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# Valley Land Purchases Have Conflicting Story

By W. S. HEAD

(This is the eighth in a series in which the history of El Cajon Valley is told. Herein is related a little known fact concerning the purchase of the Valley.)

As has already been stated, when the Dons received their land grants from Mexico and Spain, the area seemed to slip into a blank historical era. There was the establishment of an Army supply train into the southwestern states and the local back country. Further, there was the establishment of a mail route, sometimes known as the Jackass Mail through the Valley, as well as a certain portion of the old Butterfield Stage Lines. But actually none of these things seemed to contribute materially to the Valley's history, other than perhaps being a terminal for most of the routes to the east.

It might be well if we were to think of the Valley at this time as a small portion of a city lot, and the impractical job of maintaining a record of events which might take place. The lands of the Dons were immense, and El Cajon was but another pasture. Thus from 1850 to 1867, there is little to relate. Perhaps there may be letters or old manuscripts which could tell us more, but at the time of this writing, they have not been brought to light.

Don Miguel prospered for a while after the Americans had successfully terminated the war on February 2, 1848. But the years that passed brought a continued influx of Americans bent on the establishment of stores, shops, and businesses. This was an unheard of venture for the proud, happy-go-lucky Don. His business became more and more competitive. Where once Don Miguel had paid little heed to these enterprising men, he suddenly found himself squeezed from his own field of livelihood.

In 1848 Miguel had been appointed as the first Port Director in San Diego Bay, but in the latter part of 1849 he was relieved of these duties, which caused him considerable disappointment as was indicated by his letters to certain military men of that time. On March 31, 1850, Don Miguel Telesfore de Pedronena passed away, of a heart attack, leaving

his wife, his son, Don Miguel Jr., and two daughters. Although at one time considered a rich man and one of the best dressed Dons of all California, and the holder of much land, he did leave his family in rather poor circumstances.

Most writers of El Cajon's past have failed to point out the date of the death of the senior Don Miguel, and many times the reader is confused into the belief that the events which did occur after his death were of his doing. It, therefore, should be remembered that the following references to Don Miguel in these accounts are of his son.

### SON CARRIES ON

In most accounts of El Cajon Valley, it is stated that Isaac Lankershim made the original purchases of land from the Pedronena family. But an examination of certain records, available at the Sierra Meuseum and at the hall of records at San Diego Civic Center, reveal that such was not the case. Rather, that there was a most unusual story that surrounds this first sale.

First indications of this new side light were found, hidden away on the back page of an almost forgotten newspaper, "THE SAN DIEGO WEEKLY BULLETIN," dated September 4, 1869. The item is quoted in its entirety:

**CAJON RANCHO SALE**  
"The Cajon Rancho, the southern part of which is about 14 miles southwest (sic: due east) of San Diego, one of the finest ranchos in the county, containing some 10,000 acres of some of the choicest land. (Arthur's note: Apparently the writer was writing mainly of the rich river bot-

tom of the Valley, rather than the entire rancho which consisted of more than 47,000 acres.)

"About a year ago, three quarters of this ranch was sold for about a dollar an acre. At that time the well known revivalist, Elder Knapp was blazing away at fandangos and bull fighters in his peculiar manner when he shifted from the gospel and went his bottom ducklet on a quarter of the three quarters of the whole, which consisted of some 9000 acres of bottom land good and indifferent of which 2000 acres consisted of the finest land in the entire Valley.

"Then in a few weeks, the old gentleman who had for many years been engaged in the most energetic battle against the world, the flesh and the devil quietly sold his mind for \$9000 which he promised to pay and had never been compelled to advance a cent. In a matter of a few weeks he sold his holdings for \$27,000, making some \$18,000 in cold cool cash in the operation.

"I would suspend all my theological engagements gladly were I able to make as much as in such a brief transaction as this. Signed—B. C. Trueman."

As we examine this news item we find there are conflicting as well as revealing facts leading to the eventual purchase of the entire El Cajon Rancho.

The conflicting part in this note is in the statement that Elder Knapp "went his bottom ducklet" in the purchase, and in the next paragraph the writer contradicts himself when he says, "For \$9000 which he promised to pay and had never been compelled to advance a cent." Although this Trueman does leave many facts untold, it is almost a certainty, that a barn storming revivalist in the 1860's was not doing so well that he could have a loose nine thousand dollars in his pocket to make such a deal. One must, therefore, try and piece these meager facts together and come out with the possible events which may have led to this strange transaction.

It is regretable that this all took place in the latter part of 1867. Had the deal been done in the following year, the same year in which the miscellaneous records of San Diego County were first recorded, much more of the true facts could be told.