

# MRS. MAY RINDGE LOSES CONTROL OF GREAT RANCHO

One of the last great land empires in Southern California, Rancho Topanga Malibu Sequit, was broken up yesterday by the approval of reorganization proceedings in a bankruptcy hearing in Federal Court.

Approval by United States District Judge Yankwich of the bankruptcy-reorganization removed May K. Rindge from control of her 24,000-acre mountain and seacoast domain and placed it in the hands of a new corporation.

The new group will issue approximately \$8,500,000 in debentures to bondholders and preferred stock, which will go to the Rindge family, who have controlled the huge land holdings for forty-eight years, and other unsecured creditors.

## HOME RETAINED

Under the proceedings Mrs. Rindge retains a life interest in her unfinished \$1,000,000 home, built on a headland near the southeast corner of the estate on a site picked by her late husband, Fred H. Rindge, Sr. In addition she gets title to three beach front properties and to the old family homestead at Marblehead, Mass., where she lived as a young bride.

The famed Malibu beach colony of motion-picture stars will remain intact by the order. The owners of the cottages will be

given an opportunity to purchase the land on which their homes stand.

Mrs. Rindge allowed the houses to be built there on leased land.

In addition Mrs. Merrit H. Adamson, the former Rhoda Rindge, receives title to her home on a point north of the film colony.

## SUBDIVISION TO PROCEED

The court order provides that the subdivision which Harold G. Ferguson commenced at Las Flores Canyon, the southern boundary of the empire, before he went to prison, be re-established—streets to be completed, sidewalks built and an effort made to develop the property.

In addition to these changes there is a movement for the establishment of a large beach and mountain county and State park near the northern part of the domain. The proposal is for the new corporation to trade the park site for cancellation of \$1,140,000 of unpaid taxes—part of the \$10,000,000 worth of obligations which led to the fall of the empire.

## DOMAIN CRUMBLES

Thus Mrs. Rindge, who went to the vast acres of Malibu as a bride in 1890, sees her land holdings being opened to the expand-

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# Mrs. Rindge Loses Reins

## Control of Vast Land Empire Placed in Hands of Others

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ing population of Southern California.

Her husband, Fred H. Rindge, son of a wealthy Massachusetts manufacturing family, had seen the Malibu ranch during his travels and envisioned a great Riviera along its twenty-one miles of seacoast. The rancho was composed of three grants, Topanga on the north, Sequit on the south, Malibu between, totaling 16,000 acres and bounded by the ocean on the west, the ridge of the Santa Monica Mountains on the east, Las Flores Canyon on the south and Little Sycamore Canyon, a mile beyond the Ventura county line, on the north.

The grants originally were made to Don Jose Tapia, a faithful lieutenant in the Spanish garrison at Santa Barbara, by the King of Spain in 1802. Tapia's heirs held the property until 1850, when Mathew Keller, renowned Southland pioneer, acquired it for an \$800 unpaid grocery bill. His son, Henry Keller, sold the 16,000 acres to Rindge in 1890 for \$10 an acre.

Later, Rindge bought adjacent property, bringing the total acreage to 24,000.

Then in 1905 Fred Rindge died. His widow, who shared in his plans, determined to go ahead with them. Through the subsequent years, spending a fortune in legal battles, guarding the borders with armed guards, she kept her empire inviolate.

### ESPEE SEEKS STRIP

Before Rindge's death the Southern Pacific was fighting for a right-of-way through the land along the twenty-one miles of coast toward the north. The company had obtained a right-of-way to the southern boundary.

The railroad was preparing to go into court in an effort to condemn the needed land. Mrs. Rindge met this attack by building a narrow-gauge line, the Hueneme, Malibu and Port of Los Angeles Railroad, stretching the full length of the land. This she used to haul products of the vast ranch to market and to halt the Southern Pacific because the Interstate Commerce Commission refused its plea for a second rail line.

From then until 1925 Mrs. Rindge successfully prevented every attempt to pass through her land. Surveyors were chased off by her armed guards, she refused to grant a highway right of way and erected high fences about the property.

Then on October 14, 1925, Superior Judge Frederick Valentine handed down what has become the most famous right-of-way case decision in California history, giving the State authority to construct what is now the Roosevelt Highway.

### NEW DIFFICULTY

Shortly thereafter, Mrs. Rindge sacrificed some of her own bonds and stocks on a depressed market in an effort to meet interest on bonds outstanding against the rancho. Further difficulties arose.

In 1935 William G. Ware was appointed receiver. Unsecured creditors filed a bankruptcy petition against the Marblehead Land Company. Mrs. Rindge countered with a voluntary petition for reorganization under what is known as Section 77-B of the Bankruptcy Act.