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San Diego Historical Society photograph

The Ames Ranch near Los Coches Creek in El Cajon as it appeared in the mid-1880s. The 28.39-acre spread purchased by Jesse Julian Ames in 1859 had formerly supplied hogs for San Diego's Mission De Acala. Ames eventually built a large adobe house on the property, a dam across the creek and a small wheat mill powered by horses or oxen. A historical marker notes the location of the ranch.

# A look back/Visiting historic landmarks

Ever wonder what El Cajon was like in its infancy? How streets or areas came to be named? What kinds of people were important to the early growth of the community?

Anyone who has lived in the area for even a short time has probably been curious about these subjects.

This column aims to help answer those questions and instruct us a little bit about our history. It is being presented by the El Cajon Historical Society and The Daily Californian. The photographs and artwork shown with each column are from the society's collection on display at the Knox Hotel on Magnolia and Park avenues in El Cajon.

The feature will appear monthly.

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of the El Cajon Historical Society

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED IN LOCAL history and wanted to know, and visit,

The plaque wasn't ready in time for the ceremony, but a rubbing of the marker was put in place, and a Bear State flag promised to fly with the American flag from the newly installed flagpole. This is to be dedicated following services on Sunday, July 3, when the church members and members of El Cajon Historical Society will join for a picnic and program on the church lawn. This will be the annual historical society's picnic honoring early residents of El Cajon and their descendants. It will also be the annual election for the society.

In their May 1 ceremony, the Native Sons used sand and gravel from all the counties of California, cement from all the state's mills and water from the early missions to make the mortar to set the plaque in place.

## 'Los Coches'

One of the older historical landmarks dedicated by Cuvamaca Parlor, Native

Los Coches was the smallest of the land grants made during the Mexican period. Only 28.39 acres, it once was part of the large El Cajon Rancho during the Mission period. It was granted in 1843 to Apolinaria Lorenzana by Gov. Manuel Micheltorena, and was held for the Mission when all church lands were being parcelled out to land seekers.

Long before any part of El Cajon Valley was settled by easterners, Capt. Jesse Wilbur Ames sailed into San Diego, married his Spanish sweetheart, and, in the 1850s, obtained this Los Coches ranch. He planted a double cactus fence, raised sheep and cattle, constructed a dam, erected a flour mill, and opened a blacksmith shop. The ranch was also a stop on the San Diego-San Antonio mail route, better known as the "jackass mail."

Ames died in 1866, leaving his widow and 10 children.

A succession of owners brought Mr. and Mrs. W. W. Wheatley to Los Coches in 1925. They were the ones who built the Windmill house for which the area is widely known and which is still occupied.

Needless to say, there's an absence of hogs.

There was no regular caretaker during many of the early years of the cemetery, except when members of El Cajon's

Cuyamaca Parlor of the Native Sons took it upon themselves to clean up the area periodically. This was especially true around the annual May 30 Decoration Day observance, now known as Memorial Day. A 1965 newspaper item said that the Native Sons had been doing this cleanup for about 10 years.

The official dedication of the cemetery, and the placing of the marker, took place on Aug. 21, 1971, with five state officials of the Native Sons, two past grand presidents and all officers of the Cuyamaca Parlor taking part.

## Wooden flume

There are some long-time residents of the valley who can remember when a wooden flume, starting from a small dam on the San Diego River above Lakeside, crossed hills and valleys carrying water from the Cuyamaca mountains to a reservoir in La Mesa.

This flume, whose completion was celebrated in February 1889, traveled 35 miles, over 315 trestles and through eight tunnels to Eucalyptus Reservoir and then to La Mesa Reservoir, now known as Murray Dam. The last remaining portion was removed in 1937, although rights-of-way for the flume still exist.

A restored portion of the flume can be seen at the R.M. Levy Treatment Plant on Lake Jennings Road. This was erected by Cuyamaca Parlor of the Native Sons, in cooperation with the Helix Water District, successor to the San Diego Flume Co. Grand President Larry E. Mowinckel of the Native Sons and other state officials took part in the Aug. 22, 1981, dedication of the historical monument at the treatment plant. John Montgomery, past president of Cuyamaca Parlor, was master of ceremonies.

This memorial is just inside the gates of the treatment plant, can be seen from Lake Jennings Road when the area is closed.

## Bancroft House

Just over the hill, on Memory Lane in Spring Valley, is the Bancroft Ranch House, named for its third owner, operated as a museum by the Spring Valley Historical Society, and having three historical designations.

This adobe house was built in 1856 by native Diegueno Indians from the land on which the house stands. The owner was Squire Augustus Ensworth, a native of Connecticut and one of California's first assemblymen and a justice of the peace.

After Ensworth's death, the ranch was

taken over in 1864 by Rufus Porter of San Pedro who used it as a boarding house for literary celebrities, enlarged the spring and built the wall.

Hubert Howe Bancroft was the next owner, taking possession in 1885, renaming the area Spring Valley. He is best known for the many volumes of California history which he wrote here.

In 1940, the Spring Valley Chamber of Commerce purchased the adobe house and three and one-half acres. It was opened as a museum in 1963, named after Bancroft, its most known owner.

The house is State Historical Landmark No. 656, proclaimed in 1958; was made a United States National Monument in 1964 with dedication held in May 1965, and was dedicated by the Daughters of the American Revolution two years ago.

## Knox Hotel

There's one historical marker in El Cajon that you'll need to go inside a building to see.

This plaque was given during dedication ceremonies in May 1967 by Illa Knox Parlor, Native Daughters of the Golden West.

It was placed on the outside of what is the oldest commercial building in El Cajon, constructed in 1876-77, and known as the Knox Hotel.

At the time when the plaque was installed, the building was owned and was the home of the S.H. Mathews family and located on the southeast corner of Lexington and Magnolia avenues.

When the city bought this old seven-room building in 1973 to preserve it and had it moved to park land at the corner of Park and Magnolia, the plaque was removed.

When the Knox Hotel was restored as a historical museum and operated by the El Cajon Historical Society for the past 10 years, the plaque was remounted on an inside wall, along with names of those who are life members of the society or who have had memorial gifts given in their names.

The plaque can be viewed during the museum's regular visiting hours: the first and third Saturdays from 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.; the first and third Sundays and the first and fourth Thursdays, from 12:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. Special group tours can be arranged at other times.

These are just a few of the historical landmarks around El Cajon. Many more can be found throughout San Diego and the entire county, so, when you're out driving and happen to see a historical marker sign by the side of the road, why not stop and enlarge your knowledge of county history?