

Plaza is on hallowed ground

Ghost of Don Verdugo rides again

Calling the new Eagle Rock shopping center the "plaza" would probably have pleased Jose Maria de Verdugo immensely.

The flamboyant Don of the 18th Century who once owned the territory on which it is located, would have been happy that its terminology remained Spanish.

Verdugo's ranch occupied 36 403 acres and now on 22 of those acres (where Don Verdugo once grazed his cattle) stands the most modern of community structures, bearing the historic name of Plaza.

The city of Los Angeles grew up around a "plaza", western version of "city square" where itinerant priests made their calls and sheep herders and mounted cattlemen and gentlemen in fine trappings came into town for a bit of trading on a Saturday night.

The word has always connoted the exchange of merchandise and a friendly meeting place for friends.

October of 1973 will find the same historic camaraderie but with the sophistication of the late 1970's.

Half-A-League West

Located as it is near the western border of the old Rancho, Eagle Rock Plaza occupies part of the shrine of the old Verdugo Dynasty which was described by Governor Pedro Fages when he made the grant to Verdugo as "at least a league and a half west of the Mission lands and far enough north of the Pueblo of Los Angeles so as not to prejudice the inhabitants."

According to Eagle Rock historian Betty Welcome, Jose Verdugo, a sergeant at the Mission and inactive because of illness, sent his brother, Marino, who planted crops and tended the herds until Jose Verdugo's death in 1831.

When the United States took over California in 1848, the government set up a land commission to pass on all Mexican land titles and the Verdugo claim was upheld by the commission.

Hard Luck Hits the Verdugos

Apparently the Verdugos needed money to construct a home for Julio (son of Jose Verdugo) and his family. In 1861 the rancho was mortgaged

for \$3,445.37 at 3 percent interest.

Julio, unable to meet the commitment, let the debt compound until eight years later he owed a staggering \$57,750 and was forced to sell the historic parcel at auction. Alfred B. Chapman, a lawyer, purchased the property.

The Rancho was later divided into 31 parcels among 28 persons, the largest going to Benjamin Dreyfus who held 8000 acres in what is now known as Eagle Rock (except the Rockdale area) which went to P. Beaudry.

Included was the south corner of Glendale (near the present site of the Plaza), which was then called "Tropico."

Words from the Archduke

During the past 10 years of research, the historian of the Eagle Rock Valley Historical Society found what is believed to be the earliest description of the Eagle Rock Valley. In 1876, Ludwig Louis Salvator, Archduke of Austria, visited the Los Angeles area. When he returned to Europe, the accounts of his experience were published in German. He entered our valley from the Glendale Area.

This is the quotation from his book — "Having left this delightful spot, a valley was reached where directly ahead rose the mysterious Piedra Gorda, the goal of the journey. At the right is Cienega del Garvanza, a small green swamp with clumps of bunch-grass and at the bottom, Sacate de Matiaño, which never dries out. From here we emerge on a plain where enormous herds of sheep, guarded by strongfat, shaggy dogs, pastured. Nearby is the entrance into the canyon of Piedra Gorda, the haunt of wild beasts.

The Piedra Gorda, towering above, is an imposing rock of granite conglomerates on one side with exposed parallel strata having two sharply defined hollows in which swallows have built their nests. It was also used at one time by the Indians as a natural Bulwark, a rock fortress, since this spot was an excellent location from which to observe the movements of the first settlers."

It is against the backdrop of such colorful panorama of the past that Eagle Rock Plaza opens its doors to the future.