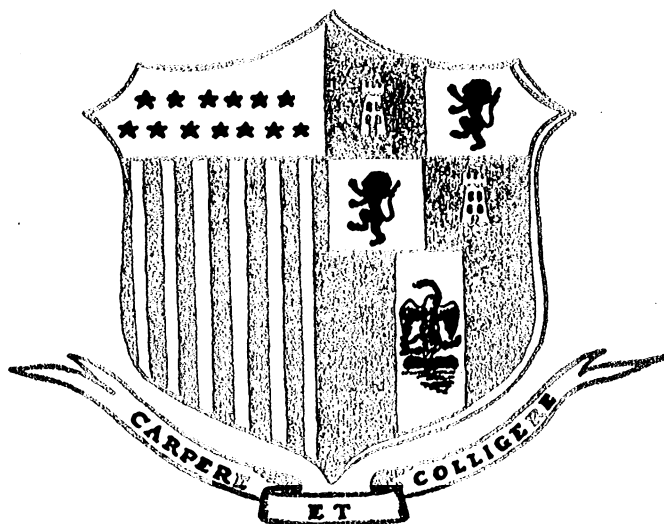


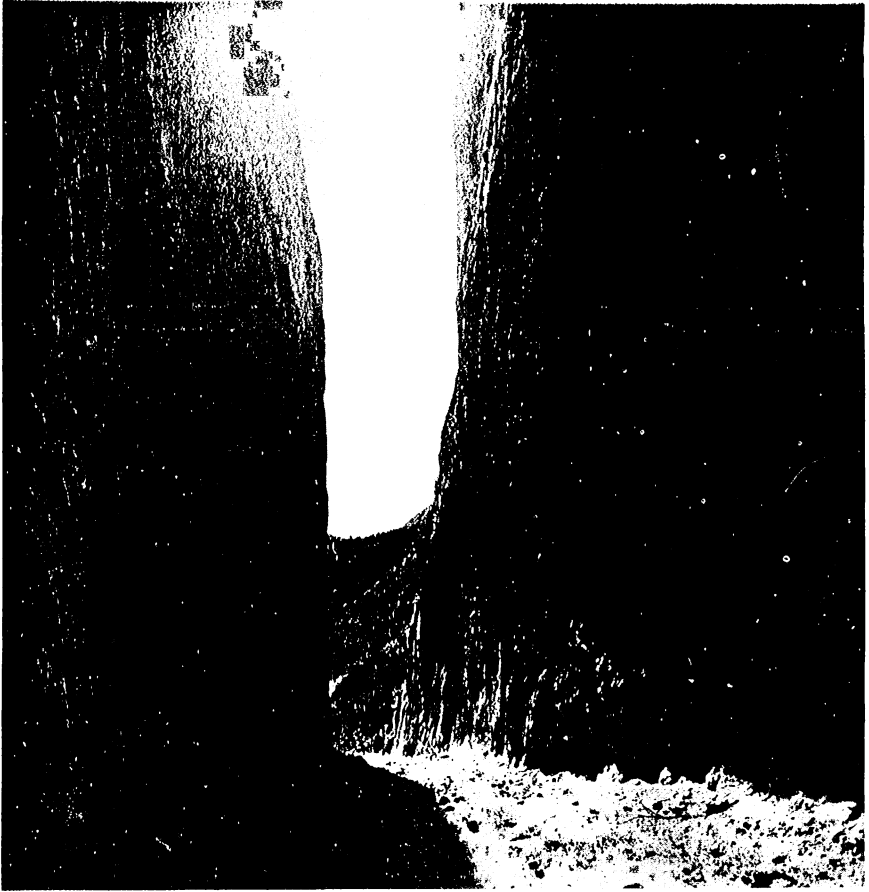
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Photograph by F. C. Ripley

The summit of the north slope looking south with view through the Cut, of green hills, dotted with darker green oaks and a blue sky above them.

The San Fernando Pass
and the
Pioneer Traffic that Went over It

By VERNETTE SNYDER RIPLEY

PART II

9

Through the Cut on the New Road
1855-1860

With quotations from those who crossed over the Pass.

1855 First crude oil used for experimental purposes in California carried over the Pass.

Governor Don Pio Pico, in 1845, had appointed his brother, Don Andres Pico, and one Juan Manso commissioners to make inventories of the Mission estates. The two of them then, through Governor Pico, obtained a lease from the Mexican government of the vast acres of the ex-San Fernando Mission Rancho. After the war with the United States in 1847, part of the San Fernando Rancho came into the possession of General Don Andres Pico. Representing the Californians, he had signed the capitulation papers presented by Colonel Fremont at the Cahuenga ranch house. With his family, he continued to live within the thick-walled, dark rooms of the middle part of the old mission itself.¹ Its surrounding adobe walls had begun to crumble into ruins, the padres' garden was a forgotten tangle. But over the wide, sunny plains of the valley, thousands of General Pico's cattle grazed, and the red wine from his ancient grape vines was unsurpassed.²

The Camino Viejo, the emigrant road from the pueblo, passed by the great doors of the old Mission. Moving swirls of dust in the distant valley told of travellers approaching. The clouds of dust disgorged bellowing, crowding herds of cattle on their way north to the Tulare Valley. All of this slowly moving procession of pioneer traffic General Don Andres Pico had looked out on as it passed by his home in the

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¹Notes placed at end of chapter.

old Mission. It had first struggled over the San Fernando Pass on the Cuesta Vieja, it was headed now for the new San Fernando Pass that crossed the mountain through the high cut in the rocks on its summit.

General Don Andres Pico's nephew, Romulo Pico, lived in the old mission with him. One day the two of them galloped their horses across the open plains into the foothills where a little valley led to the road over the San Fernando Pass. Up the steep new grade and through the new cut they urged their horses. At the bottom of the north slope they turned into a canyon to the west. Up in the wild tangle of brush, along a stream, they came across brea deposits long known to the Mission Indians and used in many ways, to line baskets or mend their pottery and canoes.

1855 "There is a legend from the San Fernando Mission to the effect that in 1855 General Andres Pico and his nephew Romulo, took oil for experimenting and refining purposes from seepages, and hand-dug the pits in the canyon . . . which bears their name." They carried the crude oil they had found back over the new San Fernando Pass to the Mission. There, General Pico tried to break it down into a lighter product that he could use to heat and light the dark, cold rooms of the old Mission. The legend "is the first references in California history where an attempt was made to utilize crude petroleum."

1855 FALL. Bishop Kip, the first appointed Episcopal Bishop to California, makes a trip up the coast.⁵

"Los Angeles has all the characteristics of an old Spanish town. It contains about 5,000 inhabitants, two thousand of whom may be Americans or English. The houses are almost invariably one story high — a style of building which an occasional earthquake has rendered advisable. All around is a perfect garden, luxuriant with every kind of fruit.

"Monday, Oct. 8. Captain Gardiner had sent down from Fort Tejon (about a hundred miles distant) a large heavy ambulance wagon, for no other is adapted to the mountain passes through which our road leads. It was drawn by four mules, and had Bell, a Dragoon, as driver, who was well acquainted with the country.

"Bell was well armed, and all the gentlemen with me had their rifles and revolvers. . . . The country through which we pass is infested with California and Mexican outlaws, whose trade is robbery and who will often shoot down a traveller for the sake of a horse on which he is mounted. Our friends in Los Angeles warned us, *when we left the vehicle to walk, as we were often obliged to do for miles at a time, not to straggle off, but to keep together.*"

Leaving Los Angeles at eleven o'clock, "we shortly passed through

a chain of hills,⁶ and then again over the plains for seventeen miles. Not a living object was seen for hours till, towards evening, the coyotes came out and we saw them loping along as they followed us with their long gallop. . . . Night closed before we reached our destination. We drove on, sometimes in darkness, 'till the appearance of a single light a long distance ahead, showed that we were approaching habitation.

"After a time we reached enclosures, the first we had seen since leaving Los Angeles, and found ourselves at the Mission of San Fernando. The buildings are the most massive I have seen in this country. Along the whole front runs a corridor which must be three hundred feet in length, supported by heavy square, stone pillars. Some of the apartments are forty feet long, reminding me of old castellated mansions in the south of Europe.

"We had letters to Don Andres Pico, the present owner of the Mission, and as he was absent, presented them to his Major-domo who treated us with all the hospitality in his power. We had a regular Spanish supper, olla porida, frijoles and tortillas with native wine. . . .

"Tuesday, Oct. 9th 1855: We were up at dawn expecting to be off early but were detained an hour for breakfast. Our morning ablutions were performed at a little stream in front of the door, which the old padres had led there to irrigate their gardens.

"We had a Spanish breakfast similar to our supper the night before. Upon offering to pay the Major-domo he refused to receive anything. We then urged him to take a present for himself but he said 'No, when strangers come along, if they make me a present, I receive it, but not from friends of Don Andres.' And all this was announced with the highest Castilian manner.

"It was seven o'clock before we left the Mission and after proceeding a few miles we reached *the San Fernando Pass* where the road has been cut through a deep defile in the mountains. Here we had to get out and walk for some miles and the scenery was the wildest I have ever seen since I have crossed the Alps. How our heavy wagon was to get over was a marvel to us. At one place was a ledge of rocks almost perpendicular about four feet high down which it plunged as if it would turn over and crush the mules while we involuntarily held our breath as we looked on.

"In the pass, two Indians on horseback met us *as we were walking* and were loud in their demands for money, till some of the gentlemen allowed their arms to be seen, when their tone was moderated considerably. Had my companions been unarmed, it was evident they would have no scruples about enforcing their wishes. After passing the hills our course lay for twenty-two miles over a level plain."



MISSION AND PLAIN OF SAN FERNANDO

Taken from: "Explorations and Surveys for a Railroad Route from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean. / War Department / Report of Explorations in California / for / Railroad Routes / to connect with / the Routes near the 35th and 32d Parallels or north Latitude / By / Lieutenant R. S. Williamson / Corps of Topographical Engineers / 1853."

1856 Lyon Station. Harris Newmark.⁹

"We left Los Angeles early one afternoon and made our first stop at Lyon's Station where we put up for the night. One of the brothers after whom the place was named, prepared supper."

This is the first known reference to the stage station which stood at the foot of the north slope of the San Fernando Mountain. It was in a meadow close to the roads coming off the Cuesta Vieja and the new San Fernando Pass. The site is considered to be the open land near the stream, on which Colonel Fremont and his army had camped nine years before. The stage station was run by Sanford Lyon and his brother Cy who raised sheep around in the foothills. Many tired, dusty travellers over the steep grade of the new pass, stopped for the night in the low adobe, or for a hot, man-sized meal cooked by one of the brothers.

1857 Reminiscences of a Pioneer. J. Kuhrts.¹⁰

"In 1857, in company with John Searles, I left San Francisco with a big mule team for Slate Range and Los Angeles. The road we took was by way of San Jose, Pacheco Pass, Indian Wells," across the desert and Borax Lake to Slate Range."

"After unloading my teams at the mines, I made my way to Los Angeles. Then I had to make part of the road myself; no team had ever travelled that way before. The road I took was by way of Bedrock canyon¹¹ and a place I called El Paso¹² where I was fortunate enough to find water. From there I went to Cane Springs, Desert Springs, The Sinks of Tehachapi, Oak Creek, Willow Springs, Elizabeth Lake, San Francisquito Cañon, *over San Fernando Pass where it took four yokes of cattle and a windlass to bring my team over the Pass into the San Fernando Valley* and thence to Los Angeles.

1857 In the fall of 1857, Secretary of War, John B. Floyd appropriated \$50,000 and ordered the survey of a wagon road from Fort Defiance, New Mexico, west to the Colorado River. Lieutenant E. F. Beale, former superintendent of the Tejon Indian Reservation was put at the head of the expedition.^{16,10}

Congress previously had sanctioned the bringing of a herd of camels into the country on the recommendation of the then Secretary of War, Jefferson Davis, and Lieutenant Beale himself. In the building of the Great Wagon Road, they were to be used as freight carriers on the desert. Their ultimate destination was Fort Tejon, California, over the road Lieutenant Beale had previously surveyed.¹⁶

1857 *In late December, 1857, the wierdest caravan ever seen in the entire country passed by Lyon Station, like a circus parade,*

and stepped gingerly and awkwardly up the north slope of the San Fernando Pass. There were fourteen hulking camels who strained their long necks and bulging eyes as they ambled through the high Cut. Their small hooves, geared for heavy desert sand, perhaps had become used to rough going from their westward trek over the Rocky Mountains. But never such a pass as the San Fernando had these ships of the desert tackled before.¹⁷

There was "the ledge of rocks almost perpendicular, about four feet high" down which Bishop Kip's empty wagon had plunged two years before; the place, where a short time ago that same year, sturdy Jacob Kuhrts had to use "four yokes of cattle and a windlass" to bring his team over the pass. The camels had to scramble up it with their long loose-jointed legs, heavy packs and all. They must have stopped and pensively chewed their cud and gazed mournfully down the steep, twisting slope of the pass, where they knew they had to pick their way. They must have had some sharp prodding from the camel boys "Greek George" and "Hi Jolly"¹⁸ (Hadji Ali) to egg them on; then cautiously they would swing their long necks and ungainly humped bodies around the sharp curves of the pass down into the San Fernando Valley.

There they would be seen quite some way off in the rising dust, ambling swiftly along over the plains, past the old Mission and on into the pueblo. In the *Los Angeles Star*, January 8, 1858, appeared this item: "General Beale and about fourteen camels stalked into town last Friday week and gave our streets quite an Oriental aspect. It looks oddly enough to see, outside of a menagerie, a herd of huge, ungainly, awkward but docile animals move about in our midst, with people riding them like horses, bringing up wierd and far-off associations to the Eastern traveller . . . of the burning sands of Arabia and Sahara."

NOTES

¹General Andreas Pico was living in the old Mission when Fremont and his army went through.

²*Explorations and Survey for a Railroad*. Lieutenant R. S. Williamson. "When we arrived at Los Angeles (1853) it was the grape season, . . . the red wine was not equal to that we purchased at San Fernando." p. 77.

³Near Newhall. W. W. Orcutt.

⁴"Early Days in California Fields." W. W. Orcutt. *Petroleum Reporter*. Souvenir Edition. Section Two, p. 1. Taft. Kern Co. Calif. 1926.

⁵*The Early Days of My Episcopate*. Right Rev. Wm. Ingraham Kip. D.D. LLD.

⁶Cahuenga Pass.

⁷The name San Fernando Pass used on the new road.

⁸*Sixty Years in Southern California*. Harris Newmark, p. 194.

⁹A. W. Lyon, son of the late Sanford Lyon, Newhall, California.

¹⁰Jacob Kuhrts, born in Germany, went to sea when very young. First came to California gold mines in a sailing ship from China, in 1848. Was an early pioneer in Los Angeles. (*Sixty*

THE SAN FERNANDO PASS

Years in Southern California, Harris Newmark, p. 228.) *The Annual*, Historical Society of Southern California. Vol. 7, 1900-1908.

¹¹East of Weldon, northwest of Randsburg.

¹²Slate Range in northwest corner of San Bernardino County, running up into Inyo County.

¹³Bedrock Canyon, near Bedrock Springs, some ten miles to the northeast of Randsburg.

¹⁴El Paso Mountains, northwest of Randsburg.

¹⁵*Uncle Sam's Camels*. Lewis B. Lesley, p. 13.

¹⁶*The Story of El Tejon*. Book Two. Arthur Woodward, p. 86.

¹⁷See Lieutenant Ormsby's following report comparing the San Fernando Pass with others across the country.

¹⁸*Uncle Sam's Camels*. Lewis B. Leslie, pp. 129-30.

(TO BE CONTINUED)