



THE HISTORY OF EAGLE ROCK

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Dedicated to the Founding Members of the

EAGLE ROCK VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The History of Eagle Rock should be considered in five different periods. First, the Indian. Second, the Spanish-Mexican times giving way to the Anglo Pastoral. Third, the small farms, and then the breaking into a suburban subdivision of a small municipality, and the final stages as a suburb of Metropolitan Los Angeles.

The following material on the aboriginal dwellers of Eagle Rock was gleaned from a book titled "The Gabrieleno Indians" written by Mrs. Bernice Johnston, an expert on the subject. It was published by the Southwest Museum.

The Shoshone group of Indians lived in what is called the Great Basin which centers in Nevada with a few living in Arizona, Utah and the California desert. About 900 AD, they began to drift across the Cajon Pass to the Coastal Basin pushing out the existing natives. They pressed as far north as Ventura, against the Chumash, south into Orange County to the border of the Luisenos and even across to Catalina. We know this to be true because Ethnologists group the various Indian tribes together by their spoken language similarities. Those of the Coastal Basin had no written language, but were considered amongst the better off and highest cultured of the Southern California Indians.

The name or designation "Gabrieleno" came at a later date to designate their attachment to the San Gabriel Mission.

Mrs. Johnston states that there could have been a small village at about the Yosemite Playground as there was a fresh water spring, and evidence has been found proving the Indians did live in the canyon below our Eagle Rock.

The Indian dwellings were made of sticks such as willow wands stuck in the ground in a circle and gathered together at the top. If it were to be a permanent camp the shelters would be plastered with mud. The Gabrielenos had no domestic animals except perhaps the dog. They moved about often, in search of food as their main supply was small animals, roots, acorns, berries and seeds. The area in Eagle Rock could support no more than 200 persons so the next village would be perhaps three to five miles away. Indian material has been found in quantity in oak-shaded Verdugo Canyon and on either side of what are now the grounds of the Glendale Adventist Hospital, in the lower parts of Chevy Chase and along the west bank of the Arroyo Seco. Excavations for buildings here brought to light bones of ancient animals, and artesian springs are still present. Mortars and other artifacts found in our valley have long been scattered and lost.

In appearance these people were short, stocky and quite muscular. Their skin was not dark, but a soft warm brown and some were quite fair in childhood. Both men and women liked tattooing on the forehead. The women sometimes preferred a decoration on the chin or a line from the eyes down to the breast.

By the time any Anthropologist or Ethnologist began to study the Gabrielenos they were almost extinct. Hugo Reed of the Santa Anita Rancho first began his records of the Indians of the area in about 1850. His wife, Victoria, was a Mission trained Gabrieleno Indian. She is said to have been the daughter of a line of chiefs, or perhaps shamens.

Now to the second period - All is to the contrary that Portola, who came in 1769, ever saw the Eagle Rock Valley, but there is evidence that Father Francisco Garces passed through the area. On April 9, 1776, he left the San Gabriel Mission on a trek to visit the Tulare Indians near what is now Bakersfield. Sometime within the next three days he crossed the Arroyo and probably tramped our valley. While reading Father Garces' diary, translated by John Galvin, I traced his footsteps by longitude and latitude on a topography map and came to these conclusions.

Jose Maria de Verdugo was born in Loreto, Baja California. He became a soldier of the King of Spain and the Corporal of the Guard at the founding of the Mission San Gabriel. This was on September 8, 1771. At 28 he was married to Maria de la Encarnacion Lopez, who had migrated from Sinaloa, Mexico with her parents. The wedding was held at the new San Gabriel Mission on November 7, 1779. His corporal's salary was too small to support a growing family so he began to augment his income by grazing a few head of cattle. He wandered the countryside looking for better pastures and finally found them, to the west of the Arroyo Seco. Verdugo petitioned for grazing rights to the Governor, Pedro Fages, and on October 20, 1784, Fages conceded to Jose Verdugo an area in distance 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." Jose was now a sergeant at the Mission and on inactive duty because of illness. He sent his brother, Marino, to plant a few crops and tend the herds. The Rancho contained 36,403 acres. The actual area in modern landmarks is: Begin at the Devil's Gate -- the east line ran west of the Arroyo Seco and followed downstream, to its junction with the Los Angeles River, following upstream north of Elysian Park to just beyond Sonora Park (at about Travel Town in Griffith Park). From this point on the Los Angeles River the west boundary ran northwesterly and entered the hills near the present Mother Cabrini Convent about two miles east of Sun Valley. About one-half mile above this point in the Verdugo Hills the line veered at a right angle and headed northeasterly to the north foot of the Verdugo Hills. The northwest corner of the property was about one-half mile east of the present Tujunga-La Crescenta boundary, thence it followed back close to the north foot of the Verdugo and San Raphael Hills to Devil's Gate. The area now includes the present communities of Burbank, Glendale, Highland Park, Mt. Washington, Flintridge, Montrose, Eagle Rock and parts of Pasadena, La Crescenta and La Canada.

Jose Verdugo died April 12, 1831, at the age of 80. His son, Julio, and daughter, Catalina, inherited the Rancho. A bad case of measles had blinded Catalina as a child.

When the United States took over California in 1848, a Land Commission was set up to pass on all Mexican Land Titles. Rancho San Rafael was Case #403. A California Mexican named Thomas A. Sanchez, testifying for the Verdugo family, referred to the Arroyo Seco as the "Arroyo Seco de la Piedra Gorda" (the dry wash of the fat rock). The Verdugo claim was upheld by the Commission.

Apparently the Verdugos needed money to construct "Portosuelo," a home for Julio and his family, for on January 2, 1861, they mortgaged the Rancho for \$3,445.37. This loan cost 3% per month, compounded every 3 months. In 1863, because no payment had been made on

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the loan, Jacob Elias, who held the papers, started foreclosure proceedings. When the court cases were finally settled in 8 years the debt had risen from \$3,445.37 to \$58,750.00. Julio could not pay the judgment and was forced to sell the Rancho. It was put up for public auction. Alfred B. Chapman, a lawyer, purchased the property for the debt.

After many more court battles in 1870 the Rancho San Rafael was divided into thirty-one parcels among twenty-eight persons. The largest award went to Benjamin Dreyfus. This grant was for 8,000 acres and included all of Eagle Rock except the Rockdale area, which went to P. Beaudry. It also included the south corner of Glendale, later called Tropic. Catalina and her nephew, Theodoro Verdugo, were awarded 3,300 acres and Julio retained "Portosuelo" with its 200 acres. This area was located not far east of the present intersection of Acacia Street and Verdugo Road.

During the 10 years of research while Historian of the Eagle Rock Valley Historical Society, I found what I believe 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 Matiago, which never dries out. From here we emerge on a plain where enormous herds of sheep, guarded by strong, fat, 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."

Taken from the "Los Angeles Herald Sunday Magazine" of October 24, 1909, I quote, "The pretty little suburb of Eagle Rock is only three years old. It was awakened into life by the magic wand of Huntington's Trolley System in August, 1906. Those who knew Eagle Rock at that time will recall it as a picturesque bit of country scenery, tucked away by itself, far from the main roads of travel. Although as the crow flies but six miles from Los Angeles, it might just as well have been a hundred miles distance as far as its availability for suburban life was concerned.

"Its area was broken up into truck gardens and orchards, and the reputation of the famous Gates (Eagle Rock) strawberries and Eagle Rock winter vegetables was about the only medium by which the district was brought to the attention of those living outside its hilly boundaries. A country wagon road leading from Glendale and the San Fernando Valley into Pasadena roughly bisected the valley from west to east; another road, running southwest, connected with the main San Fernando Road, along which the truck gardeners drove their produce to the markets of Los Angeles.

"Contrast such a picture of simple rural life with the condition found in Eagle Rock today (1909). With the comparatively small area lying west of Townsend Avenue there are now completed or under construction for immediate completion over twenty-two miles of heavy concrete street curbs and wide cement sidewalks. Eagle Rock's main boulevard, Colorado Street, is dedicated to the county at a uniform width of 120 feet and is to be paved with macadam. One of the most

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beautiful streets in Eagle Rock is the famous Hill Avenue, which follows closely the contours of the foothills, bounding Eagle Rock on the north. That portion of Hill Avenue now completed gives a smooth hard surface for autos and carriages, winding in and out close to the hills and flanked by wide parkways planted with cork oaks and the beautiful double-blooming scarlet hibiscus. Other notable streets in Eagle Rock already completed are Royal Drive (Mount Royal Drive), Aca-cia Street (Laverne Avenue), Kenilworth Avenue (Hermosa Avenue), High-land Avenue (Highland View), and Fairmont Avenue (Maywood Avenue); all have wide well-kept parkways and scattered along their length are many beautiful and expensive homes.

"The women of the valley have organized a Women's Twentieth Cen-tury Club and are soon to erect one of the most artistic and complete bungalow clubhouses to be found in many a day's journey."

Copied from "Los Angeles County" by Steven McGroarty, 1923, "Ea-gle Rock is situated at the northern door of Los Angeles. This place has had a most wonderful growth. In 1920, the United States census gave it 2,250 souls, while present careful official estimates by the Water Company, etc., show that it is close to 5,000. Again it may be said that when it was incorporated, in March 1911, it had only 600 population.

"It was originally designated, and still is a city of home build-ers, who do not cater to the rush and pellmell of a factory town, de-siring rather a quiet city of homes, superior schools and churches of the various demoninations, believing in the Christian religion.

"The Women's Twentieth Century Club has a \$10,000 Clubhouse."

Another interesting fact to be added to the history of Eagle Rock - in Denver, Colorado, on November 17, 1867, was born a small frail hunchback named Homer Lea. He became a brilliant military genius when still little more than a boy. As a youngster his family moved to Los Angeles and in 1894 he entered Occidental College. Though only 5 feet tall, he became a Lieutenant General in the Chinese Republican Army. The early efforts of Lea and the Chinese patriots failed to destroy the Manchu Dynasty. Homer Lea returned to California and through the efforts of friends, engaged an American Sergeant, Ansel E. O'Banion, to train local Chinese as officers for a new revolutionary army. Now, what is interesting to us is that during the years 1905 to 1911, O'Ban-ion with his blue uniformed Chinese, would often ride the Big Red Street Cars of the Pacific Electric to Highland Park and then hike up what is now Figueroa Street to the hills of Eagle Rock for some of their field training.

In 1923, by a vote of the people, Eagle Rock lost its cityhood and became part of Los Angeles. While the community lost its identity as a municipality, it gained the promise of an adequate water supply and an upgraded school system including a junior and senior high.

At that time Eagle Rock's City Hall, with its fire and police de-partments, was taken over by the City of Los Angeles. It has been converted, at a cost of \$41,000, into a community building for Eagle Rock. Both the City Hall and the "Rock" have been declared cultural heritage landmarks. The population of our community is now about 21,000 and still growing, but now up instead of out.

EAGLE ROCK VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
EAGLE ROCK CITY HALL
2035 COLORADO BLVD.
OPEN FRIDAYS FROM 2 TO 4:30 PM

PREPARED THROUGH THE
COURTESY OF
ARTHUR K. SNYDER
COUNCILMAN, 14TH DISTRICT
