

Early 1800's, Time Valley Receives Name; Cultivated

(This is the 5th in a series of articles telling the history of El Cajon Valley. Herein is related the first actual recorded mention of the Valley by its present name and date.)

Although a great deal has been written concerning Fr. Junipero Serra, one of his successors, Fr. Mariano Payeras possibly became one of the most zealous developers of the mission chain in California during the early 1800's. For a number of years he tried in vain to secure authorization from his superiors to build additional churches and missions to care for the rapidly expanding band of converts.

With no encouragement from those in power, F. Payeras then (1821) Father Comisario Prefecto of the missions, arrived at the Mission San Diego resolved to carry on his ambition and to see the country to the east of the mission for the sole purpose of locating possible new sites.

It was on September 10, 1821 that this Father selected his party for the trip into the back country and which eventually ended at Mission San Gabriel. The party consisted of Fr. Jose Sanchez, who is credited with having recorded these events for posterity, six trusted soldier guards, and two retired soldiers, Jose Manuel Silvas and Marcos Briones.

In order to give the actual word picture of conditions which existed then, here and in the back country, the actual translation of Fr. Sanchez's diary as made by Fr. Zephyrin Engelhardt, O.F.M. in his book "SAN DIEGO MISSION" (1920.)

TRIP RECORDED

"We set out," Fr. Sanchez writes, "on September 10, 1821 at 4 p.m., from Mission San Diego, accompanied by six soldiers and two other men. Taking the course to the east for Santa Monica, a ranch of said Mission, which is called El Cajon and maybe about five leagues (15 miles) distant, we arrived there about 6:30 p.m., and passed the night there."

We cannot help but note the time in which the 15 mile trip was accomplished. As we look at the two possible routes that this party could have taken, it does appear that these men of God were rugged individuals, physically, to

have accomplished such a trip in a short two and a half hours.

"September 11. At about 3 a.m., we started for the north after about a league we moved through a canada called Arrastradero where we found a ranch called Michegua. Thence in zigzag course we came to Jucptahua with ten pagans. Leaving the plain called Pamo we came upon another rancheria called Canapui with six pagans. North by east through said valley, where the soil was not bad, we reached Egepam, which means foreign or strange. Here we breakfasted at 8 a.m. We found only three savages. From here we traveled past a spring northward through the Canada de Santalsabel, which the Indians called Elcuanam and which we reached at 9 a.m., after having journeyed eleven leagues since leaving Santa Monica."

TRIP CONTINUES

"September 12 — We spent the day visiting the sick and conversing with the pagans in order to persuade them to become Christians. This afternoon we returned to Santa Isabel Valley. It is small but the soil is good; there is a spring in the center and oak trees abound. This was September 13.

"September 14 — At daybreak we began to climb the Sierra Madre. We passed the place of the rodeo for the cattle belonging to Mission San Diego, going two hours and a half, and arrived at a place whence we expected to view the Colorado, but could not owing to the dense vapors; however we saw the Canada de San Felipe. There is no timber; only in the low lands we observed some poplars. This valley is three leagues long.

Going to the right we came to

the Canada de San Dieguito, where we found fields belonging to Mission San Diego. We descended on the right and came to the rancheria of Guichapa. Further down, about half league, is the spring called Geenat, further below called Tatayojai, where is the house known as Elcunam. The people of the surrounding rancherias were already assembled there. The place is called by us Santa Isabel. We stopped after having wandered up and down for about six hours. The Christians number 450 souls. They call the vicinity Jamatai."

The diary continues, giving a great deal of information. Fr. Sanchez continued on until he arrived at Mission San Gabriel.

We note in the first day of this diary that there is no mention of any population here in the Valley, and yet from previous records, it must be assumed that someone was here to care for the crops and live stock. As we check further in these old records we find a first mention of population in the Santa Monica El Cajon Valley.) This information was found on a scrap of paper in old Mission records. The note states simply that in October, 1838 there were 116 souls in the valley. This statement was signed by Fr. Fernando Martin. In that same year this record was made "The Rancho of Santa Monica has a vineyard with 8,000 grape vines (approximately 20 acres) two years old and well kept. In addition, it has a field planted with two and one-fourth fanegas** of corn and two fanegas of beans."

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FOOT NOTES

Although the party had been on the trail for about 6 hours with time out for breakfast, one cannot help but wonder if the good Father may not have meant 9PM. 33 miles in less than 6 hours over rugged country is almost unheard of in this age.

** A fanegas is equal to about 1½ bushels of seed corn, and beans. According to the Extension Service of the Department of Agriculture, a bushel of corn weighs 56 pounds. Usually 15 pounds of seed corn are required to plant an acre. This would indicate about 35 acres under cultivation. When we consider that most of this was plowed with a crooked stick with a steel point it appears as a rather big job.