five chain stores have decided to enter the field.

**EVIDENCE OF STABILITY**

Chain establishments, it is pointed out, do not locate in a town until they have made a careful survey of trade conditions, especially with reference to business possibilities in the years to come. The fact that they have decided to locate in El Cajon is regarded not only as evidence of stability of the city, but reasonable assurance that it will continue to grow and prosper.

Plenty of parking facilities for customers constitutes a feature of the newly-established business houses.

When a workman can own a comfortable, low-cost home, located on an acre of ground, near his place of employment, convenient to churches, schools and stores, and in a town where he actively may participate in civic and social affairs, there is little likelihood, it is emphasized, that he will lend an attentive ear to the doctrines of ranting labor agitators.

**HAS TRACTOR INDUSTRY**

Among the newer industries of El Cajon is the manufacture of garden tractors. The factory, owned and operated by Joe Nichols, B. B. Heckert and J. J. Demeter, makes one tractor a day and expects to increase the output to three daily by Jan. 1. They employ 15 men.

The tractor, which weighs 635 pounds, is operated by a 4 1-10 horsepower engine, with three speeds forward and one reverse, and has individual brakes on each wheel. The tractor runs eight miles an hour at high speed. Advantages of the small tractor are ability to do close work on truck farms and in groves, and the low cost. The

# EL CAJON, IN HEART OF RICH AGRICULTURAL AREA, ENJOYS BOOM, LOOKS TO FUTURE WITH CONFIDENCE

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old. L. R. Lentz and R. F. Perry, concern makes aluminum fittings for irrigation standpipes. The put is 400 daily and the product old through dealers.

We are just getting started," said of the owners. Manufacture ofapsible umbrellas is contemplated but this work is held up by inability to procure the type of steel aired for the framework of therella, which will fold so that it be carried in a pocket.

he newest factory, which opened 5, makes tropical awnings of p aluminum. The awnings, attached to the outside of a window, operated from the inside, are a of cross between an awning a venetian blind. Owners of firm are L. C. March, B. J. nmin and J. B. Ellsworth.

## OTHER INDUSTRIES

ne of the more important tries is Cuyamaca Meats, ch Aubrey Sears is president. ager. The concern, established ember, 1940, does an extensive packing business, and at e time affords a ready market livestock from the back counting 1945, the company slaughtered 4842 head of cattle, 1358 calves, hogs and 313 sheep. Thirty per are on the payroll.

n especially interesting manufacturing plant is that of the American Pipe & Construction Co., which filling an order for 22 miles of l pipe, encased by concrete for San Vicente aqueduct. Sixty per of the order has been completed.

he pipe sections are 16 feet long, nches in diameter and 5/8 inches k. The company manufactures l cylindrical reinforcing cages, e of rods, which constitute the network, and rolled steel cylinders, forming the interior. Both automatically welded.

## CONCRETE STEAM-CURED

hen assembled, the steel portions upended in mammoth molds, which concrete is poured from a et carried on a huge traveling e. Each bucketful consists of e cubic yards of concrete. The re is steam-cured in 72 hours, then the pipe is ready for lay. C. M. Meade is general superintendent of the plant, which em's 60 men. The daily output is sections, or 416 linear feet.

Cajon Valley Citrus association, operative with 150 grower members, comprising about 75 percent of growers in the valley, pack and oranges and lemons. Raymond is secretary-manager. The association last year shipped 535 cars of fruit.

## IDENT FLIERS TRAINED

Cajon airport, at the north side he valley, is owned by Western es Flying service, and here student aviators are trained.

old-time industry of the valley at of Ed Rose, who manufactures deep-well turbine pumps.

mong the pioneer merchants is D. Hall, dealer in lumber and ling supplies, who has been in business in El Cajon since 1895, and at the age of 82 continues as

## PROUD OF STUDIOS

People of El Cajon point with pride to the Valley Studios, owned and operated by Mrs. Maybelle Smith. Mrs. Smith's portrait work has won wide recognition and her clientele includes many persons in San Diego.

A new building that has met with much acclaim is a modern theater in the downtown area.

El Cajon is served by a branch of the San Diego & Arizona Eastern railway from San Diego. Freight service only is maintained.

The valley is a part of La Mesa, El Cajon and Spring Valley Irrigation district, with Cuyamaca

lake and El Capitan reservoir as source of water.

An outlying community is Winter Gardens, consisting of attractive residences amid citrus and avocado groves. Here are homes of numerous San Diego business and professional men, and retired army and navy officers. Some pecans are grown here.

Villa Cara Heights, an area of 36 acres just west of the city, recently was taken into the city limits.

A convenience to the people of the valley is the newly-established bus line linking El Cajon, Santee, Bostonia and Lakeside. It is owned by Peter Lapp, who takes his turn with his employees as driver.

## CIVIC CENTER SITE HELD

The city owns a block of ground not far from the business district, which eventually will be used for a civic center. Located on the grounds at present are a playground, the chamber of commerce building, and log cabins for use by Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts.

Nearby is a park, owned by the county and leased for 20 years to the Rotary club. On this land is a building housing the county library, and it also includes two meeting halls for civil affairs, a kitchen and stage. During the war, the U.S.O. was quartered there.

El Cajon has house-to-house mail delivery, and two rural routes serve the valley.

## PLAN WAR MEMORIAL

The city has acquired eight acres to be used as a war memorial. Plans for the memorial include a baseball diamond, swimming pool, gymnasium, auditorium and a building to house trophies of the war. Thirty men from the valley lost their lives in World War II.

The Kiwanis club, of which Dr. E. J. Wells is president, has 54 members. A. Robert Hunter is president of Rotary, with a membership of 63.

El Cajon Valley Grammar schools have an enrollment of 1700. John Montgomery is superintendent. High

school students attend Grossmont. The city has six churches.

El Cajon was incorporated as a city of the sixth class in 1912 and includes an area of about one and a half square miles. Charles H. Kenyon is mayor and Vic Christianson is city clerk. The police department numbers four men. Rex Huffman is police chief and R. M. Halgren is chief of the volunteer fire department.

Building permits for the fiscal year 1945-46 totaled \$1,301,868, compared with \$97,920 for the fiscal year 1940-41.

Judge Edwin L. Thacher has an unusual distinction, in that he is a double judge. He is police judge of the city of El Cajon and justice of the peace of El Cajon township. He holds both courts in the same court room and more often than not those who appear before him do not know whether they are in police court or justice court.

## HOLDS NIGHT COURT

Judge Thacher probably is the only judge in San Diego county to hold night court. He holds court on Monday and Thursday nights for the convenience of defendants who are required to work during the day, and also to enable litigants in small claims court to appear without neglecting their work. Day court is held on Thursday afternoons and Saturday mornings.

El Cajon Valley Chamber of Commerce is only 3 months old, but is getting ready for big things. Headed by Jack Schrade, widely-known rodeo announcer, the chamber has undertaken as its immediate major problem the providing of an abundance of parking space in the downtown area.

## OTHER PROJECTS PLANNED

A second project is a clean-up campaign in the valley, while the third objective is installation of traffic control signals at the principal downtown intersection.

The chamber has 180 members, with a budget of \$8000 subscribed. Judge Thacher and H. L. Benbough Jr. are vice presidents. Foye Shu-

maker, secretary-manager, and Mrs. Lois Hall, office secretary. Shumaker and Mrs. Hall are full-time employees.

Allison B. Lutterman, member of the publicity committee, has been especially active in community promotion, since he returned from the war. He was in the First marine division and saw much activity in the Pacific war zone.

"Accomplishments that will come in the valley," said Schrade, "will be through the whole-hearted cooperation of the membership, which I am sure the directors have. We are striving for the betterment of the entire El Cajon valley. As problems arise, we are going to meet them in the order of their importance."