

Chapter XII – LASTING LEGACY

The great ranchos are gone, having given way to farms and citrus groves, which in turn have given way to industrial parks, cities, suburbs and subdivisions. Only by driving by Camp Pendleton in San Diego County, can one get a glimpse at what the great rangelands may have looked like. Yet much of the heritage from the first third of our state's history remains.

The most obvious example is that of the many placenames that are in Spanish. Although the State has an "English only" law on the books, our State Capitol, is still Sacramento, and the four largest cities are San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego and San Jose. The County Seat is Santa Ana [see Chapter I], as Portolá camped in 1769 on the banks of the Rio Santa Ana on Saint Ann's Day. The only Orange County Mission is in San Juan Capistrano. These are all old Spanish names, commemorating Catholic saints or in the case of our State Capitol the Holy Sacrament. Our mountains, rivers, valleys and even roads reflect these names, as in San Joaquin Hills, Santa Ana River, and El Camino Real. The early ranchos and their owners also contribute with Cerritos, Peralta Hills, and El Toro. Even old Saddleback is on the map as Santiago peak.

The romance of the pastoral, preindustrial culture of Hispanic California has caught the fancy of many a developer, who has chosen names such as Costa Mesa, Corona del Mar or Yorba Linda. These "new" Spanish names can usually be spotted by their non-religious meanings, i.e. mesa on the coast, crown of the sea and beautiful Yorba. The examples are numerous for subdivisions, and other modern developments. Spanish-



English combinations as if commemorating the blend of the old with the new, also occur as in Buena Park, i.e. good park.

An even older tradition can be found in names that were corrupted from Indian into Spanish, and sometimes further corrupted into English. Such is the origin of Niguel as in Laguna Niguel. Many more examples can be found in surrounding counties, such as Azusa, Cucamonga, Cahuenga, and La Jolla.

Our language has incorporated Spanish words, that one no longer considers Spanish. A mesa is a mesa, not a plateau or butte; a patio is a patio, with patio furniture, not an atrium or a lanai or an arbor. Who asks what a canyon is? Cities have plazas. Celebrations are called *fiestas*, without need to explain. Ranch and rancho are very interesting strictly Californian words in their origin. In the rest of Latin America, a rancho is a small farm, but in California we have seen vast acreages referred to as Ranchos and the word came into the entire southwest with that meaning. Thus we have ranch meaning large grazing lands, as well as large subdivisions.

A rodeo was originally a gathering together of stock, usually with various exhibitions of skill. Now we have rodeos with no explanation needed, a rodeo is a rodeo. Our word lariat comes from "la riata". All cowboys ride "western", that is in a Spanish style saddle with high pommel and cantle.

A little known fact is that under the State Constitution of 1849, the Spanish pueblos were granted the status of "charter cities" usually with a grant of "pueblo lands". Most of the cities incorporated after 1850 are considered "general law" cities. State laws and regulations generally apply to all cities but the charter cities have some exemptions and privileges to this day. Thus Capistrano does not operate under the same regulations as does Santa Ana.

The architectural styles of early California continue to influence builders in several ways. Until the coming of air conditioning, houses continued to be built with thick walls and wide eaves for cooling, even on Craftsman style homes. The "ranch style" home with its spreading arms has become such a standard that it has spread to the eastern seaboard in popularity. This tendency to make houses larger by extending the first floor rather than adding a second floor has led to vast subdivisions, called contemptuously "urban sprawl". California homes have patios (even if mispronounced). Mission tile roofs are replacing the shake and shingle roof (tiles do not burn). In the 1920's and 1930's, a furniture style was called "mission", as the pieces were in the simpler, heavy style of early mission pieces. Pottery dishes are still popular in the Southwest.

Food habits are probably the longest lasting of all cultural habits. Hispanic foods continue to this day to be served in the homes of the descendants of the early families of Southern California, and there were always some restaurants which served our own local cuisine. With the recent increase of population from south of the border, the popularity of

these foods increased also. The appeal of these foods spread throughout the general population and are now omnipresent. Tortillas and salsa are available not only in ethnic stores but in Luckys, Vons, and Ralphs. Indeed salsa now outsells ketchup; chili beans have moved out of the ethnic foods section. Fish tacos, chili dogs and burritos are as easy to find as a hamburger.

Many of the plants in California were also brought into the state in the early days. The mustard, "Padres Gold", by legend used to mark the trails, now covers the foothills with yellow in the spring. An interesting tale from the San Juan Bautista area is of a San Francisco entrepreneur who contracted with some local farmers to remove the mustard "weeds" from their farms. A world-wide shortage of mustard provided a windfall profit to him. Grapes were brought in by the Mission Padres to provide wine for Mass. Olives were also brought in by the Padres. Another legend is that some early French vintners brought snails along with grapes having heard that there were no escargot in California. The French grape industry was saved by the use of California grape root stock. So we Californians can enjoy our wine, and swear at the snails in the garden.

The most subtle influence may, however, be the most important. California is noted for its laid-back life style and easy informality. This was the way of the old rancheros, where "*mañana*" might be soon enough and "*mi casa es su casa*." Wave after wave of Easterners came to California, but many quickly accepted this part of the local culture. The custom of a midday siesta passed, but still life never acquired quite the maddening pace of the East. Certainly the fact that many of the immigrants in the 1850's through the 1870's came from the Old South may have contributed to the fact they could accept this part of our ways more easily. Nowhere else can one present a credit card, and then have the attendant use your first name to address you.

California is now one of the most cosmopolitan societies of all the states, with Native Americans, who trace their heritage to before the coming of the Padres, descendants of those first soldier-settlers of 1769, *Norte Americanos* of the first half of the nineteenth century, the Eastern immigrants and the Chinese laborers of the next hundred years, and our newer members from Southeast Asia, and Latin America. Most have a struggle when they first arrive and yet they make it and become Californians. For all of them, "*mi casa es su casa*."

