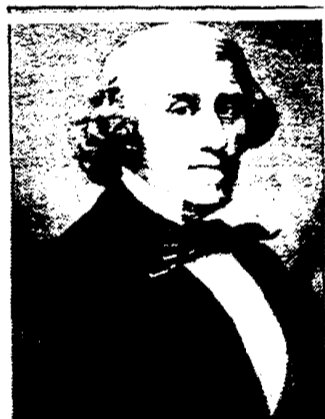




The ranch house of Los Cerritos maintains its charm in the days of its decay.



Don Abel Stearns

HE weary son of Spain traveling along the dusty way of El Camino Real had as a reward for his effort the reception he was assured at the next rancho. Greeted with "Bien venido, amigo" (Welcome, friend,) an Indian would take his horse and the don of the rancho would lead him by arm into the casa. For on the ranchos of California there was always an abundance of corn and beans, fruits and barbecued beef and wines, and a traveler with news from San Diego or Monterey was as welcome a sight to the rancho as the rancho was to the traveler.

In the middle '40's coming north from San Diego such a horseman found his first settlement of any size at San Juan Capistrano. Here the mission lay in ruins, the padres and the Indians gone, and Don Juan Forster and Ysidora, his wife, the sister of Pio Pico, their large family and their servants, living among the ruins. The settlement which was left was Juan Forster's. He was the Juez de Paz (Justice of the Peace) and self-styled Alcalde (Mayor.) Brother-in-law of the Governor, if any more authority were necessary he took it for granted that he had it. He owned all of the surrounding land, the mission gardens and the mission itself and so completely was Juan Forster identified with the little mission

town that he was often called "Don San Juan" and even "San Juan Capistrano."

But the traveler saw only in Don Juan a host of exceeding generosity and charm. Forster would tell him of his rancho possessions, of Mission Viejo, the old mission rancho sometimes called Rancho La Paz, Rancho de Peace, of Rancho Trabuco adjoining San Juan Capistrano, of Rancho La Nacion, the National Rancho at the head of San Diego Bay, and of Rancho Valle de Felipe near San Diego.

The traveler would rest at San Juan Capistrano, stay as long as he might, then "Adios, amigo," and he would head north through the Rancho Canada de Los Alisos, "the canyon of the aliso trees," then across the broad acres of Rancho San Joaquin and Lomas de Santiago to the home of Bernardo Yorba on the Rancho Santiago de Santa Ana. Since 1810 the Yorba family had owned this 62,000-acre rancho, Antonio, Bernardo's grandfather, a corporal in the King's army, having received the grant from the King of Spain in recognition of bravery and loyalty. There a n o t h e r friendly re-

ception, more time to rest and play. Lazy acres of the Santiago de Santa Ana resting perhaps for the active years to come, years when Santiago de Santa Ana would no longer graze cattle and the Yorbas alone prize its possession, years when scientifically spaced orange trees in mathematical rows would cover the hills and valleys, years when a city called Santa Ana, named for the rancho itself, would grow into a beautiful city of homes of people of another nation, a people too busy to build of adobe, a people too busy for barbecues.

Patio of Los Cerritos when occupied by the Bizbys.



—Security-First National Photo.

By E. PALMER CONNER

too much in a hurry to use the fleetest horses.

Refreshed, the traveler would again follow El Camino Real northward through Rancho San Juan Cajon de Santa Ana and Rancho Los Coyotes, across the Rancho Santa Gertrudes to Paso de Bartolo, the country home of Gov. Pio Pico. Within the rancho boundaries are 8991 acres extending from our present-day Whittier to Montebello. But compared to the giant cattle ranches of his neighbors, Pio Pico's Paso de Bartolo property was very small, so he called his home Rancho (little rancho.) Although this rancho was small, Pico's other holdings were not. With his brother, Andres, he owned Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores, 133,000 acres, in San Diego county, and a later traveler would have found Pico owning

one-half of the 121,000-acre Rancho Ex-Mission de San Fernando.

At Rancho the Governor entertained in keeping with the high honor of his position. Should other visitors come, passers-by like the traveler or officials from Monterey or Los Angeles, the Governor might make a speech, first of welcome, then of the beauties of Alta California, then of



Security-First National Photos.

Don Juan Temple

the virtues of the government of Mexico, how the Department of California must always be preserved, and of the danger of the increasing number of Americans coming into California. Could Pio Pico have pictured Sloat and Kearney and Fremont and Stockton, the security of the Mexican government in California would have seemed less secure, and if the few Americans coming into California disturbed the Governor, could he have visioned the world aflame in five years and 100,000 Americans pouring into California in its gold rush of '49, he might not have been able to finish his oratory.

With respects paid the Governor, the traveler continues on El Camino Real, up through the pass, across Rancho La Merced and the two pastures, Rancho Potrero Grande (beautiful pasture) and Potrero de Felipe Lugo (the pasture of Philip Lugo,) to the Mission San Gabriel. Beautiful Mission San Gabriel Arcangel, how you have suffered, your steps worn by the Indians and the feet of padres for many decades are dust covered when the traveler views them. The government of Mexico has completed the mission's ruin and is even now trying to lease the buildings and the gardens for any purpose producing revenue. The traveler, crossing himself,



passes on, on to the gay, happy, sun-baked adobe Pueblo de Los Angeles.

In a long, low adobe facing the pueblo's plaza there is a dance that night and nearly every night. Perhaps at the Del Valles, where the illustrious Don Ignacio and his family, owners of Rancho San Francisco and Camulos, enjoy a social prominence. Possibly at the pueblo home of the owner of Rancho Tujunga, Judge Augustin Olvera, whose name is perpetuated in Olvera street. Or possibly that night at the old Avila adobe, old even then, where Francisco Avila's beautiful daughters are the attraction. One of these, Luisa, is the bride of Don Manuel Garfias, and the happy bridegroom is doubly lucky for the last Governor had given him Rancho San Pascual, 13,693 acres, as a wedding gift. The richness of this same Rancho San Pascual, lying northeasterly of the pueblo and across the Arroyo Seco, could not even be dreamed by Don Manuel, for it was destined to be the sites of Pasadena and sister cities of the Northwestern San Gabriel Valley.

The dance might be at the Lugos, on the east side of the plaza, where lives Don Antonio Maria, known as "El Viejo Lugo," a mark of respect for his age, less respectfully translated as "Old Man Lugo." Don Antonio had himself received from the King of Spain the 29,000-acre Rancho San Antonio, adjoining the pueblo on the southeast. The horses of his rancho are famed for swiftness and his sons with their bright velvet suits and on silver saddles are by far the most conspicuous young men in the pueblo. Andres Pico, the Governor's brother, also lives in a

home facing the plaza, but he is the general of the Mexican army and he cares little for dances.

But the town's finest home is not on the plaza. Don Abel Stearns came too late for a plaza site and his home is on Calle Principal (Main street,) a block south of the church. In 1834 Don Abel had acquired pueblo land and an adobe home adjacent, formerly built by Don Claudio Lopez. Here Stearns built El Palacio and to it brought his beautiful bride, Arcadia Bandini. They lived here happily twenty-five years until his death in 1871, when she married Col. R. S. Baker and built the Baker Block on the site.

#### EL PALACIO

The stranger now gazes at Don Abel's home and vows it rightly named El Palacio (the Palace.) In the front patio a fountain sings merrily and in one of the wings is a ballroom 100 feet long. Don Abel, however, can well afford the splendor of his home, for his possessions are tremendous, pueblo land on the Bay of San Diego, the warehouse built by the mission fathers on the Bay of San Pedro, a hundred thousand head of cattle and ranch acres numbered in tens of thousands. Rancho Los Alamitos is his, its 28,000 acres extending along the ocean for miles and inland far past the strange hill some day to be called Signal Hill. On the Los Alamitos Don Abel has another beautiful adobe home, his rancho headquarters. Perhaps because Don Abel is New England born he views this California cattle land differently and buys it recklessly. For years Abel Stearns bought land and before he was through he owned the



*Don Pio Pico, last of the Mexican Governors, and his house, from a water-color painting by Orpha Klinker.*

adjoining Rancho Los Coyotes, Rancho Las Boissas and Rancho Bolsa Chica, now in Orange county, Rancho Guajome in San Diego county, part of the Jurupa grant, and Rancho La Laguna, within which lies Lake Elsinore, both in Riverside county. From the heirs of Antonio Maria Lugo he purchased a giant slice of the Rancho San Antonio and called this holding likewise Rancho Laguna. In 1930 the heirs of Don Abel's widow, Arcadia Bandini de Stearns de Baker, sold to the Santa Fe railroad for \$6,000,000 the last of their inheritance in Rancho Laguna.

If business in hides or tallow

took the horseman to the port, or if he decided to visit some of Alta California's finest ranchos, he could ride south from the pueblo across fenceless plains, past the little home of Anastacio Abila on the Rancho Tajauta, then through miles of the Rancho San Pedro to the Dominguez home. He would find the princely ranch possession of that family producing splendidly, herds of cattle roaming the 48,000 acres, and the ten children of Cristobal Dominguez proud of their years of ownership and of the standing of their family.

#### RANCHO SAN PEDRO

Great development was to take place on Rancho San Pedro. On the portion of the rancho facing westerly on the sea Redondo has been built. Nine miles inland is the city of Compton and on that part of the rancho facing southerly on the ocean is the Wilmington district of Los Angeles. Through the heart of Rancho San Pedro runs the shoestring strip connecting Los Angeles with its harbor. But with all of the development, heirs of the Dominguez who received the grant of the rancho more than 100 years ago have retained ownership of thousands of its acres. The adobe hacienda that the stranger would have found eighty-five years ago is standing yet and used now as the Dominguez Memorial Seminary.

On the western side of the port is another celebrated rancho, the Rancho Los Palos Verdes (green poles,) 17,000 acres smaller than its neighbor, Rancho San Pedro, but it has nineteen miles of coast line. From Point Fermin, named for Father Fermin Francisco de Lasuen, the padre president succeeding Junipero Serra,

the traveler would gaze out at sea for incoming vessels or watch a ship, too large to venture into the then narrow, treacherous, marshy little port, load its cargo of hides by means of small boats running to and fro from the shore to the ship anchored in the roadstead of San Pedro. Perhaps one of the Sepuveda brothers, owners of the rancho, would show the traveler where the government of Mexico was planning to erect a lighthouse on a portion of Los Palos Verdes. The Sepuvedas and their heirs saw the lighthouse built, but not by the government of Mexico.

With his business, if any, at the port attended to, the traveler of the middle '40's decides to visit Don Juan Temple on the Rancho Los Cerritos and inspect his new two-story hacienda. There he finds Don Juan as gruff and forbidding as Dona Rafael Cota de Temple is pleasant and gracious. Their hacienda and the Italian garden they are developing are lovely and their rancho is in ideal condition. Los Cerritos, too, faces the ocean, but Don Juan incorrectly judges its value, not on its ocean frontage, but by the two rivers which bound it, the Los Angeles on the west and the San Gabriel for nine miles along the east.

Don Juan Temple, like Don Abel Stearns, a native of New England, was at that time a naturalized citizen of Mexico. His holdings were more in pueblo property than in ranchos, yet his two rancho possessions, Rancho Los Cerritos and the Rancho Tejon, were among the finest in California. In the pueblo of Los Angeles he owned a home on Temple street which bears his name, built Los Angeles' first theater and the old



An aristocrat of Spain was Don Jose Antonio Julian de la Guerra y Noriega, and his house (above) in Santa Barbara, a social center in the days of the ranchos.



—Security-First National Photos.

quite to the liking of Don Julio and the thirteen sons. On their rancho were five adobes and flowing water through the Verdugo Canyon continuously. Not many years later Rancho San Rafael was partitioned among twenty-four claimants, only six of whom were Verdugos, and today 100,000 citizens of Glendale, Eagle Rock, Glassell Park, Highland Park and Garvanza enjoy ownership of Rancho San Rafael.

From west of the pueblo to the Lugo's fiesta would be invited Don Tomas Sanchez of Rancho Cienega o Paso de la Tijera (the pass of the scissors,) now known as the Baldwin Hills, also Don Augustin Machado of Rancho La Ballona and the Sepulvedas of the Rancho San Vicente y Santa Monica.

#### THE YANKEE DONS

Not all at the fiesta could claim Spanish blood. But those Americans who had come into this part of Mexico and so successfully adapted themselves to Spanish ways and customs and to the soft Spanish language, were equally welcome. The Workmans and the Rowlands of Rancho La Puente were such. So was William Wolfskill, most successful with his vineyard and wine ventures. Henry Dalton, known as Don Enrique, owner of Ranchos Azusa and San Francisco, was an Englishman, but had been naturalized as a citizen of Mexico.

A famous visitor at the fiesta might be Don Benito Wilson, who would come a long way from the Rancho Jurupa. Born Benjamin Davis Wilson, this son of Tennessee had become one of the leading citizens in Mexico's California. His Rancho Jurupa on the Santa Ana River is excellent for cattle, but he complains bitterly that marauding Indians living in the passes of San Geronio and San Jacinto are raiding his establishment and stealing his cattle in such quantities that he is compelled to spend most of his time chasing them. Eventually Rancho Jurupa was sold by Don Benito to Louis Robidoux to become in time the site of the town of Jurupa, now the city of Riverside. With the sale of Rancho Jurupa, Wilson acquired ranchos closer to the pueblo, the Rancho San Jose de Buenos Ayres, where Westwood and the University of California at Los Angeles have been built. Rancho Rodeo de Las Aguas (the gathering of the waters) on which Beverly Hills is situated, 2000 acres at the harbor from the Dominguez heirs, and finally Rancho San Pascual (site of Pasadena) from Manuel Garfias.

Much of the development of the orange in California can be credited to Don Benito during his many years on Rancho San Pascual. Cities, too, were planned and platted by him. With Gov. John G. Downey, Civil War Governor of California, and Phineas Banning, famous stagecoach operator, he founded Wilmington on the acres bought from the Dominguez heirs and with his son-in-law, J. de Barth Shorb, he founded Alhambra. Mt. Wilson is named for him.

#### SAN FERNANDO VALLEY

When the fiesta of the Lugos was over the traveler would return to the pueblo, there to take once more the Royal Road northerly over the Pass of Cahuenga and into the Valley of San Fernando. Traveling across Rancho Ex-Mission de San Fernando was lonely for the horseman in that day. A few Indians were living on El Encino (the Oaks) and on the little Rancho El Escorpion (the Rancho of the Scorpion,) but the far-flung mission rancho was most barren and deserted. The Mexican government having wrested it from the padres was holding it intact in 1845, but only a year later sold its 121,000 acres to Don Eulogio de Celis for the sum of \$14,000, the money being used to equip and maintain the Mexican army against the American invasion. What a land bargain Don Eulogio received in his purchase of the San Fernando Valley at 11 cents an acre. And for cattle land most timely, as he at once stocked his big rancho and before the war was over sold cattle to both sides, and following the war the gold rush sent the price of beef soaring.

Leaving San Fernando Valley, the horseman passed through the oak-covered Rancho Las Virgenes, then across Rancho El Conejo (the Rabbit.) The Conejo grade has well advertised Rancho El Conejo to present-day motorists, but in the days of the dons its principal claim to importance was that it was the property of Jose Antonio Julian de la Guerra y Noriega. This long-named Spanish grandee was without doubt California's most prominent citizen. During his lifetime he was captain in the army of Spain, confidential adviser to the padres, comandante of the Presidio of Santa Barbara and held many official positions with the Mexican government. For over fifty years Capt. De la Guerra dominated Santa Barbara and it is not surprising that Santa Barbara today honors his name annually in their fiesta period. But the traveler's reception at the De la Guerra's would not be at his Rancho El Conejo and there are eight ranchos along the King's Highway between the El Conejo and the De la Guerra home in Santa Barbara.

So he would hasten on through Rancho Guadaluca, then the property of Dona Ysabel Yorba.

For thirty-five years Dona Ysabel enjoyed possession of the Guadaluca, but for an even longer period William Richard Broome and his heirs have held the rancho. Broome, an Englishman, purchased the Guadaluca in 1880 for \$1.20 per acre and the property still belongs to his heirs.

Next the traveler would cross Rancho Calleguas, finding that rancho owned by the family of Gabriel Ruiz, and then the vast acreage of Rancho Rio de Santa Clara. Valentin Cota, Mexican army officer, had received the ranch by the River Santa Clara in 1837 in recognition of services rendered, but although he still owned his big estate in the middle '40's the traveler would have more likely found him at the pueblo of Santa Barbara.

Crossing the River Santa Clara, the horseman entered Rancho Santa Clara del Norte, property of Juan Sanchez. The next rancho, Santa Paula y Saticoy, was the property of Manuel Jimeno, citizen of Monterey and ex-secretary of the territorial government of Mexico. Two cities are named for the Rancho of Santa Paula and Saticoy.

At San Buenaventura El Camino Real meets the ocean and here the traveler found a little cluster of adobes and the Mis-

sion of San Buenaventura constituting what was left of the once flourishing mission settlement. The little cluster of adobes has since grown into the thriving city of Ventura. And one of these little adobes affected its future growth by having the main street laid out with an angle so that the early settlers would ride by the adobe and not through it.

A pleasant trip had the traveler of the middle '40's along El Camino Real from San Juan Capistrano to San Buenaventura. Present-day motorists might laugh at his "elapsing time," but although those days were slower they could not have held more contentment. They were happy, laughing, carefree days—halcyon days of the Spanish ranchos.



Don Benito (Benjamin D.) Wilson and his house at Lake Vineyard ranch in the San Gabriel Valley played an important part in the development of Southern California.



—Curtis Altmate Studios.