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Author(s): ROSE L. ELLERBE

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HISTORY OF TEMESCAL VALLEY

BY ROSE L. ELLERBE

In the history of our planet, a century of time is but a breath; yet we of today find it almost impossible to visualize the life of our forerunners of a hundred years ago, or to understand the conditions of their daily living, much less the spirit that animated them. In a way, the history of the Temescal valley is typical of that of many another obscure corner of California. During the slow-rolling years it has passed through many changes; it has been the scene of tranquil lives undisturbed by modern unrest and change; of high hopes and anxious fears; of romance, tragedy, and comedy. And at last it has become the victim of present-day utilitarianism, drained, to a large extent, of its abundant waters and torn and despoiled by the huge machines that take out its most prosaic yet valuable treasures, clay and building materials.

The Temescal valley, in Riverside County, heads in Lake Elsinore, drops to the southwest, and opens out on the plains where Corona and the Arlington district of Riverside flourish. To its west rises the beautiful Santa Ana range, to its east is the rolling sweep of the Temescal mountains. The valley is divided by a hill, on one side of which is the bed of the Temescal Creek, taking its rise in Lee Lake, and carrying at flood tide the overflow of Lake Elsinore. It is fed by small streams coming in from the canyons, and terminates in the Temescal wash, a natural reservoir.

From the western wall of the valley a number of streams flow at high tide. One of these, Coldwater, flowing from the beautiful canyon of that name, once carried a considerable body of water, often maintaining its flow the year round. A number of cienagas also fed this stream. On a beach near Coldwater was located hot sulphur springs.

People who knew the valley in earlier days can reproduce a semblance, at least, of the fair sight that met the eyes of the first explorers who passed this way. Here were cienagas which were oases of green in the driest season; groves of fine live-oaks and sycamore, beside many scattered giant trees; the streams were lined with a lush growth of willows, cottonwoods, bays, and underbrush, all overrun by a tangle of grapes, roses of Castile, chilicothe, and other vines. Wild flowers—fields of Matilija poppies, the nodding evening primrose swaying over rippling waters, hillsides covered with carpets of dainty baby-blue-eyes and cream cups, and a rich growth of alfileria and wild grasses—must have attracted the atten-

tion of the priests and soldiers of San Luis Rey, which mission laid claim, under the Spanish régime, to this valley.

About 1818, a priest of San Luis Rey—probably Father Peyri—sent a soldier who had served the Mission long and well, to locate in the Temescal valley, giving him a “paper,”—a permit, or license, for grazing. This was Leandro Serrano, a son of one of the soldiers of Fray Serra’s first expedition, born in San Diego “prior to 1870.” According to Bancroft, this native son had served San Luis Rey as mayor-domo at Pala and at San Juan Capistrano. He married, first, Presentacion Yorba, a sister of Dons Tomás and Bernardo Yorba, of the Santa Ana Rancho, who bore him six children. After her death he married Josefa Montalva, of Santa Barbara, who served as cook for Father Boscano, when he was the first parish priest of Our Lady of the Angels, Los Angeles. Before the death of Don Leandro, in 1852, seven children were born of this later marriage, of whom two daughters—the last of the family—now reside in Los Angeles.

Señorita Dolores Serrano states that the priests wished her father to live in the Temescal valley because he had much influence with the Indians and could thus prevent trouble for the Mission. She says that when her father first came, there were many Indians in this valley, that there was a rancheria with a temescal located near the big cienaga, where the bathers could run from the “sweat-house” to the cold water of the mountain stream. She also says that her father’s first occupation was to organize hunts, with the help of the natives, to exterminate the bear, mountain cats, and other prowling “animales,” which overran the country. After this was done, Señor Serrano brought in a flock of sheep and a herd of cattle.

According to the testimony reviewed by the Supreme Court in rendering its final decision in the matter of the Temescal Rancho, it was admitted that Leandro Serrano occupied the valley and held it in undisputed possession from 1819 until his death, although he held no formal grant—only the license to graze. Señor Serrano seems to have made an attempt to secure a better title to his land through Governor Echandia; but he did not push matters, and is reported as telling “Benito” Wilson, who married into the Yorba family, that he had held undisputed possession since the settlement of the country and that everybody respected his claim. As was cited and admitted, under Spanish law, undisputed possession for thirty years alone gave title. But the claim was finally rejected altogether.

Don Leandro built his first house, probably early in the twenties, at a spot beside the “big cienaga,” near the center of the valley, which was marked until recent years by a monarch of a walnut and

an equally large fig tree. These were for a long time landmarks in that vicinity. Later, apparently some time in the early thirties, because of threatening trouble with Indians, another home was erected upon a knoll just above the first site, which commanded a far-reaching view. The ruins of this adobe were standing during the eighties. So far as I have been able to learn, Leandro Serrano was the first settler of European blood, and built the first residence in what is now Riverside County, and probable in San Bernardino County, also. Prior to 1820 some kind of shelter had been provided by the priests of San Gabriel in the neighborhood of what was later the *asistencia* of Politana, in the San Bernardino valley; but this does not appear to have been the permanent residence of any man of Spanish blood.

Don Leandro set out orchards and vineyards and cultivated some of the fertile lands of the valley. As his family grew up about him, sons and sons-in-law built adobes along the trail traveled through the valley between San Diego, San Luis Rey, and San Juan Capistrano and San Gabriel, and later on between Warner's Rancho and the Colorado River and el pueblo de Los Angeles. Some time in the forties Señor Serrano moved into a new adobe, nearer this traveled road. This house is still standing, in ruins, and was occupied by the family until the daughters moved to Los Angeles, in 1898. Here Señora Serrano died in the nineties—a very old woman. A few outside settlers may have come into the valley during this decade—one family, the Aguilars, came from Mexico and settled, doubtless through the permission of Señor Serrano, near the Lagunita, or Lee Lake.

The coming of a new government, with insistent demands for titles and legalities, must have brought fear and anxiety to the heart of the old Californian, who had so long enjoyed undisputed possession of his valley. Before the United States Land Commissioners rendered their decision denying his title, in 1853, Don Leandro died, and was carried to San Juan Capistrano to be buried beside Doña Presentacion. By the rejection of their claim his family was left without land, without even a title to the orchards and vineyards surrounding the residence. An appeal was taken to the District Court, and years of uncertainty followed. Some American squatters came in, early in the fifties, chief of whom seems to have been the Lathrop family.

In 1856 Daniel Sexton, who came into California in 1841, claims to have discovered the tin mine in the Temescal mountains, having been told of it by an Indian. Señorita Serrano says that one of her brothers had a residence at the mine; but I have not been able to fix the date of this. According to the records of San Bernardino County, Don Abel Stearns purchased from Señora Josefa Serrano

whatever right she might have to the Temescal Rancho for 200 head of cattle. "Don Abel" seems to have had great faith in the value of this tin deposit. H. M. Willis, of San Bernardino, speaking many years later, declared that in 1858 there was but one mine of value known in San Bernardino County—the Temescal Tin Mine. An agreement is on record, dated 1864, in which Stearns disposes of his rights in the Temescal Rancho to J. H. Ray, of San Francisco, for \$100,000.

In 1859 the District Court finally reached a decision, reversing the ruling of the Land Commissioners, and granting the Temescal Rancho, to include four leagues of land, to the Serrano heirs. But they were not to be allowed to remain in undisputed possession of their heritage. Already, other claimants for the tin mine district had appeared. In 1842 a grant known as "San Jacinto" had been made to José Antonio Estudillo, its boundaries named as Ranchos Jurupa and San Bernardino, on the north; Temecula, on the south; Gorgonio on the east, and Huapa on the west. As the boundaries of all these ranchos were indefinite, and as they were located in what is now San Diego, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Orange counties, it will be seen that the San Jacinto grant covered a very large territory and contained large possibilities. Later, Rancho Nueva y Potrero and Rancho Vieja San Jacinto were indefinitely limited and taken from grant. In 1845, M. Aguirre, on account of his wife, Rosaria Estudillo, was granted Sobrante San Jacinto, to include five leagues, more or less, or all the remaining lands of the original San Jacinto. Here was a situation which led to litigation extending from the time, 1853, when the Sobrante San Jacinto was thrown out by the Land Commissioners, until the final decision of the Supreme Court, in 1888. In 1855 the District Court reversed the ruling of the Land Commissioners, and granted the Sobrante San Jacinto, to include five leagues. The grant was purchased soon after this decision by Edward Conway, an employee of the Surveyor-General's office. Before 1866 Conway and associates—mostly men connected with the U. S. Land Office—had filed claims for some 400 mineral locations in the Temescal Tin District, claiming the filings were on unsurveyed government land.

In the meantime influence had been brought to bear somewhere—the U. S. Government appealed from the decision of the District Court, and in 1866, in spite of the protests put up by Stearns and the Serrano heirs, the Supreme Court decided that the Spanish administration had no intention of making Serrano a grant, since it had given him merely a license for grazing, therefore his undisputed possession did not give a title to Temescal Rancho. In 1867 the Land Office patented the Sobrante San Jacinto, to include eleven leagues, and with its boundaries carried over "twenty-six" miles, according to Stearns, in order to include the tin district.

The history of the Temescal tin mine would fill a volume. I can only briefly epitomize it here. A tin mine company had already been formed, its members including Gen. Beale, U. S. Surveyor-General for California; Messrs. Conway, Hancock, and other employees of the Land Office, and also some of the Washington officials, it was claimed by Stearns, who fought every step of the proceedings. The case was tried by different courts, under various titles, and the decision was always that no fraud was proved. It was passed upon by the Secretary of the Interior. After Stearns's death, his heirs carried on the warfare until the final decision, sustaining the lower courts and the Land Office.

In 1869 bars of tin from the Temescal mine were exhibited at the Mechanics' Fair, San Francisco. Specimens of the tin were sent to England and were pronounced of the purest quality. It was declared by many investigators that here was a body of tin, unlimited in quantity and of the finest quality—the richest and, indeed, the only workable body of tin ore in the U. S. Because of the litigation little active work was done, until the title was cleared in 1888. After this, experts from England repeatedly examined the tin district, and made extensive reports which were so favorable that, July 24, 1890, a company with a capital of 3,500,000 pounds was incorporated in London, known as the California Mining and Smelting Co.; also another corporation, the San Jacinto Estate, Limited, was formed, members of which were Sir James Balfour, Irish Secretary; Sir John Stokes, Vice-President of the Suez Canal Co., and other prominent financiers of London, including some of the men interested in the Welsh tin mines, then the chief source of supply for England. The Sobrante San Jacinto Rancho, 45,126 acres, was purchased; Col. E. N. Robinson was installed as manager; a plant that had been intended for a Black Hills, Dakota, tin mine, was first installed, and the Temescal tin mine was at last opened up. It is claimed that nearly two million dollars was expended here within the next two years. Up to July, 1892, 136 tons of metallic tin were produced—the only tin bars ever made from ore in this country. On March 30, 1892, the first shipment of American pig tin reached New York, via Colon. The *Redlands Citrograph* stated: "This shipment caused tin dealers in London to telegraph New York dealers to lower prices on tin plate." This was the first—and the last—shipment. The Temescal tin mines were closed down in 1892, the valuable equipment and machinery were later sold, and no effort has since been made to work the mine.

No entirely satisfactory explanation of the fact has developed. The tariff on tin was made a political issue of the campaign of 1892—this may have had a bearing. It was claimed that the Corn-

wall tin interests obtained a controlling hold and closed down the Temescal mine to prevent competition; it is also claimed that the English tin experts were mistaken in their estimates and tin was not present in paying quantities. The property has now passed into the hands of an American company, although English stockholders still have an interest.

To return to the history of the Valley proper. In 1858, the quiet which still prevailed was disturbed by big, three-seated coaches, drawn by dashing horses—the Butterfield stages, which provided transportation and carried mail between San Francisco and St. Louis. In this connection, the following extract may be of interest, taken from the report of Special Agent G. Bailey to Postmaster-General Brown, dated October 18, 1858, after making the first over-land trip:

“Left San Francisco Plaza at precisely ten minutes past midnight on the 14th of Sept., 1858, and arrived at Tipton, terminus of the Pacific railway, at five minutes past nine, in the morning, Oct. 9th. The mails reached St. Louis the same day at forty-five minutes past eight p. m. Time actually consumed between San Francisco and St. Louis, 24 days, 18 hours and 26 minutes.

“The second division of the trip, with time and distance between points: Los Angeles to El Monte, 13 miles; San Jose, 12; Chino Rancho, 12; Temescal, 20; Laguna Grande, 10; Temecula, 21; Tejunga, 14; Oak Grove, 12; Warner’s Rancho, 10; San Felipe, 16; Vallecito, 18; Palm Springs, 9; Carrisso Creek, 9; Indian Wells, 32; Alamo Mocho, 24; Cook’s Wells, 22; Pilot Knob, 18; Fort Yuma, 10; Total, 282 miles. Time, seventy-one hours and forty-five minutes. Note: There is no water on this route between Carrisso Springs and the Colorado, except at stations.”

In the eighties the ruins of what was known as the “old stage station” were pointed out in the Temescal valley, and a fitting story of a peddler who was said to have reached this station and was never seen again, was current. However, the Serrano sisters, who vividly recall the big stages, state that the station used was further down the valley, and was never at the building named.

In 1866 the Temescal School District was organized, the fifth in San Bernardino County. Its boundaries were defined, according to Book A, of the Supervisors’ Minutes, as: “Commencing at the N. E. point of the Jurupa Dist. and running S. E. to the boundary of San Diego County, and containing all that portion of the county not included in other districts.” As San Bernardino was, at this time, the largest county in the U. S., and this district extended from the Santa Ana River to the Colorado and included all but a small corner of the area of the county, Temescal may be fairly supposed to have been the largest school district in the U. S. A California

school house was planted under a huge sycamore tree, and here the children of the settlers—all speaking Spanish, though English was taught—were gathered. This building, with some repairs, served until 1889, when a fine modern building took its place and still serves.

The oldest resident of the Temescal valley, now, is Mr. C. J. Compton, who, with his brother, Ambrose, arrived here from England in 1879, and purchased squatter's rights, which had already passed through two or three hands, the first owner having been one Myers. Mr. Compton says the Serranos still claimed the land, which had not yet been surveyed, although the Supreme Court had denied their rights in 1866. Early in the seventies Mrs. Thorndyke took up a homestead upon the bench of land near Coldwater Canyon, including the hot springs, and filed a claim on all the water of Coldwater, although a previous settler, Binkley, had made a filing before hers, but had not utilized the water. Mrs. Thorndyke built a two-story frame house, probably the first in that section, hauling the lumber for it from Los Angeles. This was called a hotel. The springs were widely known and greatly valued by the early residents. Many visitors came to the valley to camp under its trees, drink and bathe in the healing waters. The Californians and pioneer settlers came here, too, for their wash-day fiestas—the warm waters were cleansing as well as healing.

Soon after Mrs. Thorndyke had established herself, an old sea-captain, Sayward by name, homesteaded the land at the mouth of Coldwater Canyon, erected a two-story adobe—now a part of the Glen Ivy Hotel—and also filed a claim upon water from the stream. Naturally a lawsuit followed—a lawsuit in this case backed by an ancient feud between the families, and a long and interesting history. The suit over the water rights and the ditches of these two claimants went merrily on, through various owners of the Sayward side, with Mrs. Thorndyke upon the other, until both properties came into the hands of the Temescal Water Company, which supplied water for the settlement of South Riverside, now Corona.

During the seventies stock and sheep men began to give place to orchards and bees. The latter were first brought into the valley, Mr. Compton states, by a negro, in the early seventies. Later, the Compton brothers became apiarists upon a large scale and bees are still an important source of income in the valley.

The rapid developments of the eighties brought a new and more enterprising class of settlers. Mines and "prospects" were developed; there was much talk of a railroad—still unbuilt. The Santa Fé took the San Jacinto route to Elsinore and Temescal remains a stage station. In May, 1886, the South Riverside Land and Water Company was incorporated, its members including ex-Governor

Merrill, of Iowa; Messrs. Joy, Hudson, W. H. Jameson, R. B. Taylor, and others. This company purchased a tract of land lying on the mesa between the Temescal Wash and Arlington and secured water rights to Temescal Creek, Lee Lake, and tributaries of the creek—150 acres of water-bearing lands. Work was at once begun on water development and in building dams and pipe-lines. In 1889 the Temescal Water Company was incorporated, to supply water for the new colony. This company purchased all the water-bearing lands to be obtained in the valley and soon began putting down artesian wells. The first wells flowed, at a depth of 300 feet. Soon, however, pumping plants had to be installed. In time all the water of both Temescal and Coldwater creeks was turned into pipe lines. Cienagas and springs were drained, and, gradually, the beautiful spots of the valley became dry and desolate. Farms and orchards in the central part of the valley were abandoned; the old adobes along the stage route crumbled until now most of them are gone, and recently the old road, traveled for so many years, is abandoned also.

Along the foothills, and in small cañons, some flourishing ranches and orchards are found. Several country places have been developed. The Glen Ivy Hotel, with its hot baths and plunge, remains a popular resort. But the chief industry now is the taking out of clay and building material. Here is a zone, according to State Mining Bureau reports, of "plastic clay of superior quality, resembling important white, grey, black, and red cretaceous clays of the New Jersey plains." At Alberhill, near Lake Elsinore, is located an extensive terra cotta plant; also clay to supply a large number of plants in Southern California, is taken out here. Other clay pits are located in the lower end of the valley; while a large rock crushing plant ships out quantities of material.

As we have seen, the Temescal valley has passed through many stages and been occupied by a shifting series of settlers. Since the undisputed possession of the Serranos ended, it has seemed to know but little of permanence; it has been the stopping place of many a stranded soul; a source of supply for more fortunate districts. One wonders what the future may reveal. When its water supply and clay beds are exhausted, will some new treasure be uncovered? Attempts are now under way to locate oil. Perhaps, sometime, it may again become the "tin district" of the United States, and the great industry once so proudly boasted of may materialize.

The story of the Serrano family is, perhaps, not strictly history—only a human interest story. When the decision came that their heritage to a rich valley was a mere dream—that they had no right to an acre of the land they had so long called their own—it was a heavy blow to the surviving members of the family. One of the

sons who had been educated as a priest became insane, and for more than forty years was incarcerated in Napa State Asylum. Other members left the valley until only the mother and two youngest daughters remained. When the land was finally opened to settlement, a homestead was secured to 160 acres surrounding the home. A Mexican servant remained with them and raised the barley and cultivated the old orchard. But the living of the three women was scant in these days; they were aliens to their squatter neighbors, and hated because of the claims they cherished in their hearts. The chest of rich silks, Chinese shawls and other finery, left by Señora Presentacion and cherished as a family treasure through the years, was despoiled at last to keep them alive. When the mother died there was no money for the funeral, and the daughters could not consent that she should be laid in unconsecrated ground. So they mortgaged their home to the South Riverside Land and Water Company, and carried Señora Serrano to the little graveyard at Agua Mansa, near Riverside—the first Catholic burying ground in San Bernardino valley.

Their old servitor was now too crippled to carry on the rancho. In 1898 the two sisters left Temescal to live in Los Angeles. Major Horace Bell, long their friend and attorney, made arrangements which gave them a home on East Sixteenth Street. Here they live almost as secluded a life as though they were in the old adobe under the pepper tree at Temescal. They are of a past generation and a past age—a bit of Old California left over.