

Valley Mission Rule Ends As Rancho Era Begins

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(This is the seventh of a series telling the history of El Cajon Valley. Herein is related those events which led to the end of the Mission Rule and the start of the Rancho El Cajon.)

It may be just a bit hard to believe, but according to the records, the Padres of the California Missions, for a number of years, violated the laws of the governing bodies of Spain and Mexico, as they furthered the settlement of the area of California.

It was always the contention of these Franciscans, that the land belonged to the Indians, regardless as to what the governments of these countries might say. As early as 1773, there had been laws passed by Spain, which provided for private grants to the native Indians and soldiers. Yet the missions defied this law, contending that they hold the lands until such time as the Indian was considered civilized. They were most successful in this attitude, during and up to the time that Mexico busied herself with fighting for her independence from Spain, in 1821. So successful, in fact, that by this time there were only 20 privately owned ranches in all of California.

In 1830, Mexico wrote a new provincial secularization act, which was designed to break this strong Mission hold. But still the Missions defied these orders. The Mexican government became angered at these acts of defiance against her wishes, and in April, 1834 called for complete secularization** of all Mission holdings within four months. This act was carried out so far as taking the land and possessions from the Missions. But, instead of these lands going to the Indians, it was gradually being turned over to the form of land grants to a favored few. The Mexican government gave many of these grants to their ex-soldiers who had fought for her independence, and to others whom the government or her rulers owed political debts.

It was in the year of 1838, that Don Miguel de Pedrorena arrived at the Port of San Diego from Peru. He was a native of Spain and had been educated in London. He was young and filled with ambitions towards great attainments. In a relatively short time he became one of the most influential persons in the area. His superior education, magnificent manner of dress, his business of importing and his sympathies towards Mexico all had much to do with his



Don Miguel Telesforo de Pedrorena, first citizen of San Diego, and the first owner of the Rancho El Cajon. Don Miguel was born in Madrid. He was an aristocrat. In 1837 he came to San Diego as super cargo aboard the brig DELMIRA of which he was a part owner. He represented the McCall Importers & Company of Lima. He settled in San Diego early in 1845, and appointed Collector of Customs and Harbor Master of San Diego in 1847-48. Bancroft, the historian, also says that he was a Justice of Peace. He died March 31, 1850 and was buried at Campo Santo, in Old Town.

— Photo The San Diego Historical Society.

successes.

Not long after his arrival he met and wooed the beautiful Dona Maria Antonia, daughter of Jose Antonio Estudillo and the grand daughter of Jose Maria Estudillo. The Estudillo family built the now, world famous Casa Estudillo (Ramona's Marriage Place) and was active in all of San Diego's civic affairs throughout the first

of the 1800's.

We mention this family genealogy for the fact that it was to Dona Maria that the grant of El Cajon Rancho was made by the Mexican Governor Pio Pico in 1845 at the insistence of Don Miguel, as payment of a \$500 debt due him from that government. It is interesting to note that between the two families they had also received other land grants. There were the Otay Rancho, the San Leandro Rancho (near San Francisco), a vague claim to the Temecula Rancho, and a very strong claim to the San Jacinto Nuevo Rancho near Perris. Later Don Miguel, Jr., son of Dona Maria married the daughter of General H. S. Barton who owned the Jamul Rancho.

RANCHO GRANT

The El Cajon Rancho grant consisted of 11 square Spanish leagues, or 48,766.85 acres. To give an idea as to the size of this Rancho with present day land marks, it extended from the eastern limits of the ex-Mission Rancho (approximately in line with Grossmont and Mount Helix) eastward to a point beyond Flinn Springs. The Southern boundary was just north of the Sweetwater River and Jamacha Ranch; the northern line was above the bed of the San Diego River a short distance. The boundary lines were most irregular, and according to old time residents and engineers, the entire area was marked by 13 oaken posts, long since eroded to time. Included in this area were the present sites of the towns of El Cajon, Lakeside, Santee, Bostonia, Johnstown, Glenview and parts of Grossmont.

The El Cajon Rancho differed from other ranchos throughout the area, in that there are few indications of either the Dons or the Padres building a permanent building here. However, according to a letter written by a Judge Ben Hays in 1862, he tells of two houses in the northern portions of the Valley. One was just two miles above the mission dam near the river and belonged to Jose Antonio Estudillo. The other was eight miles further up the river and was the summer home of Jose Maria Estudillo. This accounts for the ruins which once existed in the northeast corner of the Valley. Guesses are that these houses were built about 1847-50, and were demolished by the flooding of the San Diego River. The judge goes on to say that Jose Antonio once cultivated some eight acres.

FORTUNE FOR DON MIGUEL

Don Miguel's success as an importer continued to bring him fortune and prestige. With the outbreak of war between Mexico and

the U.S., he shifted his support to the U.S. forces and through his aid and influences was appointed a captain in the cavalry. He, later, was instrumental in the establishment of San Diego at its present site.

Although the Dons were very often well educated, one point stands out in regards to their reign, they seldom left records of any kind, such as had been the practice of the Padres. However, from other sources it is a known fact that cattle became the principle product of the ranchos in the San Diego area. Not for the meat, as it is today, but strictly for the hides and tallow. In the 1840-50's the Valley was an important grazing range described as having "grass belly deep to the fine cattle." These fine herds were the result of the Mission's cattle

which went with the grants.

There is an interesting story about these Dons. When it came to work, they would always make the job into a game. Their time was taken up with pleasures rather than to mar it with an eight-hour a day routine. In the slaughter of cattle, they made it into a sport, rather than a hard job.

The Dons would arm themselves with long knives, somewhat like a sword. They would mount a speedy horse and then select an animal from the herd which was to be killed. Other riders would herd the animal into a full gallop. The armed rider would then overtake the beast at a full gallop. When alongside the bull, he would wield his knife in such a manner for the blow to strike the back of the neck, severing the spinal cord and instantly killing the bo-

vine.

Behind these riders would follow two groups of Indians and other laborers. One group would skin the carcass, and the second would gather the tallow. The remaining meat and bone was left where it lay, the hides and tallow being the only valued commodity.

**Complete secularization in this case meant to convert all the Mission lands, cattle, buildings, etc., from the church to the Indians and grantees, without reservation. The monies of the Missions were turned over to the Mexican government. In other words, everything which the Padres had worked for nearly a century to build, was taken from them, and according to the government, returned to their rightful owners.