

Dec. 2 - 1952 - 88.5

Squatters Nearly Took Over Cajon Valley In Early Years

By W. S. HEAD

(This is the 11th in a series in which the history of El Cajon is told. Herein is related the story of the squatters who once nearly took over the Valley.)

After Lankershim had purchased the Rancho El Cajon from Don Miguel, Knapp and Dodge, troubles began to take place in rapid succession for the new owners, and which eventually led into some seven years of litigation. This litigation was taken all the way from the local county courts to the U.S. Supreme Court, and eventually led to the issuing of a land patent signed by President U.S. Grant.

In 1869, the U.S. Government announced that the Mission lands, other than those parts held by recognized grants from the Spanish and Mexican Governments, were open for settlement and homesteading. Since the Civil War's end, a great many people from the battle damaged areas had migrated to the West Coast in search of new lands to re-settle and make new homes away from the memories of the war.

With this announcement, there was an immediate surge of new settlers into all parts of the mission lands, including much of those lands which had been purchased, such as the Cajon Rancho. Property lines were vague and past government surveys which were on record in a great many cases were not correct or revised to indicate new ownership.

The problems of the "squatters" and "land grabbers" soon became a major problem, so much so, that a Captain R. K. Porter, a cor-

respondent for the San Francisco Bulletin, found cause enough to visit the Valley in the early part of 1869 to report the situation for his paper. Briefly, here is the way that Captain Porter reported the situation:

"If the floating, miserable land claims were disposed of legitimately, there would be much more encouragement for the settlers than there is at present. The 'Mission Claims' is now advertised to be sold at auction on the 10th of February of this year, which shows conclusively that even the rich land grabbers have not made any very heavy bids for that uncertain of all uncertain claims which have no given starting point and no boundaries; and yet all the land for leagues around is claimed by some of the parties.

"Trouble is ahead on the Cajon Rancho on account of these new surveys made by Major Levi Chase and other owners. The squatters are indignant at being included in the recent survey, especially those who have worked hard for a couple of years, be-

lieving of course that the survey of Col. Jack Hays some years ago was all correct. It has now been claimed that the new owner (apparently Lankershim) has taken in a great deal more than 11 leagues."

From these words of Captain Porter, it appears that the squatters or perhaps we could say "homesteaders," arrived here in the Valley a couple of years before Don Miguel had sold out to Lankershim. Although there does not appear to be any official record of actual violence between owners and the squatters in El Cajon Valley, there are certain vague records which mention one or two lynchings taking place somewhere in the vicinity of the present day Daley Ranch out on highway 94.

Adding to further complications which had fallen upon Rancho El Cajon, it was discovered shortly after the exchange of the property that the U.S. Land Offices had not officially recognized the original El Cajon Rancho grant by Pio Pico.

This discovery soon spread, and added a still greater influx of squatters and oddly, most of the people were under the impression that regardless of the fact that Lankershim had paid better than \$60,000 for the land, that with this release by the government, that included the Cajons.

It was at this point in the history of El Cajon Valley that Major Levi Chase, representing Lankershim, undertook the long legal battle to free the Rancho from the group of the squatters and land grabbers.

Doug