

# FRESNO PAST AND PRESENT

Quarterly Bulletin of the Fresno County Historical Society

Volume 4

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Number 1

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The series of articles which has been appearing in this Bulletin, dealing with the railroad history of our county, has aroused considerable interest among many readers, and has engendered a greater appreciation of the part played by railroads in local history. As a further indication of this interest, we noted with great pleasure that the August 1960 issue of **The Western Railroader**, a magazine published monthly for the railroad fan, was entirely devoted to the history of the interurban and street-car railroads of the City of Fresno. This issue, consisting of about twenty pages, is so full of good text, pictures, and maps of early Fresno street-cars that we thought it a pity not to try to share the information with the members of our Society. Accordingly we wrote to the editors of **The Western Railroader**, asking if we might purchase issues in quantity. We received an affirmative reply, and after some delay were fortunate enough to receive a large shipment—practically all the copies still remaining in stock—for a very reasonable price.

It is now our intention to give these copies away free to our members, on the following basis: one copy to each member of the Board of Directors; one copy to each Life Member; one copy to each Sustaining Member upon renewal of membership in 1962; a certain number to be retained in our files for future use; and the balance to be distributed to Institutional and Active Members renewing their membership (or becoming a member for the first time) in 1962. This last category of distribution will be on a first-come-first-served basis, as long as the copies last. We believe there will be enough for all who renew their membership during the first few months of 1962. Still, to be sure

you get your copy, don't fail to renew your membership as soon as you can.

This gift from the Society to you will, we hope, prove enjoyable reading to those of you who remember the old Fresno Interurban that used to run out Floradora, or the Fresno Traction Company's line out to the River, and will prove informational to those of you who have come to Fresno since these landmarks or "the good old days" have disappeared.

It is my hope also that this New Year's gift will serve to lessen the blow that comes with the announcement that we feel compelled, in view of rising costs, to raise our Active Membership dues to \$2.00. The new schedule of dues is printed on page 4 of this Bulletin. For families who have been already paying \$2.00 for a "Husband and Wife" membership there will be no actual increase; nor will those libraries and other educational institutions which derive no personal benefit from attendance at our meetings be asked to increase their support.

With a somewhat larger budget we hope to be able to do a little more towards the maintenance of our museum in Roeding Park, for one thing. Our Museum Committee chairman has been working very hard to clean out some of the dead storage, to replace some of the very old display cases with more modern ones, and to make the entire building more attractive to the public and more informative of the history of our county.

We are also looking forward to the future at Kearney Mansion. No decision has been made by the County as to the personnel or maintenance that will be required, but we expect that our Society will have some part in it, and we shall probably have some expenses to meet, at least initially.

Our best wishes to you for 1962.

EDWIN M. EATON, President

## RANCHO LAGUNA DE TACHE

(Editor's note: This page is normally devoted to a summary of the talk given at the previous quarterly meeting of the Society, and there follows a summary of the talk given by Charles E. Dixon, Fresno County Administrative Assistant, on October 22, 1961. Because of the unusual interest and importance of his topic, twice the usual amount of space is devoted to this subject. The history of the railroads in Fresno County will be continued in our next issue.)

The Rancho Laguna de Tache, lying almost entirely in Fresno County, though spilling over a little into Kings County, is one of the few Mexican land grants made in the Central Valley. It is sometimes erroneously called a "Spanish Land Grant," a term often applied, equally erroneously, to many other grants of land in California. Actually there is no such thing as a Spanish land grant. Prior to 1822, when California passed from Spanish imperial to Mexican republican domain, the Spanish crown had made a number of concessions of land, thirty-six of them between 1776 and 1822, to deserving citizens, mostly retired soldiers. These concessions conveyed the right to use the land, but the title to the land remained with the crown.

After 1822, the Mexican government began to make actual grants of land, according to a fixed formula for determining availability of the land, its suitability for agriculture, and so on. Among the earliest of these grants were the land concessions previously made by the Spanish government, so that in a few years most, if not all, of the original Spanish "concessions" had been converted into Mexican "grants," and clear titles to the land were issued.

Not all of the Mexican grants were confirmations of earlier Spanish concessions, however. The Mexican government seemed to feel that it had the right to give away, or later on to sell, unlimited areas of land to anyone who asked for some.

In the Central Valley particularly, land was plentiful, and not in much demand. All a person had to do was to petition the Governor for some land—up to eleven

square leagues (approximately 48,700 acres), which was the maximum size of a grant. The petition was usually accompanied by a crude sketch map, called a *diseno*, showing the general location and boundaries. The second step called for the Governor to ask a local official to determine if the land was vacant, and also to make a rough survey. This official's report, called an *informe*, was attached to the petition and returned to the Governor. The Governor then made a notation on the margin of the original petition, "Let the title issue." A grant, the official document describing and limiting the actual property, was then drawn up in duplicate. The original grant was given to the petitioner, and the copy, with the petition, the *diseno*, and the *informe* attached to it, was filed in the official archives at Monterey, the entire bundle being referred to as the *expediente*.

There was yet one more step, however, before the title to the land was made secure, and it was the failure of the various governors to carry out this step that later caused many claims to be invalidated by the U. S. Land Claims Commission after 1851. This was the requirement that the Governor present the petition to the members of the *Diputacion*, or Territorial Legislature, who alone had the right to approve the grant, even though their approval was seldom if ever denied.

In 1843 a grant of some land had been made to a certain Don Jose Yves Limantour, on the south side of the Kings River, where a cattle ranch had been subsequently established and called El Rancho de Laguna de Tache, from the Tache or Tachi Indians who lived somewhat west of the area, but who used to come to the Kings River bottom lands each year to hunt and fish.

On December 7, of the same year, 1843, Don Manuel Castro, Military Prefect of the Monterey District, petitioned Governor Micheltorena for eleven square leagues of land on the opposite side of the Kings River, for the purpose of grazing the surplus cattle from his Monterey ranch. It is to be assumed that the Governor at once ordered an *informe* to be

made, according to the usual custom. Two men set out on horseback, holding between them a lariat fifty varas in length (approximately 137 feet). This lariat was tied to a long stake at either end. One man plunged his end into the ground at a given starting point—a heap of stones or an identifiable tree—while the second man rode off as far as the fifty-vara lariat would allow. He then drove his stake into the ground, never dismounting for a moment. The first man then rode past him to the end of the lariat again. They continued this stopping and riding past each other until they had enclosed the designated amount of land in a rough circle or ellipse, designating certain natural features as boundaries as they went, and had returned to their starting point. If the ground was a bit wet, and the lariat stretched a little, the petitioner might get a few more acres of land than if the “survey” were made in the summer.

It is possible that an *informe* on the new Rancho Laguna de Tache was not made at this time. If the governor knew the petitioner well, and if the land was obviously not in the vicinity of already occupied land, he could dispense with the *informe* and issue a grant at once. Micheltorena, knowing Castro well, and seeing that the Limantour land was used as the south boundary, and that the land was otherwise not in dispute, probably issued the grant at once. The conveyance was made on December 12, 1843, by Pio Pico, later a governor also, but then a private citizen and member of the *Diputación*. This conveyance gave Castro the grazing land he sought for his cattle, and after a while he dispatched an overseer and three vaqueros to the Kings River, where they built a house and corral a few miles west of present-day Laton. He himself never lived on the grant, preferring to live in Monterey.

When Pio Pico became Governor, Castro wrote to him asking for a confirmation of his grant. This confirming grant was issued by Pico on January 10, 1846. Since this date was several months prior to the date of the raising of the American flag over Monterey, July 7, 1846, which was taken as the limiting date at the

Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, this grant of Castro's should have been patented without question by the U. S. Land Commission. It was rejected, however, on October 17, 1854, and Castro had to appeal to the District Court of the Southern District of California. This court reversed the prior decision, and on February 10, 1858, declared Castro's title to be valid. A patent was finally issued on March 6, 1866, based on an accurate survey made by T. J. Dewoody in February, 1864.

This survey delineated the grant by section lines, and declared it to be 48,800.62 acres in extent.

The starting point for the survey, marked as L.T. No. 1 (Laguna de Tache No. 1), was “. . . an oak tree thirty-six inches in diameter, on the Fourth Standard Line South, on the line between Townships 16 and 17 South, Range 22 East . . .” This tree is still standing, and it was suitably marked and dedicated, with appropriate ceremonies, by the Jim Savage Chapter of E Clampus Vitus on April 9, 1961.

Castro did not long enjoy possession of the Laguna de Tache. Being an absentee landlord, he looked upon his land as a source of income and borrowed extensively on it, allowing large portions of it to be lost to him by foreclosures. In fact, by December 8, 1863, he had disposed of the last of his holdings, a certain Jeremiah Clarke being by then the largest holder of Laguna de Tache property.

Before his death in 1883 Clarke sold some of his land to a group of real estate men, among whom was S. N. Lillis, who built the “Grant House” on Mt. Whitney Avenue. Lillis and associates sold their interest to another group, among whom was Llewellyn Arthur Nares and William E. G. Saunders. Under Saunders and Nares the Grant developed into a thriving agricultural area. In 1898 the town of Laton was established, to be followed by Riverdale and Lanare, the latter named for Nares himself.

Manuel Castro, if he could come back today, would certainly never recognize the land he once owned. The open, grassy plains of his day have become the heart of the wealthiest agriculture area in the land.

Form 3547 Requested

## COMING EVENTS

January 21, 1962, Sunday, 2:00 p.m.

Winter quarterly meeting of the Society  
Place: Guarantee Room, Blackstone and  
Ashlan Avenues, Fresno.

Speaker: Miss Barbara L. Wynn, Direc-  
tor, San Joaquin Valley Information  
Service.

Subject: "The San Joaquin Valley In-  
formation service and its relationship  
to historical research."

April 6-7, 1962.

Fifteenth Annual California History  
Foundation Institute, University of the  
Pacific, Stockton 4, Calif.

April 14-21, 1962.

Fifteenth Annual California Missions  
bus tour, sponsored by the California  
History Foundation. Write to U. of P.,  
Stockton 4, California, for details.

April 15, 1962, Sunday, 3:00 p.m.

Spring quarterly meeting of the Society.  
Place: R. C. Baker Memorial Museum,  
Coalinga. Note time and place of this  
meeting. Details will be announced in  
the April issue of the Bulletin.

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membership in the Society.

Please send manuscripts and pictures to  
the editor, and notices of change of  
address to the secretary.

## GIFTS TO THE SOCIETY

Gifts continue to come to the Society,  
and among some recent acquisitions, omit-  
ted from the October issue for lack of  
space, are the following.

A book "California at the World's  
Columbian Exposition, 1893", including  
pictures of the Fresno County Exhibits  
at the Chicago fair, from Lesley Einstein.

Early Kearney Park photographs from  
Miss Pearl Hart in memory of her parents  
Mr. and Mrs. C. H. Hart.

Please remember the Society if you  
have or know of items such as the above  
that would make welcome additions to  
our files.

### Fresno County Historical Society Officers

President: Edwin M. Eaton

Vice-President: Richard E. Denton

Secretary-Treasurer: Nelle Minnick

146 E. Simpson Avenue  
Fresno 5, California

### Membership Dues:

Institutional (Library, College,  
Museum, etc.) .....\$ 1.00

Active (includes all members of  
the same family) .....\$ 2.00

Sustaining - - - - - 10.00

Life - - - - - 100.00

Membership year is from January through  
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### Fresno Past and Present

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