

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BOSTON RANCH
AND EARLY BOSTONIA IN EL CAJON VALLEY

Compiled by Hazel Sperry - about 1968

Information for this brief history has been gleaned largely from original copies of very early newspapers - The El Cajon Star (1889); El Cajon Valley News (1892-1894) & (1897, 1898); Hall & Kessler's "Once-a-Week" newspapers (1899); and from more recent articles which appeared in various issues of El Cajon Valley News; San Diego Union & Tribune papers; also from Douglas Gunn's "Picturesque San Diego" (1887); a one page "History of Bostonia" written by the late Mary J. Collard; and a paper on "Early History of Bostonia" prepared by Irene L. Vita. Additional information and mementos also included in this history were contributed by Mrs. Ruth Koch, Mrs. Harold Ross, Mrs. E. E. Rogers, Mrs. Irene Vita, Mrs. Dorcas Asher Drown, the late Mrs. Josephine Asher Vacher, Mr. & Mrs. Jackson Roether, Mr. & Mrs. Rexford Hall, and Mr. Leland Barker. Appreciation also goes to Mrs. Basil Morrow for the typing of this material as well as that of previous reports; and to Mr. Robert (Bob) Eckert for recapturing for us with his camera, the two 5"x7" scenes of the old Bostonia Store from some extremely faded original photos. I can always depend on "Bob" for help with his camera when I find otherwise irreplaceable photos - whether they are from faded newspapers or someone's album.

Hazel Sperry

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BOSTON RANCH
AND EARLY BOSTONIA IN EL CAJON VALLEY

Compiled by Hazel Sperry

After the old Spanish "Rancho El Cajon", which consisted of 48,799.85 acres was sold by the Miguel Pedorena family in about 1868, it was opened to settlers in 1869. During the Spanish Rancho period the land had been used mainly for grazing of cattle which were raised for their hides and tallow.

These first few settlers of 1869, sparsely scattered throughout the large El Cajon Valley, started out with grain raising; but very soon some of the ranchers began experimenting with the raising of deciduous fruits, olives, and grapes on a portion of their acreage. Those who had acreage on the higher ground surrounding the Valley floor also planted some citrus trees. The climate seemed very favorable to all of these crops. Experiments were also being conducted to perfect the making of raisins; and with the successful production of fine raisins, many of the ranchers on the Valley floor turned much of their acreage into vineyards. And so El Cajon Valley's wheat production which had been the largest in San Diego County gradually gave way to vine and fruit growing.

It was about this time (1886) that a group of men from Boston became interested in the promising possibilities of success with raisin vineyards here, and they purchased about 585 acres here in the northeast section of El Cajon Valley in order to establish a large grape vineyard for the production of raisins. Mr. Souther and Mr. Crosby were the two men who came out here from Boston to get the ranch started, and all accounts seem to refer to them as the owners. They named their ranch the Boston Ranch.

In the description of El Cajon Ranches which appeared in the December 31, 1892 issue of El Cajon Valley News it states -

"The acreage devoted to raisins is about 3,500 which is divided into

some sixty vineyards varying in size from a few acres to nearly six hundred, the Boston Ranch being the largest, as it is probably the most productive. Twenty five men are constantly employed here, but this number is increased to 300 during harvest time. The machinery used in stemming, cleaning, and grading raisins does the work splendidly, hence the "pack" of this ranch is first class and the raisins command guilledge prices".

"Messrs. Souther and Crosby, the owners, have spared neither pains nor money to bring their ranch to its present high standard.In addition to the vineyard they have a three year old orange grove of 3,500 trees on the Boston Ranch, already in bearing."

In those early days there were few roads in the Valley and still fewer roads with names. Hence it is not easy to describe in simple fashion the boundaries of this ranch - especially since it was irregular in shape; but roughly speaking it might be described as follows:

The southerly boundary was somewhere near the present Madison Avenue. The westerly line was between the present First Street and Mollison Avenue. A portion of the northerly boundary was somewhat north of the present Greenfield Drive and it included the area later called the "Orlemvine" Ranch. "Orlemvine" was a "coined" word meaning "Oranges - Lemons - Vines". This same section was finally subdivided as the "Orange Vista Tract". It was on this higher ground that they had about fifty acres planted to citrus trees, and it is also where they built their large reservoir into which water was pumped from their ranch well and then distributed in pipes to other parts of the ranch. In the section north of Broadway, the easterly boundary was along Second Street. In the section south of Broadway the easterly boundary was near the present Third Street which was called Meridian Road in those early days because the road followed the 33rd Meridian.

The Boston Ranch was developed with quite a definite plan for farm buildings and all of the necessary equipment. The plans also made provision for the establishment of a store, post office, church, etc. as needed.

A stone and iron fountain was installed in the center of the intersection of Broadway and Second Streets for the use of wagon teams.

The Boston Ranch house was built just south of Broadway and a short distance west of Second Street - almost directly in line with the south end of Crosby Street. The house is still standing and in use at the time of this writing (January 1968). It is a yellow two story house. Originally the house faced north toward Broadway, but with later streets being cut through, the entrance was changed to Peach Avenue.

On the Boston Ranch there were the big ranch house, several cottages, two packing houses, a winery, and a warehouse, barns, etc. The packing houses were set afire during World War I and burned to the ground. The winery was a stone building and stood for many years on the south side of Broadway just west of Second Street. It was finally demolished in 1961 to make room for the Bostonia Shopper's Mart.

During the grape picking season many additional workers were hired to help. Many Indians came and camped there while helping with the harvest. The grapes were dried on large wooden trays. The Indians would take some of the extra empty trays and arrange them as makeshift shelters underneath trees which lined the roadways. For many this was their shelter and camp.

Many vineyards in the Valley had a double row of olive trees planted around every ten acres of vineyard. Ranch roadways were between the rows of olive trees which provided shade for the harvesting wagons filled with grapes. For any grapes which were to be marketed as grapes rather than raisins it was very important to keep the grapes as cool as possible to prevent spoilage. In those early years of slow transportation and no refrigeration the successful marketing of fresh fruits and vegetables to points any distance away from the farm or ranch was a real problem. Miss Kate Sessions (remembered as the "Mother of Balboa Park" and "San Diego's First Lady of Flowers") was given the credit for the suggestion of planting the olive trees in the vineyards to provide the necessary shade during the harvesting.

Mexican labor was also brought up from Mexico to help with the harvest. The Mexicans always camped in the "Triangle" at the "angling" intersections of Second and Broadway.

"Peon" was a guessing game which the Indians played in the late evenings and which attracted much attention by its weird noise. The Indian men sat around a stretched blanket and passed peon sticks back and forth under the blanket while the women chanted in very weird tones. Bets were made on who would be holding the stick when the chanting would suddenly stop. This weird chanting set all the dogs in the vicinity to howling, and their howling caused the more distant dogs to join in until the air in the entire Valley was somewhat vibrating with the unmelodious sounds.

From researching early newspapers we learn that Joseph Donald was ranch superintendent in those early years and that when Mr. Souther and Mr. Crosby erected their general merchandise store and post office in the summer of 1894 that Mr. Donald directed the construction of the building. Mr. Donald was manager of the store and was also appointed postmaster of the new post office which was given the name of "Bostonia" and the store was called "Bostonia Store".

In the same year that the Bostonia Store and Post Office were constructed (1894) an acre of ground was donated and the Episcopal Church was erected on Clarendon Street near Second Street and near the Bostonia Store. For sometime prior to that "Episcopal services were being held regularly in the Meridian school". (The old Meridian School was built on Meridian Road (Third Street) near Highway 80 in 1889). The Episcopal Church was called the St. John's Episcopal Church.

Mr. Joseph Donald's name appears in a number of accounts indicating that he was quite influential in community undertakings such as establishing the Meridian Grammar School and the El Cajon Valley High School District. (The Meridian School District was formed in 1887 and the two room - two story Meridian School was built in 1889. The El Cajon Valley High School District was formed in 1893 and the High School classes were held in the

upstairs room of the Meridian School from 1893 until 1908 when the El Cajon Valley High School was built just up the road at Broadway and Meridian Road.)

The late Josephine Asher Vacher used to tell the story of how she and Gracie Donald were asked to pack raisins to be entered in the 1893 World's Fair at Chicago. (Josephine Asher Vacher's parents, Mr. & Mrs. J. M. Asher were the ones who developed Castle Rocks Ranch here in El Cajon Valley in about 1879) The girls packed the raisins (which had been dried in bunches with the stems left on) in boxes with fancy paper. Each girl received a first prize for her entry.

In about the latter part of 1898 Mr. C. O. Nichols became the ranch manager of the Boston Ranch. Mr. D. G. Gordon was appointed as Postmaster. Mr. Uri Hill purchased the Bostonia Store which he managed until his death in 1903. Uri Hill had been an active participant in the growth and development of El Cajon Valley since 1869 when he and his wife, Renette, and children came to the Valley and established their Claydelle Ranch.

Mr. Nichols remained as Boston Ranch Manager for a number of years with continuing success and also contributing his share of leadership to the community.

Because of limited space the full sequence of store owners and postmasters will not be listed here.

Mr. & Mrs. Murray Wright purchased the Bostonia Store in 1913 and Mr. Wright also became Postmaster. He operated the store until the early 1940's at which time he leased out the store but he continued as Postmaster until December 31, 1950 when he fully retired. After retirement they continued to live in their Bostonia home until their deaths. Mr. Wright passed away in 1953 and Mrs. Wright in 1961. Mr. & Mrs. Wright always showed an active interest in civic affairs and contributed much to community betterment during their long residence in Bostonia.

Mrs. Wright, while reminiscing with Mrs. Irene Vita about early days in Bostonia told the following incidents which Mrs. Vita recorded in a paper written on "Early History of Bostonia".

"On North Second Street just to the rear of the Bostonia Store, a private dance hall had been built by members of fifty pioneer families; and it was used for dances, parties, and meetings. It was called the "Bostonia Hall". Mr. & Mrs. Wright lived next door to the Hall. After some of the families had moved away and others had died, the hall was sold to the bank. The bank rented it out for \$5.00 a night. Many community affairs including school plays were held in the hall. For two years Mr. & Mrs. Wright rented the hall on Friday nights and sponsored teenage box socials and dances. The young people danced to phonograph records and an occasional violin or guitar."

"One of the early landmarks later removed, was a stone fountain in the center of the street at Second and Broadway. This provided water for the wagon teams which often came from as far away as Julian. It also provided a swimming spot for "Mama Duck", a pet of Mr. and Mrs. Wright."

" 'Mama Duck' is really a part of Bostonia's history. In the early days she was a familiar figure around the town. Each morning she would be waiting for the store to open, and she would be the first to enter. She would waddle to the cracker bin and stand patiently until she was handed her morning cracker. Mama Duck had no mate, and many early settlers remember the time Mama Duck hatched a setting of chicken eggs. Everything was fine until Mama Duck tried to get her chicks to swim in the fountain. Her efforts always attracted crowds. She never taught her chicks to swim. They remained on the edge of the fountain, frantically trying to keep up with her as she swam."

Mr. Leland O. Barker was the last proprietor of the Bostonia Store. He purchased the store in 1948 at a time when many of the small privately owned stores were "bowing out" to the large chain stores which seemed to be sweeping the country. But Leland (as he was affectionately called by his friends and patrons) was convinced that the old Bostonia Store still had a place to fill - and with this sincere interest in preserving the heritage that was "hers", he began pumping new vitality into its precious old fashioned atmosphere. Thus for another twelve years, he continued to preserve

and radiate the spirit of friendliness, honesty, and helpfulness that had touched Bostonia Store patrons down through its many long years of service.

On July 17, 1954 the Bostonia Post Office moved out of the Bostonia Store into separate quarters across the street on the south side of Broadway. Mr. J. George Fonchak was the Postmaster at that time. On August 1, 1958 the Bostonia Post Office was officially discontinued and became a branch of the El Cajon Post Office. On April 23, 1960 this Bostonia Branch of the El Cajon Post Office moved into its newly erected building at 1062 North Second Street - still located on property which was a part of the old Boston Ranch.

The old Bostonia Store was finally closed on February 17, 1960 and the building was moved in December of that year to make way for the Standard Oil Service Station and for the planned Safeway Store which now also stands at the crossroads where little "Bostonia" was born and reared. The store was removed in two sections, and taken to Alpine where it was to have been reconstructed and authentically preserved as a part of Sleepy Hollow Ranch and Ghost Town, but due to some mishap the plans were not carried through to completion. At last report the old Bostonia Store building had been dismantled for use as second-hand lumber.

Bostonia's resident doctor was Dr. Eugene Mathewson who came to Bostonia in 1896 and built his house (which was both office and living quarters) on North Second Street at the corner of Sumner Street. There he lived and served the medical needs of the people for fifty four years until his death in 1950.

When Dr. Mathewson came to Bostonia in 1896 there were eleven doctors in the County outside of San Diego, but within the next five years, one by one, they either died or left the County and for the next decade, he said that he was the only doctor between San Diego and the Cuyamaca Mountains. He used a relay of three horses to cover the vast territory. For calls near home, he rode a bicycle to give his tired horses a rest. When he bought an automobile in 1906, he had to keep a horse to drag the car back home when it broke down, which was often.

"Probably my most difficult case", he said, "was that of a scalped

Indian." Two Indian bucks who were working in a vineyard got into a fight, and the one Indian took his hooked grape knife and started scalping the other. He got his enemy's scalp 5/6ths off before friends intervened. He was brought to Dr. Mathewson's surgery almost dead. The skull was covered with gravel, but the doctor cleaned it as best he could, put the scalp back and sewed it on. Fortunately, it healed which was not much less than a miracle.

Subdivision of the Boston Ranch began in 1919 when some half acre tracts were offered as residence property. Response to this offer was slow but in 1925 a new sales campaign was launched and many sales were made. The real estate office was situated on the "Triangle" at Second and Broadway.

Mr. Amey built a large dance hall on Broadway - east of Second Street. The dance hall was very popular and so the real estate office had a little replica of the dance hall setting in the real estate office window as an advertisement. Later the dance hall was sold to Mr. Walter Judy. When this hall burned down in 1932, Mr. Judy replaced it (at the same location) with the Bostonia Ballroom which is still in use today.

Bostonia might well boast of having been the Valley's first "airfield". For it was on the Gordon Ranch upon which are now located the present Greenfield Jr. High School, The Aero Drive-in Theater, and the Bostonia Elementary School, that Donald H. Gordon, in 1909 built and flew a plane which is believed to have been one of the first powered flights in the west. That was less than six years after the Wright Bros. first flight. Don Gordon's ground crew were the local grammar school students. "As a schoolboy", said Don Gordon, "I used to go back into the hills behind Bostonia and watch the eagles and buzzards floating around, diving on their prey, and I wished I could do that. It seemed that it should be possible. It seemed so effortless."

Mrs. Dorcas Asher Drown who was one who witnessed Don Gordon's flight gives this account of it.

"I had just put my daughter to bed on the patio of our house, which

overlooked the Gordon ranch."

"She shouted, 'Mama, there's a man carrying a load of lumber up in the sky' and I looked up just in time to see the plane fall".

"All I saw was a big cloud of dust when it fell. But my husband and several other men ran over from the Bostonia General Store and there was Don, climbing out of the wreckage without a scratch on him".