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Chase's Investment In Valley Termed 'Foolish' By Associates

By W. S. Head

(This is the thirteenth in a series of articles telling the story of El Cajon Valley. Herein is related the continued story of Major Levi Chase and his many associations with the Valley's History.)

Major Levi Chase may have been credited with being one of the richest men in the county at the time of his death, but it is considered apparent that he did not acquire much of that fortune through the litigation action for the rights to the Cajon Rancho Grant. However, Chase did

receive a considerable payment from Isaac Lankershim in land acreage. In September, 1868 a deed was recorded in favor of Chase for 7624 acres. In the transaction, the price was placed at one dollar, for the undivided portion of the rancho.

With the fact that old records do reveal that Chase received these nearly 8000 acres, and yet was not paid for the work he did, can be understood when we realize that Chase would have also lost his land were the land patents not issued.

So much so, did Chase go after these land patents, that his associates in the 1870's termed his investments of time and work, foolish. They could not understand his reasons for all of this work for land which apparently had no value, when there was much more acceptable land available nearer San Diego. They pointed out to him that most of his land was located on the sides of hills and cluttered with boulders, and not fit for either cattle raising or cultivation. Oddly enough this land of which they talked so

cheaply, has in this century been considered the most valued avocado land in the U.S. today.

As the years passed, Major Chase realized a nice fortune through sales of his land in 1888. One of the biggest sales that he made during this Southern California real estate boom consisted of nearly 1600 acres. The final break up of the Chase ranch was made after 1907, when Charles Chase, the major's son, commissioned Al Miller, a local and rather well known real estate promoter, to sub-divide the remaining portions.

Apparently, after some 20 years, Chase learned to love the Valley which he had done so much for. He set off a 170-acre plot of the land and built a weekend recreation home. One writer of that day wrote of the Chase "Villa Cajon."

"The Chase place is nestled into the southeastern corner of the Valley, and shut in on three sides by hills. The house is located on a slightly elevated arm. The entrance to this Villa Cajon is pic-

turesque in the extreme. The great granite boulders, on either side of the drive, are just as nature left them and seem to have been thrown there by some monstrous giant. The entire drive (possibly Chase avenue) is lined by great eucalyptus and flower trees."

Major Chase was more or less like Geo. A. Cowles, doing a considerable amount of experimental work along agricultural lines. He is credited with having been the first to plant corn to any great extent. Further, he was credited with having produced one of the finest barley crops in the county, averaging a little better than 62 bushels per acre. He also brought into the Valley one of the first gang plows, and at one time had eight sets in operation.

One credit is that he found that the soil and climate were adaptable to the grape, but we still must credit Cowles with being the one to find the correct variety.

Back in the latter part of the 1880's, it seems that any old timer who did anything for a particular area was usually dubbed the "Father" of that area. In an 1889 issue of the publication, "GOLDEN ERA," a tribute is paid to Major Chase:

"He can rightly be called the Father of the Cajons."

Be that as it may, we still go along with the fact that it was Isaac Lankershim who plunked down the cash for the original purchase of the land, and the further fact that Lankershim was one of the top promoters of Southern California.