



SPRING 2011

LOS ANGELES CORRAL

NUMBER 262



Don Abel Stearns late in life – a very different view than the idealized portrait of him as a younger man you usually see. (Courtesy the First American Corporation)

Drought, Debt, and Development The Story of the Stearns Ranchos

by Phil Brigandi

In 1860, Abel Stearns was one of the richest men in California – and one of the ugliest. In 1835, during an argument over a keg of brandy, a drunken sailor had stabbed him repeatedly with a knife, leaving him disfigured in face and speech. Behind his back, his Mexican neighbors called him *Caro del Caballo* – Horseface. Yet he married one of the most beautiful girls in California, and made her very, very rich.

Born in Massachusetts in 1798 and orphaned by age 12, Abel Stearns went to sea as a boy. He traveled the oceans on trading ships, first as a sailor, and later as a supercargo or agent, responsible for buying and selling hides, tallow, and manufactured goods. In 1822, he began trading in Mexico, and in 1826 moved to Mexico City, where he became a naturalized citizen two years later.

(Continued on page 3)

THE BRANDING IRON
The Westerners Los Angeles Corral
Published Quarterly
OFFICERS 2011

TRAIL BOSSES

PAUL SPITZZERI.....*Sheriff*
1157 Carbon Canyon Road, Chino Hills, CA 91709-2384

ERIC NELSON.....*Deputy Sheriff*
3342 N. Lamer St., Burbank, CA 91504

JOSEPH CAVALLO.. *Registrar of Marks & Brands*
2441 Ganesha Ave., Altadena, CA 91001

TED DALTON.....*Keeper of the Chips*
322 Blue Cavern Pt. Long Beach, CA 90803-6813

PAUL SPITZZERI.....*Publications Editor*
1157 Carbon Canyon Rd., Chino Hills, CA 91709

WILLIS OSBORNE.....*Past Sheriff Trail Boss*

MICHAEL PATRIS.....*Past Sheriff Trail Boss*

APPOINTED OFFICERS

JOSEPH CAVALLO.....*Wrangler Boss*

SHERRY CAVALLO.....*Wrangler Boss*

DOUG BRUTSCHE.....*Daguerreotype Wrangler*

JAN CHIK.....*Roster/Sunshine Wrangler*

GARY TURNER.....*Westerners International Rep*

WILLIAM DAVIS.....*Librarian*

MILLIE TISCAREÑO.....*Membership*

STEVE CRISE.....*Paparazzo*

ERIC NELSON.....*Editor, Brand Book 23*

Subscriptions:
Los Angeles Corral of The Westerners
P.O. Box 1891, San Gabriel, CA 91778-1891

*The Branding Iron solicits articles of 2,500 words or less,
dealing with every phase of the Old West. Contributions
from members and friends welcomed. Copyright © 2011
by the Westerners Los Angeles Corral*

Publication Layout by Katherine Tolford

Editor's Corner

The Branding Iron is one of the most important productions of the Los Angeles Corral of The Westerners and, in Phil Brigandi's highly capable hands for the last three years, it maintained its recognized standard of excellence. I'd like to formally thank Phil once again for his contribution to this publication and wish him the best as he relaunches the journal of the Orange County Historical Society. Of course, Phil will continue to remain an active member of the Corral and, presumably, will be sending submissions from time-to-time that are as substantial as his feature article in this issue.

Phil's accounting of the history of the Stearns Ranchos is not just vital to understanding the Orange County area from the 1860s to the 1920s, it is an important contribution to the history of land tenure more broadly, especially as it relates to investment from San Francisco capitalists and the massive migrations to the region from the 1880s onward. Hopefully, anyone reading the essay will agree.

In this issue, we also pay tribute to some of our valued members who have recently passed on, members who not only made important contributions to the Corral, but to their professions and their historical interests. Robert Blew, Doyce Nunis and Don Torguson were significant figures within the Los Angeles Corral and, while we mourn their passings, we are grateful to be able to acknowledge their fellowship and involvement with our organization.

Lastly, a couple more acknowledgements are in order. First, we are happy to have Katherine Tolford back to do the layout for this publication, a job that she had for several years in the past. We also want to point out that our fellow member and printer, Trushar Patel, has been working with this periodical for 25 years. Without Katherine and Trushar, it simply would not be possible for *The Branding Iron* to be issued this year., while we are in transition to having a long-term editor starting next year. A grateful "thank you" to them both!

—Paul Spitzzeri

He came to California in 1829, when the missions still dominated the area. He soon settled in Los Angeles, where he opened a store and continued to deal in hides and tallow. He often served as a middleman between the trading ships on the coast and the ranchos of the interior. In 1834 he established a warehouse and store above the harbor at San Pedro, where he dominated the Los Angeles trade for the next decade.

In 1841, Stearns married Arcadia Bandini, the daughter of a prominent ranchero. She was 14; he was 43. It was by all accounts a happy marriage – though childless.

So instead, Don Abel raised cattle.

A Yankee Ranchero

Cattle were the backbone of the California economy in the first half of the 19th century. Their beef fed the population, and their hides and tallow were sold and traded for manufactured goods shipped in from the United States, England, Mexico, South America, and Asia.

Prior to 1834, the missions owned most of the cattle in California, and controlled much of the grazing land. The only *rancheros* were a few retired Spanish soldiers, who had decided to stay on in the new land.

Under Spanish law, all of California was considered the property of the King. The missions were given the right to use their share on behalf of the Indians, but they did not own the land. The handful of *pueblos* and *presidios* scattered along the coast were given four square leagues each (about 18,000 acres), some of which was held in common, and some divided among the settlers. One of the towns was *El Pueblo de la Reina de los Angeles* – the town of the Queen of the Angels – [editorial note: some believe the original name to have been *El Pueblo de Nuestra Senora de los Angeles de Porciúncula* — the town of Our Lady of Los Angeles of Porciuncula] founded in 1781.

But what of the retired soldiers and their growing herds? In 1784, Governor Pedro Fages took it upon himself to allow a few of them to start their own ranchos, outside the mission and pueblo lands. These were not land grants, but concessions, grazing

permits, a right to occupy the land that still belonged to *El Rey* or the King of Spain.

One of the first three lucky recipients was Manuel Nieto, who was given the rights to use all the land between the Old San Gabriel River (now the Rio Hondo) and the Santa Ana River, from the foothills to the sea. Later, on protest of the missionaries at San Gabriel, the northern end of the Nieto concession was cut off, leaving him a miserly 163,000 acres.

In 1821, Mexico broke away from Spain, taking California with them. In 1828, a new law was passed, giving the government the right to grant up to eleven square leagues (some 48,000 acres) to any Mexican citizen of good standing who would develop and stock the land. The impact of the law was delayed in California until 1834, however, when the secularization of the missions began, stripping them of their lands and authority.

It was also in 1834 that Manuel Nieto's heirs petitioned the Governor of California to formally grant them the land their family had controlled for half a century. Faced with the size of the Nieto concession – and the number of descendants – Governor José Figueroa made five separate land grants to various members of the family – Santa Gertrudes, Los Coyotes, Las Bolsas, Los Alamitos, and Los Cerritos. Suspiciously, Governor Figueroa was, very shortly afterward, able to purchase the Rancho Los Alamitos for a nominal fee.

It was Los Alamitos that soon caught Abel Stearns' eye. After considering the purchase for several years, he bought, in 1842, the 28,000-acre grant and began his new career as a California ranchero.

While the hide and tallow trade was the basis for the California economy in the 1830s and '40s, there were two main drawbacks. First, there just wasn't much money in it, as in, not much cold, hard cash, because it was largely a matter of trade and barter. And that led to the second problem. The manufactured goods the rancheros needed had to be shipped in from great distances, at great expense.

The Mexican War of 1846-48 and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended

the war and transferred California from Mexico to the United States, did little to change the hide and tallow trade. But just days before the treaty was signed, a carpenter looked down into the millrace of a new lumber mill along the American River and spotted a few yellow flakes. James Marshall had found gold at Sutter's Mill, and California would never be the same.

Beginning in 1848, tens of thousands of miners flooded into Northern California. The surge in population was so great that California skipped being a territory and jumped straight to statehood in 1850.

Los Angeles County was a long way from the gold fields, but the rancheros there felt the impact of the Gold Rush in their own way. Cattle that were once worth perhaps \$4 for their hides and tallow were suddenly selling for as much as \$75 on the hoof for beef to feed the hungry miners. Regular cattle drives began between "the Queen of the Cow Counties" and the Mother Lode. Men like Abel Stearns grew wealthy on Northern California's gold.

There is a certain irony that the romantic image of the rich ranchero in his luxurious clothes, mounted on a fine horse with saddle and bridle trimmed in silver – for whatever truth it holds – is an image from the 1850s, after California had become a part of the United States. And this was not a moment too soon. For with American statehood came newfangled American ideas like property taxes, which weighed heavily on the *Californios* who measured their land in thousands of acres.

Worse yet, while the United States envoy negotiating the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo had pledged to recognize all existing property rights in those parts of Mexico seized by America, President Polk and Congress had this provision stricken from the document. Gold Rush induced pressure, especially from Northern California, where a growing population was hungry for land, led Congress to pass the California Land Act of 1851. This legislation considered all California land titles suspect, and required owners to prove their claim before a commission and then endure automatic appeals by the federal

government for successful confirmations before a patent was issued. That meant government commissions, hearings, testimony, attorneys, judges and courts, and all the expense that went with them. Some ranchos were not confirmed for decades.

It is common to speak of the old Hispanic *Californios* struggling to adapt to the new American laws of taxes and land commissions (along with the high interest rates then common on loans). But in fact, the race of the ranchero made little difference under this new system. Foreigners had been moving to California for decades. A few, like Stearns, had become Mexican citizens and secured land grants of their own. Except perhaps for the language barrier, they faced the same challenges as the *Californios* – and often with the same results.

To compound matters, in the mid-1850s the Gold Rush began winding down. The surface gold in the rivers and creeks had been largely panned out. Now it was a matter of hardrock tunneling and hydraulic mining to chase the rest. The population in the gold fields dropped, and so did the demand for beef. At the same time, an increase in the local livestock and cattle driven overland to California to take advantage of the booming market here were driving prices down.

To stay afloat, the rancheros began borrowing money. The interest rates were staggering – three, five, even ten percent, compounded monthly. And when payment came due, old debts and their accumulated interest were often rolled over, and the cycle started again.

A first, this rising tide of debt worked to Abel Stearns' advantage. As a merchant as well as a ranchero, he had easier access to hard cash, which he was willing to lend at prevailing rates. If the rancheros paid off the note, good, but if they could not, better. The debt would allow Stearns to sue them, receive a judgment, and extract payment – sometimes in livestock, other times in land.

The Ranchos of Los Coyotes and La Habra (also once parts of the vast Nieto concession) were both owned by Italian-born Juan B. Leandry when he died in 1843. Andrés Pico then arranged to buy a

half interest in the ranchos from Leandry's mother, borrowing \$6,000 from Abel Stearns to close the deal. In 1851, when Pico couldn't pay the money back, Don Abel claimed Pico's half. Meanwhile, Leandry's widow, Francesca, married Francisco Ocampo. They also borrowed money from Stearns and, failing to repay the loan, they were foreclosed on by him in 1860, and Los Coyotes and La Habra became his.

The Rancho Las Bolsas was granted to Catarina Nieto in 1834. Seven years later, she allowed her brother, Joaquin Ruiz, to carve out the Rancho Bolsa Chica as a separate grant from Las Bolsas. In 1849, Señora Nieto sold a half-interest in the Bolsas to Ramon Yorba and his siblings. Yorba's wife was a Morillo, a niece of José Justo Morillo, who was married to Catarina Nieto's daughter, Maria Cleofa, giving him an additional claim on the Bolsas as well.

In time, the Morillos also borrowed money from Stearns, and Ramon Yorba borrowed money from John Downey and James McFarland, who were using the same debt and foreclosure method to build their ranching empire. Don Abel bought Yorba's note from them, and either bought, or loaned and foreclosed on the interests of his siblings.

With all the pieces in place, in 1861 Stearns forced the sale of the Ranchos Las Bolsas and Bolsa Chica at public auction, and he bought them both. Other ranchos were purchased outright. Juan Pacifico Ontiveros sold 1,165 acres of his Rancho San Juan Cajon de Santa Ana to the original Anaheim colonists in 1857. He gave another 3,900 acres to two of his sons. The remaining 21,000 acres, *mas ó menos* (more or less), he sold to Abel Stearns in 1863.

Stearns eventually controlled some 200,000 acres in Los Angeles and San Bernardino counties, "the largest land-and-cattle empire in southern California," according to historian Robert Glass Cleland. But while Stearns was busy foreclosing on others, his own debts were mounting. He had begun borrowing at the same usurious rates, and as his cattle ranges expanded, so did his operating expenses and property taxes.

The final blow for Stearns, along with

many of his contemporaries, came in 1863-64, when a withering drought swept Southern California, decimating the open range. Cattle died by the thousands for lack of food and water. As Don Abel's income dried up, his debts mounted and his taxes went unpaid. He was forced to borrow more and more just to hold on to what he had.

He was not always successful. In 1865, financier Michael Reese turned the tables on Stearns, forcing the sale of the Rancho Los Alamitos – his first and favorite rancho – to settle a \$20,000 debt.

Mired in debt now, Stearns borrowed money anywhere he could, offering ranch land as collateral to secure his debts again and again. His ready cash was gone. His income was almost nil.

A Matter of Trust

Early in 1868, Stearns borrowed \$43,000 from the Hibernia Loan & Savings Society of San Francisco. As collateral, he had to put up all of his ranchos in Los Angeles and San Bernardino counties.

There seemed no good way out for Don Abel now. He had forced the sale of so many other ranchos for debt, but now his own end was in sight. The old days of the vast, unfenced ranchos where half-wild cattle grazed on grass and scrub were numbered. On many of the ranchos, sheep were replacing cattle; sheep raised for their wool – a rising market once the Civil War cut off the North from the Confederacy's cotton. Some men were getting rich on sheep.

Stearns was not rich. He was poor – land poor. But land would always have value, and there were people in California who could see that. At the last moment, Stearns was rescued. In a remarkable real estate deal, his debts vanished, and he was set back on the road to wealth.

Alfred Robinson was one of Abel Stearns' oldest friends. He stood for him as best man at his wedding to Arcadia Bandini in 1841. He had first come to California on a trading ship in the same year as Stearns. The two had done business together many times.

Now Robinson looked at his old friend's situation, and looked at his many ranchos. In

those vast acres, Robinson saw an opportunity. The land was good for more than cattle ranching. Subdivided and properly marketed, it could be sold off in small parcels to farmers and town builders. And as the area grew, the land would only increase in value.

So Robinson went to work to round up a group of San Francisco investors to buy and market Stearns' land. The men who agreed to put up the cash were Edward F. Northam, Charles B. Polhemus, Edward Martin, and Sam Brannan. Robinson would manage the operation, and get a share of all sales. Together they formed the Robinson Trust. Then they made Stearns a very generous offer. In return for almost all of his Los Angeles and San Bernardino county lands, they would pay him \$50,000 up front to settle his debts, give him a 1/8th interest in the trust, and pay him \$1.50 an acre out of every future land sale.

Don Abel knew a good thing when he saw it. On May 25, 1868, he deeded over 177,796 acres of choice Southern California real estate to the Robinson Trust.

Much of the land was in what is now Orange County, including the Rancho La Habra, the Rancho Los Coyotes, a portion of the Rancho San Juan Cajón de Santa Ana, the Rancho Las Bolsas, and the adjoining Bolsa Chica – that is, most everything west of the Santa Ana River to the Rio Hondo (except the Rancho Los Alamitos), north to La Habra on the east and Norwalk on the west. In what is now Riverside County, Stearns signed over the Rancho La Sierra, and his late father-in-law's Rancho Jurupa. Only his Rancho La Laguna in Los Angeles County was held back as a gift to his wife.

Northam, Polhemus, and Martin had all come to California during the Gold Rush and gotten rich in mining, railroads, and real estate. Polhemus was born in New Jersey, but went to South America at an early age. He came to California during the Gold Rush, not as a miner, but as a businessman and banker. In the 1860s, he was investing in mining in Nevada's Comstock Lode, and new railroads in the San Francisco area. Martin was one of the founders of the Hibernia Loan & Savings Society. Sam Brannan had come a few years

earlier, with a group of Mormon colonists, but had left the church and been involved with all sorts of real estate schemes. Edward Northam had the largest share – 3/8th – and Edward Martin had another quarter. Charles Polhemus got an eighth, as did Abel Stearns. Sam Brannan also got an eighth, but quickly sold it to George Howard and A.V. Bowman, giving them each a sixteenth share.

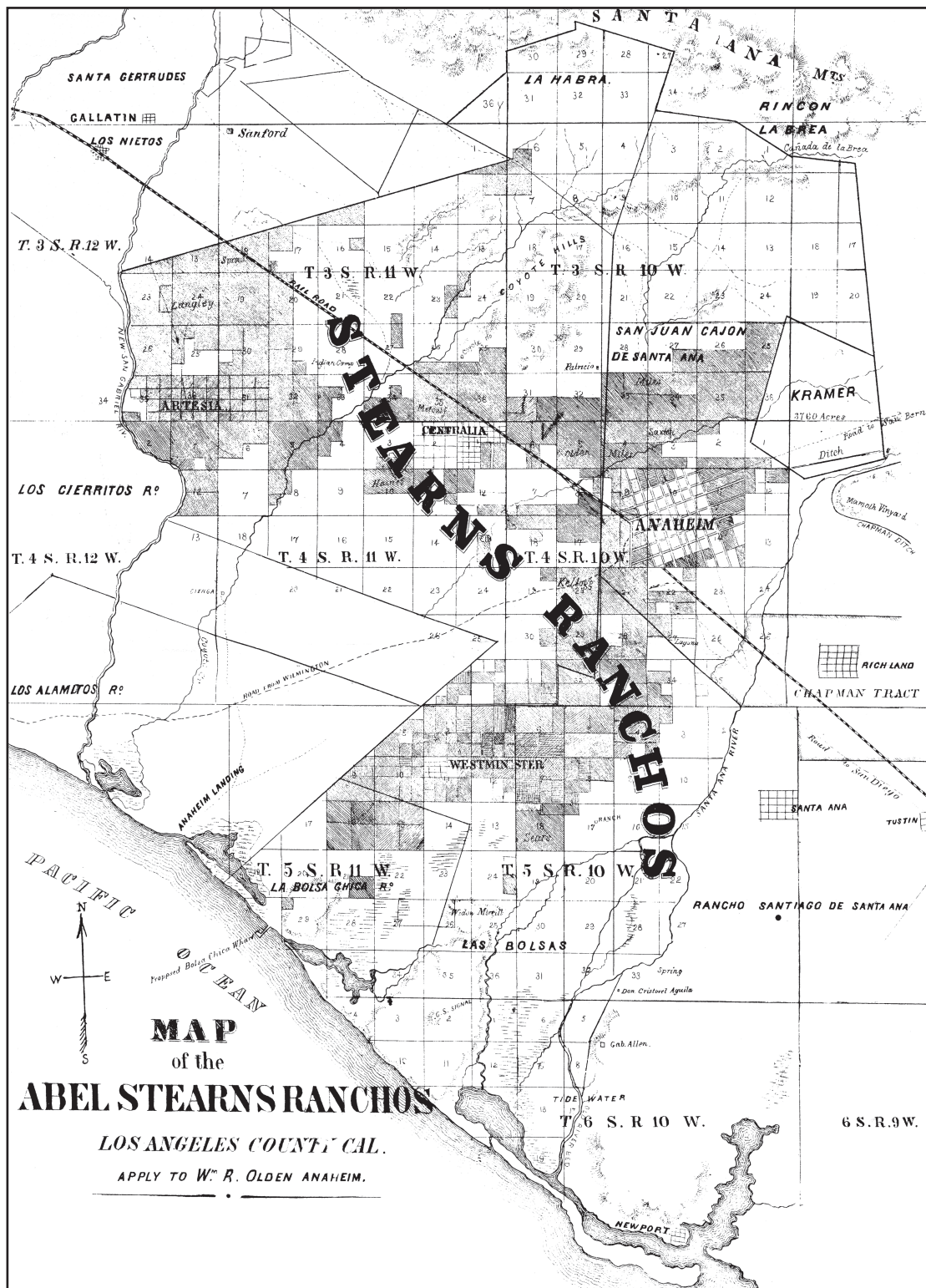
To sell their new holdings, the Robinson Trust organized the Los Angeles & San Bernardino Land Company. The name was a little unwieldy, so most everybody just called it the Land Company, or more simply, the Stearns Ranchos.

The land was subdivided on the usual government pattern of 640-acre sections. The square parcels were then divided up into farm lots ranging from 20 to 160 acres. Sales began almost immediately, and within just a few months, over 12,000 acres had been sold.

During the first few years, the Los Angeles & San Bernardino Land Company launched an aggressive marketing campaign in California, across the United States, and even into Europe. Brochures, maps, and advertisements were everywhere. The Land Company also hired agents to represent them and handle sales in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Anaheim.

Charles B. Polhemus' cousin, Henry D. Polhemus, was the company's representative in Anaheim for the first few years. He was followed by William R. Olden, a consummate booster. Later Robert J. Northam, a nephew of Edward Northam, took over. "Diamond Bob" would cut quite a figure locally for a number of years, as will be subsequently noted.

Olden wrote numerous features for the *Anaheim Gazette*, most of them either promoting local products or proposing prospective new ones. Olden was "an accomplished publicist who wrote voluminously for periodicals," Anaheim historian Leo Friis wrote. "He was a better than average writer. Commencing with an 'attention-getting' paragraph, he led his readers through a column of informative material written in something of a scientific vein and gener-



The Stearns Ranchos covered much of western Orange County and southeastern Los Angeles County. Not shown are the company's holdings in what is now Riverside County.

ously larded with observations on the superiority of lands in the Anaheim area.”

Some of Olden’s articles were later published in pamphlet form. He was involved in several of the early attempts to create a new county out of the southeastern sections of Los Angeles County. He remained with the Company for most of the 1870s, but eventually moved to Los Angeles, where he died in 1883. Six years later, his aim for a new county was realized when Orange County was organized.

But the Robinson Trust had a problem – and its name was Abel Stearns. Despite having signed away almost all of his property, Stearns continued to act as if he still owned it. He was still grazing cattle and horses on the land. He made offers to sell portions of the ranchos at prices different from the Land Company rates. And worst of all, he rented large swaths of land for sheep grazing. In 1870, Stearns rented out portions of the Ranchos La Habra, Los Coyotes, San Juan Cajón de Santa Ana, and Las Bolsas to various sheep ranchers at about 10¢ per head for the season.

All this was quite improper, since Stearns no longer controlled the ranchos. Plus, the sheep, as his new business partners pointedly reminded him, ate the grasslands right down to the roots, leaving the area barren – and harder to sell. Even Alfred Robinson finally grew disgusted with his longtime friend.

The problem was solved in 1871 when Abel Stearns died, once again a rich man. His widow, Arcadia Bandini de Stearns (later Mrs. Robert S. Baker) survived him by 41 years, and was one of the richest women in Southern California when she died in 1912.

New Towns

The sale of the Stearns Ranchos led to the founding of a number of new communities in the 1870s; some of them survived and thrived, others faded and failed.

The area around Anaheim filled in quickly with new farms. By 1870 enough families had settled southwest of town to support their own school district, which they dubbed Fairview. But the community never grew

large enough to have its own post office, and the school district was annexed to Anaheim in 1888.

North of Anaheim, the local ranchers voted to form their own school district in 1873. There was already talk of a separate Orange County then, which may be why they chose the name Orangethorpe (thorpe is an Old English word for village).

Orangethorpe barely ever rose to the level of a town, yet it was briefly its own city (1921-23). The school district survived until 1954, when its territory was divided between Anaheim and Fullerton.

Rev. Lemuel P. Webber, the new pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Anaheim, saw an opportunity in the vast Stearns Ranchos. In 1870, he arranged to take charge of some 7,000 acres of the Rancho Las Bolsas to found a Presbyterian temperance colony he called Westminster. He laid out a town-site, and no one could buy land there without his approval.

To advertise his new town, Rev. Webber published an extensive *Prospectus*, which is worth quoting at some length:

It has long been a cherished purpose of the projector of this colony, to establish a settlement of persons whose religious faith, notions of morals and education, should be so nearly alike, that they might cordially co-operate from the first, in the maintenance of a Christian Church and a superior school....

The moral and religious features may be stated as follows:

1. The members of this colony, although not strictly required to be members of any church, yet shall be such as can conscientiously and heartily unite with the other colonists in encouraging and supporting the sanctuary service to be established at an early day by the Presbyterian Church. It is not intended or desired that any one’s religious views shall be interfered with or constrained. Yet only those who freely and from principle can endorse this requirement, and can feel at home with the Presbyterian

Church are invited to cast their lot with us.

2. Each colonist shall solemnly pledge himself not to manufacture, buy or sell intoxicating beverages or liquors except for sanitary or scientific purposes, and to use his influence to prevent such manufacture and traffic.

3. The members of this colony will be expected to make Liberal provisions for the education of the children and youth, making such expenditures from time to time as circumstances and resources may warrant....

The land was divided into 80 farm lots of 40, 80, or 160 acres, originally priced at \$13 an acre. The land sold well; within four years, almost the entire tract had been sold, and the Robinson Trust agreed to set aside another 3,000 acres for prospective colonists.

But the town was slow to develop. A schoolhouse was built in 1872, and a post office opened in 1874, along with the first store, a Grange co-operative. Water for the tract came largely from artesian wells. The water table was high enough then that would rise naturally to the surface from wells drilled down some 75-200 feet (depending on the location).

It was not until 1872 that Rev. Webber organized the First Presbyterian Church of Westminster, with 17 charter members. But Westminster was never truly a Presbyterian Colony. While Rev. Webber expected settlers to be sympathetic to his denomination, he was unwilling to force his faith on anyone, and by 1876, a Methodist Church has been established on the townsite. It was joined two years later by a Congregational Church, and both these congregations completed their own sanctuaries before the Presbyterian Church was dedicated in June 1879.

Rev. Webber did not live to see any of these first three churches built. His efforts to build up Westminster were cut short by tuberculosis. He died on September 25, 1874, at the age of 42.

One of the settlers, Rev. Robert Strong – another Presbyterian minister – followed Rev. Webber as Superintendent of the colony, serving until January 1878. By then, the

colony scheme had run its course.

By the late '70s, Westminster's growth had slowed to a crawl. Ivana Bollman, who wrote her master's thesis on the colony, suggests several possible reasons, including the lack of good transportation facilities, the early death of Rev. Webber, problems with alkali soil, and the many marshy areas that needed drainage, not irrigation. It was not until the 1890s that large-scale drainage projects began in the area, opening up more and more land for farming.

As the population grew in the area between Westminster and Anaheim, another new town emerged. Garden Grove was the brainchild of Alonzo G. Cook, who arrived in 1874, and bought 160 acres from the Stearns Ranchos. When a school district was formed to serve the area about a year later, it was Cook who suggested the name Garden Grove. One old pioneer recalled:

"Some objected, thought it not appropriate as there was nothing that could be called a tree in the whole district, but Mr. Cook said, 'We'll make it appropriate by planting trees and making it beautiful.'"

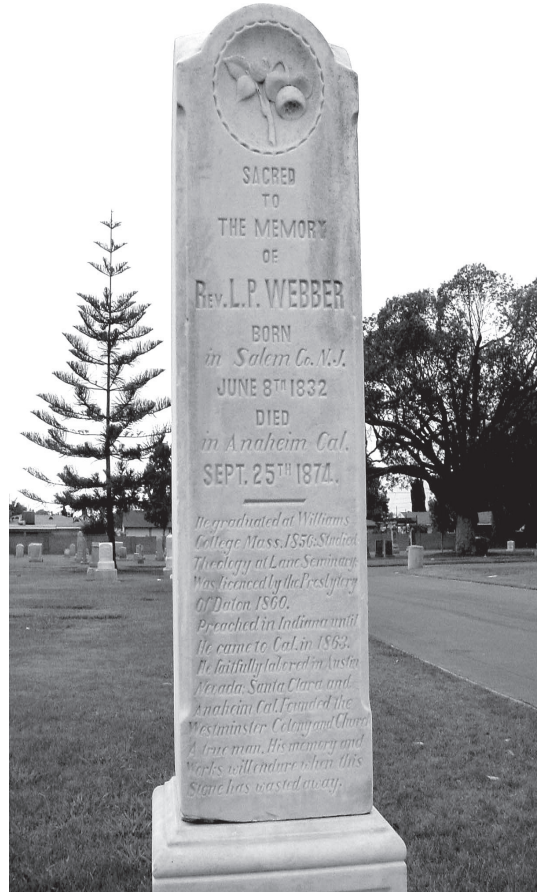
In 1876, Cook began selling off portions of his property to other settlers, and the community of Garden Grove was born. He provided a lot for the school, and helped to organize a local Methodist Church. He was a partner in the first store in Garden Grove, and the first postmaster (1877) was his father-in-law.

Artesia began more formally, with a land company organized by Los Angeles investors to subdivide and sell land that had already been bought by others from the Stearns Ranchos. In 1875, they laid out a townsite, but the community did not grow large enough to demand its own post office until 1882. The company gave up after about four years, and the unsold lands reverted to their original owners. It was only later the townsite was revived and grew into a city.

Hoping to capitalize on the colony idea, the Los Angeles & San Bernardino Land Company also laid out two other tracts, hoping to lure a town founder and a group of ready-made settlers. Neither project proved successful.

Their first tract was known as Savanna, in the Buena Park/La Mirada area. In 1869, the Land Company filed a tract map and began boosting Savanna in its sales literature. But the tract never took off. James Guinn's description of his first visit there later that year has been quoted many times:

In 1868 and '69 Southern California was in a transition state. The era of cattle and sheep raising as distinctive industries was on the decline. Grain and fruit-raising were beginning to be recognized as the coming industries of that region. Los Angeles was experiencing its first real estate boom. Every steamer was crowded with immigrants seeking cheap lands for homes. The Stearns ranchos in the southeast part of the county, comprising over two hundred thousand acres, had been subdivided into small tracts and thrown on to the market at prices varying from \$2.50 to \$10 per acre. Just before we cast loose from the wharf at San Francisco an active young man came aboard the steamer with an armful of boom literature, the first I had seen. It was maps, plots and circulars descriptive of the lands of the Los Angeles and San Bernardino Land Company (the Stearns ranchos). These he distributed where he thought they would do the most good. A map and description of the city of Savana [sic] fell to my lot. The city was described as located on a gently sloping mesa overlooking the valley of the Santa Ana. Sites had been reserved by its founders for churches and schools, and a central location was held in reserve for a city hall. A few weeks after my arrival I visited the city. I found it on the western slope of the Coyote Hills, about six miles north of Anaheim. Long rows of white stakes marked the line of its streets. A solitary coyote on a round-top knoll, possibly the site of the prospective city hall, gazed despondently down the street upon the debris of a deserted sheep camp. The other inhabitants of the city of Savana [sic] had not arrived, nor have they to this day put in an appearance.



Rev. Lemuel P. Webber (1832-1874) founded Westminster on the lands of the Stearns Ranchos Company in 1870. His tombstone in the old Anaheim Cemetery is a tribute to both the man, and 19th century funeral arts. It reads in part:

"He graduated at Williams College Mass. 1856; Studied Theology at Lane Seminary; Was licenced [sic] by the Presbytery of Daton 1860. Preached in Indiana until He came to Cal. in 1863. He faithfully labored in Austin, Nevada, Santa Clara and Anaheim Cal. Founded the Westminster Colony and Church. A true man. His memory and Works will endure when this Stone has wasted away." (Author photo)

In 1875, the Land Company decided to give it another try. The Southern Pacific railroad to Anaheim had just been completed, and on the south side of Coyote Creek, at what is now the Orange County line, a station was established known as Costa.

With a railroad in place, the Land Company proceeded to organize a 480-acre tract around Costa station. It was laid out for

farming, with the smallest lots still two acres each. There was no defined townsite. There were rumors the new town might be named for E.F. Northam, one of the stockholders in the Land Company, but he refused the honor, and the tract was dubbed Centralia, "from its proximity to the center of the valley" – five and a half miles from Anaheim, six miles from Artesia, and six miles from Westminster.

Perhaps learning from Savanna's failure, the Land Company never filed a tract map with the county. A number of settlers bought land in the tract, and in 1876 formed their own school district. But as late as 1880, the Land Company was still looking for a town founder to lure colonists to the area. The local papers speculated that the price was just too high – \$60 an acre – for anyone to make a profit. Much of the area later became part of Buena Park.

In the end, most of the Stearns Ranchos were sold to individuals on a contract basis, with an initial down payment and three years to pay. The buyers also had to pay 10% interest on the unpaid balance, and any and all taxes due on the land. Once all the money had been received, a deed was issued, signed by Alfred Robinson as trustee, with the "consent" of the major stockholders.

The deeds wisely reserved to the company "a strip of land thirty feet wide, along, adjoining, and each side of the Township and Section lines, and a strip of land fifteen feet wide, along, adjoining, and each side of the Quarter Section lines" for future roads or even railroads, along with "reserving the use and control of cienegas and natural streams of water, if any, naturally upon or flowing across, into, or by said granted tract; and reserving the right of way for, and to construct irrigation or drainage ditches through said tract, to irrigate or drain the adjacent land."

In other words, the Land Company retained all the water rights, and a right-of-way for any irrigation projects they chose to build. In arid Southern California, that was a significant clause. But in fact, it was little used. The general complaint was that the company didn't do enough to develop the

water resources on their lands, especially during the dry years of the 1870s. According to the *Southern Californian*, an Anaheim newspaper [not to be confused with the 1850s Los Angeles journal]:

"At the commencement of 1872 the valley of the Santa Ana had passed through two years of severe drought, and in consequence thereof, the purchasers of land were sadly crippled in their resources. Many of them were unable to meet their payments as they matured, and all were compelled to practice the strictest economy in order to keep their heads above water."

After an initial surge of sales things cooled off for the Los Angeles & San Bernardino Land Company in the mid-1870s, with only 60,000 acres sold by the end of the decade. Along with drought conditions, they also faced some failed marketing schemes, and an invasion of "squatters."

Squatters

The squatter problem stemmed from the Santa Ana River, which had been used as a boundary for several early ranchos. In the floods of 1825, the river had shifted several miles southeast to drain into Newport Bay. That meant – according to some – that the land between the two channels was not part of any rancho, and thus was public land, open for homesteading.

It seems that some of the squatters actually started out as buyers, signing sales contracts with the Los Angeles & San Bernardino Land Company then later deciding to stop making payments, and take their chances as the battle wound its way through the courts.

Most of the squatters (or settlers, as they preferred to be called) took up land on the east side of the Rancho Las Bolsas. Before long, they began forming their own communities.

Nathan Sears and a group of his kith and kin settled east of Westminster in what would be the Little Saigon area today. The *Anaheim Gazette* usually referred to the area as the Sears Settlement, but in 1871, when the settlers organized a school district, they named it Bolsa Grande. The Bolsa Grande



Centralia was the Stearns Ranchos' second unsuccessful attempt to found a town on their land. Located in the Buena Park area, a townsite was laid out in 1875, but never took off, though a number of ranchers – including E.B. Foster – did settle in the area. (Thompson & West, *History of Los Angeles County*, 1880)

School was the Sears Settlement's only civic asset. Though references to the settlement continue on into the 1880s, there never seems to have been any "town" there – no post office, no store, not even a blacksmith shop.

Other squatters settled southeast of Garden Grove in an area that became known as the Willows. Horace Head, who came to the area with his family as a boy in 1876, later recalled, "In the early days the land for a mile or more adjoining the river was a jungle of willows, cottonwoods and sycamores, with an occasional patch of cactus or tules. It was occupied by rabbits, quail, coyotes, wildcats and squatters." The Willows never even grew to the status of settlement, though for a couple of years the Garden Grove School District maintained a second schoolhouse there.

To the south, in 1879, another group of settlers formed their own school district, which they called New Hope. South of Westminster, the Ocean View School District was formed in 1875. Nearby was the simi-

larly named Bay View district.

But the heart of "Squatterdom" was Fountain Valley. The name celebrates the artesian wells, which flowed like fountains without pump or windmill over much of the lowlands. There were enough settlers in the area by 1875 that the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors created the Fountain Valley Township, giving them a constable and a justice of the peace. A year later, a school district and a voting precinct were established. There were even hopes of a post office, but it never materialized.

The squatter question affected everyone in the area. The Stearns Ranchos, of course, wanted ownership of the land they had purchased. They also faced the challenge of selling land in the disputed area. Who wants to buy a lawsuit? This uncertainty slowed the growth of the area, which meant less business for the surrounding towns. The squatters, on the other hand, were risking years of work and improvements to their homes and farms, and still faced years of struggle in

court if they ever hoped to prove their case.

As long as the final government patents to the Ranchos Las Bolsas and Santiago de Santa Ana remained to be issued, the uncertainty remained. In 1872, the Stearns Ranchos ordered all the squatters off the Bolsas. Instead, more and more kept coming. By the beginning of 1876, the *Anaheim Gazette* reported there were 274 squatters and their families living on the Bolsas, supporting four public schools.

In 1877, the Federal Government at long last recognized all the lands between the old and new beds of the Santa Ana River as part of the Rancho Las Bolsas. The location of the river at the time of the Nieto's 1784 concession did not enter into it, they ruled, since the government patent was based on the 1834 grant of the Bolsas, when the river was already in its current position.

Yet more squatters continued to arrive, settling on other parts of the Bolsas, even north of Westminster, far from the disputed lands. In May of 1878 the Land Company finally decided they had had enough. It was time to evict the squatters from their land. But in a neat trick, the company did not sue the squatters directly. They leased a portion of the rancho to a man named Edwin P. Whitmore, who was said to be from New York. This allowed the case to be filled in the U.S. Circuit Court in San Francisco, rather than the Los Angeles County Superior Court, adding to the trouble and expense for the squatters. More than 300 of them were named as defendants in the suit of *Whitmore v Asbill*, which sought their removal, and \$50,000 in damages.

Through various legal maneuverings and postponements, it was not until July 1879 that the circuit court heard the case. The entire hearing lasted only about four days. With the Bolsas now patented all the way east to the river, the squatters tried a new argument. The Rancho Santiago de Santa Ana had not yet been patented, and wasn't its western boundary the river as it flowed in 1810? That meant the Bolsa Squatters weren't on the Rancho Las Bolsas at all, but on the Santiago, which overlapped with the Bolsas. Shouldn't both claims be thrown out,

and the land opened for homesteading?

But the judge would have none of it. He ruled that the Bolsas patent was binding, and finding no questions of fact to be decided, instructed the jury to find for the plaintiffs. The Stearns Ranchos came out on top.

In October 1879, eviction notices were served on all the squatters. All agreed to leave peacefully. "Many who are able to do so will purchase" their farms, the *Anaheim Gazette* reported, but "the majority" could not afford the Land Company's prices. They took with them everything they could carry. Some even picked up their houses and moved them into Westminster or other nearby communities. Others moved further afield. Quite a few went to San Diego County, and settled in the area around Julian and Warners Ranch. Forty families moved up to Buell's rancho in San Luis Obispo County, where the town of Buellton was later born.

The last of the squatters to go was a French woman and her children, who had been too ill to move when the others "were given the grand bounce," and was allowed to remain until June of 1881.

By then, the population across the lowlands had dropped precipitously. By 1880, the Ocean View and Bay View school districts were both left with less than 30 school-age children, and were unable to receive any more county funds. Ocean View managed to survive, but the Bay View district was abandoned, and merged with Fountain Valley in 1886. The Fountain Valley voting precinct, which had registered 89 voters in 1876, cast only 26 votes in the Presidential election of 1880. The Federal census that year found only 143 residents in the entire township – the smallest population in what is now Orange County.

A cloud still hung over the disputed lands until the patent to the Rancho Santiago de Santa Ana was finally issued in 1883. And even then, the controversy continued. But where the newspapers had originally supported the squatters against the evil Land Company, by the 1880s, some came to believe that the endless battles did more harm than good, and were holding back the development of the whole region.

The last of the lawsuits was finally settled in 1889, when Justice Stephen Field of U.S. Supreme Court ruled against the Bolsa squatters. Once again, the company gave the few remaining holdouts a chance to buy their land, and time to harvest their crops before moving out.

A Re-Organization

Over the years, the owners of the Robinson Trust continued to change, as members bought and sold, or died and others inherited their interest. Around 1880 Edward Northam's interest was purchased by Moses Hopkins, said to have been a brother of Mark Hopkins of the Central Pacific and Southern Pacific's "Big Four" syndicate of railroad titans. After Edward Martin's death, his widow, Eleanor, a sister of former governor and Los Angeles luminary John G. Downey, became involved with the trust. By the late 1880s, Charles Polhemus was the only one of the original investors still active with the trust.

Squabbles between the various owners hampered the Land Company's efforts in the 1880s, and for much of the real estate "boom" of 1886-88, the Stearns Ranchos were not even on the market.

The *Anaheim Gazette* (May 24, 1884) speaks of the "internecine [that is, internal, and sometimes fierce] difficulties now existing among the owners." Part of the problem may have been in placing a dollar value on the land, and thus the value of the many owners' fractional interests.

An attempt was made to re-organize the trust in 1886, but for some reason fell apart. Finally, in August 1887, the owners incorporated as the Stearns Ranchos Company, with headquarters in San Francisco and a capital stock of \$92,160, divided into 9,216 shares. Charles B. Polhemus, Moses Hopkins, Eleanor Martin, and William H. Howard were all on the board of directors, along with James B. Randell, attorney John T. Doyle, and Charles A. Grow, who would serve as secretary of the corporation for many years. Not long after, the old Robinson Trust was dissolved.

Meanwhile, "Diamond Bob" Northam

stayed with the company through all these twists and turns. Besides serving as their agent in Anaheim, he was a partner in one of the major downtown stores, and served as mayor of the city in 1885-86. But in 1893, Northam's management of the Stearns Ranchos' interests was called into question by Charles Polhemus and his son George.

They claimed Northam had been skimming cash from land sales and leases, and had pocketed \$15,000 from the sale of sheep manure, which had been sold for fertilizer. Northam replied that, by his accounting, he was actually owed money from sales commissions, and that he had assumed the sheep manure belonged to the sheep ranchers whose flocks had produced it on lands they leased from the company. The attacks against Northam seem to be another symptom of the continuing conflicts between the various stockholders. He claimed George Polhemus had always been a "bitter enemy" of his uncle, while the Hopkins heirs and Charles Grow stood behind Northam, who hurried to San Francisco to present his side of the story.

The San Francisco papers devoted a great deal of space to the charges, even before they were formally presented to the Stearns Ranchos board of directors. Someone – apparently from the Polhemus side – had leaked a draft of the investigation to the press. The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that "Northam, so the report as it now stands will charge, devoted too much of his time to recreation and pleasure to properly attend to his land interests, and consequently many good opportunities of a business nature were allowed to slip by."

But Northam's admittedly flashy lifestyle notwithstanding, the financial questions seem to be more about his accounting practices than any actual embezzlement. And with the Hopkins estate owning 72% of the stock, and the fact that the company was still paying regular dividends, the matter was soon settled.

Northam soon retired to a 1,600-acre ranch on the Bolsa Chica where he grew barley, walnuts, and apricots, and ran cattle and horses. In 1901, he sold out to a group

of investors who formed the West Coast Land & Water Company, which founded a new community along the coast there. They called their town Pacific City, but the original company was soon bought out, and the community was renamed Huntington Beach.

Northam moved up to Los Angeles that same year, and three months after his first wife died, he married a woman 33 years his junior. A decade later they were just about ready to divorce when Northam fell ill, and his young wife decided to stay with him to the end. He died in 1912.

Sales of the Stearns Ranchos continued in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but not at the old pace. As late as 1893, the company still owned about 80,000 acres, worth an estimated \$3,000,000. That value increased as oil was found in the northern Orange County foothills in the 1890s. In some cases, the land was leased, rather than sold to the oil companies, providing another source of income for the stockholders.

Despite its name, the Los Angeles & San Bernardino Land Company focused most of its attention and advertising on its Los Angeles County holdings. But they also owned 59,000 acres in what is now Riverside County. Large-scale development of these lands did not begin until years later, when most of the land had passed out of the hands of the company. A portion of the Jurupa Rancho was subdivided in the late 1880s as West Riverside. Today the area is known as Rubidoux. The first big tract on the Rancho La Sierra was not laid out until 1910. Later it became the community of Norco.

The Hopkins family continued to play a major role on the board of directors. E.W. Hopkins was president in 1908, Timothy Hopkins, once treasurer of the Southern Pacific railroad, was president in 1925.

The following year, nearly sixty years after the Robinson Trust's first three recorded sales in what is now Orange County

occurred, the last land sold by the Stearns Ranchos seems to have been 9.44 acres along Magnolia Avenue, west of Anaheim, in 1926. The company was dissolved by decree of the San Francisco Superior Court in February 1927 and the assets divided among the remaining shareholders. After decades of notable successes and some abject failures, the Stearns Ranchos Company faded into history.

Selected Bibliography

Bollman, Ivana Freeman, 1983, *Westminster Colony, California, 1869-1879*, Santa Ana: Friis-Pioneer Press

Cleland, Robert Glass, 1951, *The Cattle on a Thousand Hills. Southern California, 1850-1880*, San Marino: The Huntington Library (second edition)

Doig, Leroy L., 1962, *The Village of Garden Grove, 1870-1905*, Santa Ana: Pioneer Press

Guinn, James M., 1893, "Los Angeles in the Later Sixties and Early Seventies," (in) *Annual Publication of the Historical Society of Southern California*, 1893

Head, H.C., 1939, *The History of Garden Grove*, Garden Grove: Garden Grove News

Robinson, W.W., 1948, *Land in California; The Story of Mission Lands, Ranchos, Squatters, Mining Claims, Railroad Grants, Land Scrip, Homesteads*, Berkeley: University of California Press

[Wilson, Albert], 1880, *History of Los Angeles County, California*, Oakland: Thompson & West

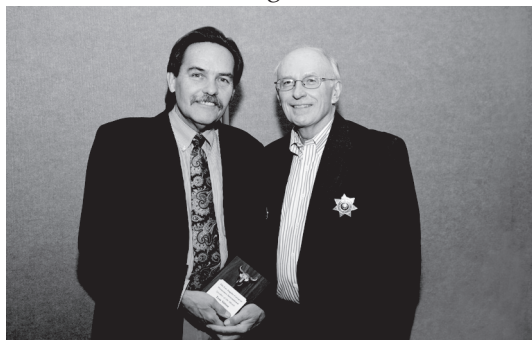
Wright, Doris Marion, 1977, *A Yankee in Mexican California. Abel Stearns, 1798-1848* Santa Barbara: Wallace Heberd



THE MONTHLY ROUNDUP

January 2011

Tom Sitton, longtime curator of History at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, discussed the importance of the Banning family in the history of southern California. Sitton first detailed the background of Phineas Banning, who came to the small town of Los Angeles in 1853, and became the major force at San Pedro Harbor and his settlement of Wilmington, as well as the primary figure behind the region's first railroad, the Los Angeles and San Pedro.



Banning's three sons continued the transportation empire and added a significant success in tourism at Santa Catalina Island, though, by the 1920s, their enterprises were ebbing. Sitton concluded by discussing the third generation's involvement in business, social work, and the legacy of preserving the Banning Residence Museum in Wilmington. Drawing from his book on the Bannings, Sitton provided an entertaining and informative presentation on this notable family.



February 2011

Shocking to believe, but this was the first talk the redoubtable Mr. Selmer had ever given to the Corral in his more than three decades of membership and active involvement. Now we wonder why it took so long, as Jerry gave us an incisive and interesting history of the Southwest Museum, from its founding by the irrepressible Charles Fletcher Lummis to his own years as executive director during some of the institution's most dire days. With candor and context, Jerry offered some penetrating insights into the inherent limitations of the Highland Park site and the possibilities and problems of its recent merger with the Autry National Center. In all, Jerry's talk was an excellent summary of a venerable institution and a reminder that he needs to come back and do another presentation sooner than thirty years from now!

March 2011

Mollno, a professor of history at Cal Poly Pomona and director of the Historical Society of Southern California, gave the Corral a presentation rich with visuals as well as with fascinating information on the viticultural empire that was Guasti. An Italian immigrant who came to Los Angeles and got his start on Olvera Street, Secondo Guasti painstakingly and patiently developed his business on the old Rancho Cucamonga on and near present-day Ontario International Airport, creating a massively successful vine-



yard and winery. Mollno explored Guasti as a person, his Italian Vineyard Company, and Guasti as a company town, providing Corral members with a wealth of material on an important part of regional history.

PASSINGS

ROBERT W. BLEW, A long-time Active member and former Sheriff, Bob passed away on March 8, 2011. A professor of history for many years, he devoted much time and knowledge to the Los Angeles Corral. Bob acted as Branding Iron editor for a lengthy period, during which he also produced two keepsakes for the Corral: No. 31, A Grand Score, Brand Books 1-20 and No. 32, Last Nuggets From the California Gold Rush 1849. At the time of his death, he was working on bringing to date the listing of monthly meetings and speakers, an unfinished project hopefully to be assumed by one of our members. In addition to his activities with Westerners, Bob for many years was in charge of the docents at the Autry National Center.

• • •

DOYCE BLACKMAN NUNIS, JR. Doyce, a former Sheriff of the Corral, died on 22 January 2011 from complications following abdominal surgery. He was 86 years old. Doyce was an emeritus professor of history at the University of Southern California, author

and editor of many important works on California and the West, and was the pro bono editor of the Southern California Quarterly, the journal of the Historical Society of Southern California, for 43 years. In addition, Doyce was an officer of the Zamorano Club and was recognized by Pope John Paul II for his work in helping to found the archives of the Santa Barbara Mission and that of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. He was also bestowed with the Orden de Isabel la Católica by King Juan Carlos of Spain for his work on the Spanish era of California.

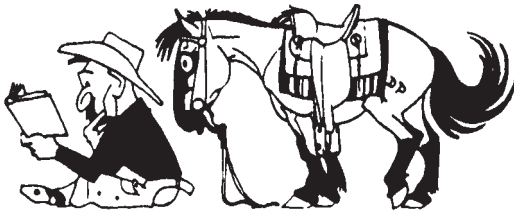
• • •

DONALD TORGUSON, Don, another former Sheriff of the Corral, was a career employee of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department and, upon retirement, took on teaching as a second career. Working in the Los Angeles Unified School District, Don taught English and Social Studies at Sun Valley Junior High School. With the Westerners, he was not only a Sheriff, but also won the Phillip Danielson Award from Westerners International for his talk and paper on Hubert Howe Bancroft. A member of the Death Valley 49ers and E Clampus Vitus, Don lived in Oregon in his later years and his son Michael is still an LA Corral member.

FROM OUR FILES

#163 – Spring 1986

Otis "Dock" Marston presented "With Powell on the Colorado" at the February meeting, held at Costa's Grill. In his "lively discourse," the "forensical scalpel was put to Major Powell's adventure, and in the debunking process it began to appear that the one-armed hero was not a hero at all, but rather a starry-eyed fictioneer who paddled down the river, seated in a high-chair. The question and answer period on this subject, as might be surmised, was also an interesting one."



DOWN THE WESTERN BOOK TRAIL ...

JEWS OF THE PACIFIC COAST: *Reinventing Community on America's Edge*, by Ellen Eisenberg, Ava F. Kahn, and William Toll. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010. 309 pp. Maps, Illustrations, Notes, Bibliography, Index. Cloth, \$50.

The authors of this ambitious book have carved out a section of North America variously referred to as the Pacific West or Pacific Coast, and they examine the history of the Jews who have made this region their home. The Pacific Coast obviously includes Washington, Oregon, and California, but they also give some attention to Nevada and Arizona. For some reason British Columbia and Alaska didn't make the cut. The story is largely an urban one, with the focus mainly paid to Jews in Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego, and, later on, some discussion on Las Vegas, Phoenix, and Tucson. Inevitably, California dominates the narrative, and with the 20th century Los Angeles displaces San Francisco as the preeminent city on the Pacific Coast and the largest Jewish population west of New York City.

Four themes are addressed in the book: "selective migration to a distant frontier, concentration in the largest cities as pioneering merchants and professionals, civic prominence and philanthropic leadership, and cultural diversity and outreach" (p 213). The authors offer an essentially positive view of Western Jewish history, describing the accomplishments of Jews in business, politics, culture, education, and other fields. They focus

on the distinctiveness of being Jewish on the Pacific Coast as contrasted with those on the Atlantic Coast. They see the parameters of East Coast definitions of American Jewry as inapplicable to Jews who came West for opportunity, health, and the chance to make a fresh start in life. Jews began arriving in significant numbers during the Gold Rush Era, largely German-speaking and strongly favoring assimilation and accommodation to the larger society. Subsequent generations with origins in Eastern Europe clashed with the German Jews, desiring to preserve their cultural heritage as well as their religion. Issues of Zionism, ecumenism, and such cultural elements as opposing interfaith marriage and *kashruth* made the combination of Ashkenazic, Sephardic, Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Jewry a lively mix.

The authors carry their narrative to the present day. Readers will note the early interfaith acceptance between Jew and Gentile faltering in the 20th century as Protestant-dominated government and society placed restrictions on Jews in housing and social acceptance where none had previously existed. With time such barriers fell. Western Jews asserted their distinctiveness after World War II in generally supporting Israel and running for public office; exercising influence in the arts and sciences; and supporting philanthropic activities. Whereas an earlier generation had preferred to avoid a public image in these areas, especially in the film industry, West Coast Jews are noticeable in their support for civil rights and denunciation of bigotry and prejudice.

The book offers an excellent bibliography that can provide a starting point for anyone who wishes to delve further into West Coast Jewish history. There's enough change in recent developments — the arrival of Iranian Jews in Southern California, the growth of Jewish communities in the Sun Belt — to remind people that when it comes to the West, the region continues to fascinate and influence American life.

— Abraham Hoffman

RIVAL RAILS: *The Race to Build America's Greatest Transcontinental Railroad*, by Walter R. Borneman. New York: Random House, 2010. xxiii+406 pp. Maps, Illustrations, Glossary, Index, Bibliography. Cloth, \$28.

Borneman, president of a foundation that funds post-doctoral fellowships in children's health at Stanford University, has also worked as an attorney and as an executive with the Colorado Historical Society. While he's written books on the War of 1812, the French and Indian War, and on President James K. Polk, *Rival Rails* is described by him as a very personal work, shaped by his fascination in railroads from his childhood in his native Colorado. The enthusiasm and passion shows clearly in this book, which manages to find a balance between solid academic scholarship and a readable narrative for a wide, popular audience.

As the author notes in his introduction, a great deal has been written about the Union Pacific/Central Pacific transcontinental line completed in 1869, but relatively little about future transcontinental routes through the Southwest that had an arguably greater influence on the development of the West and of commerce in America broadly. Over several decades, keen competition and business battles between several major and many smaller railroads marked the race to open up new lines between the Pacific coast and the eastern states and Borneman tells the tale in a lively manner, giving enough detail to probably satisfy most train history buffs but with plenty of entertaining anecdotes for others not as well-versed in railroad lore.

While Borneman is adept at covering the larger institutional components of some of the major railroad companies, such as the Southern Pacific, Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe and the Denver and Rio Grande, he also is sure to highlight the powerful individuals battling for supremacy in the region.

These include Collis P. Huntington of the SP, William Barstow Strong of the Santa Fe, William Jackson Palmer of the Denver and Rio Grane, and the seemingly-omnipresent Jay Gould. So, while he examines in some detail the intrigues and strategizing of these major figures, he also looks with some depth at the contributions of engineers, crew leaders and others whose major contributions "on the ground" reflect those of the company heads "in the boardroom" or "in the office."

Among the most compelling portions of *Rival Rails* are those anecdotes concerning the tense battles between railroad companies and their crews at important passes, crossings and other notable contested hot spots. It is also fascinating to read quotes from many of the principals as they plot and scheme to outflank their rivals, even if one of these latter happens to be the United States government, as was the case with the Southern Pacific's illicit crossing into Yuma, Arizona in 1877.

For those of us in the Los Angeles area, Borneman's discussion of local railroad battles, including the 1870s contest for Cajon Pass between the SP and the fledgling Los Angeles and Independence Railroad as well as his coverage of the rivalry between Los Angeles and San Diego as terminuses for transcontinental lines, are solid retellings.

All in all, *Rival Rails* is an excellent popular overview of railroad building in the American Southwest. One might quibble with whether his diversions covering Nellie Bly's trip over the rails on her round the world trip in 1890 or the record excursion of "Death Valley Scotty" along the Santa Fe in 1905 detract rather than add to the narrative. Overall, though, Borneman is to be commended for making the book an enjoyable and enlightening excursion.

—Paul Spitzzeri

Poems

by *Loren Wendt*

The Wild Herd!

Wal, Sherm, ole buddy, wish ya coulda been
with me yesterday
You'll understand when ya hear what I got
to say
Yessirree, it was the goldurnest thing this
ole boy's ever seen
When that wild herd came bustin' outta
that ravine

Musta been fifty of 'em at the very least
'N them ole boys warn't stoppin' for man
ner beast
Out in the lead of that wild herd was a big,
black hoss
A toss of his head and a wild cry, he was
the boss

Wal, Sherm, I sat there on old Ben and
watched 'em go
Kinda choked up and kinda thankin' 'em
for the show
Down deep inside I hoped they didn't
know what lay in store
Cuz I knew they'd get hunted down and
wouldn't be free no more

It's kind of a strange and funny world, ain't
it ole pard?
When you know we're losin' 'em and that
makes it hard
But just that once, it was the goldurnest
thing this ole boy's ever seen
When the wild herd come bustin' outta that
ravine

Grandpa's Boots

Yep, those are my Grandpa's boots
Lined up there in the hall
There's Tony Lama's, Justin's.
Wal, I can't name them all.

He wore a pair of them
Wore 'em each and every day.
Like them beat up old black ones
The day he passed away.

What's that? Why, I can't wear 'em
My big feet don't fit at all
You see, Grandpa wasn't a big man
'N his feet were mighty, mighty small.

Now, when I see those boots
I see a man, a man I knew so well
And each and every pair of them
Has a story they can tell.

Stories about breakin' the wild ones
And roundin' up them big horn cattle
Yep, mebbe he wasn't a big man
But he sure looked tall up in the saddle

What's that? Wal, no, I ain't gonna sell 'em
And I sure ain't givin' 'em away
They belong lined up like that
'N that's exactly where they'll stay

You can bet I miss that grand ole cowboy
'N I know I always will
But when it comes to makin' memories
Why, Grandpa's boots sure "fit the bill."