

# The Romance OF THE RANCHOS

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(This is the nineteenth of a series of historical sketches on Southern California ranchos, written by E. Palmer Conner, chief title searcher of the Title Insurance and Trust Company.)

Rancho San Jose de Buenos Ayres was not in South America, as its name might indicate, but was an important rancho of Southern California. The rancho was granted by Manuel Michelstorena, Governor of the Californias, February 24, 1843, to Maximo Alanis, and comprised 4438 acres. Don Alanis died shortly after he received the grant and his heirs conveyed the rancho to Dr. Wilson W. Jones and William T. B. Sanford, the former one of Los Angeles' first doctors and the latter an early Los Angeles postmaster.

## OPERATED JOINTLY

But the doctor knew little about ranching and in 1852 he was glad to sell his half-interest in the rancho to Don Benito Wilson for \$662.75, or at the rate of 35 cents an acre. Don Benito's interests were extensive and widely separated. Jointly with Dr. Griffin he operated Rancho San Pascual northeast of the Pueblo of Los Angeles. Jointly with Phineas Banning he founded and developed the city of Wilmington at the port of San Pedro, and west of the pueblo, halfway to the ocean, with Sanford, the postmaster, he raised cattle on Rancho San Jose de Buenos Ayres.

Between supervising trips to his ranchos and to the harbor he found time to maintain a home in the pueblo of Los Angeles—so large that after he moved it was used for an orphan asylum—buy much city property, ship wine to San Francisco and foster the development of the orange.

In 1858 B. D. Wilson bought the interest of Sanford in this and other property for \$16,000 and subsequently sold the rancho. In 1884 John Wolfskill of the prominent family of that name purchased the rancho for \$40,000. The purchase by Wolfskill was timely, as the completion of the Santa Fe Railroad two years later sent land prices skyrocketing, and in 1887 he entered into an agreement to dispose of the rancho for \$438,700, or more than ten times what he had paid for the land in 1884.

The Los Angeles and Santa Mon-

ica Land and Water Company was organized to take over the land at that figure. This company built a railroad through the property and platted the town of Sunset. But few lots were sold, however, and in 1891 the Los Angeles and Santa Monica Land and Water Company quitclaimed the land back to Wolfskill and the town site was restored to acreage.

## FARM USE ONLY

Then for many years the rancho was used only for farming, although its neighbor on the east, the Rancho Rodeo de Las Aguas, was subdivided into Beverly Hills, and on the west Santa Monica grew into a thriving city.

In 1919 Arthur Letts, Sr., merchant prince of Los Angeles, founder of the Broadway Department Store, bought the rancho for an investment. Since that time Westwood, Holmby Hills (named after Holmby, Eng., Mr. Letts' birthplace) and University Village all have been platted on parts of the rancho. The moving-picture industry has expanded into the property and several of the largest studios are located there. Now the University of California at Los Angeles is being built on the rancho, soon to open as a great institution of learning.

B. D. Wilson, John Wolfskill and Arthur Letts all profited by their far-sightedness, but none had the vision and none could foresee Rancho San Jose de Buenos Ayres as it is today.