

# Palos Verdes Peninsula Granted to Sepulvedas

(This is the fifth in a series of articles tracing the history of the Rancho San Pedro which was granted to a Spanish soldier by his king nearly 200 years ago. The area included all of that part of Los Angeles county now comprised by the cities of Torrance, Wilmington, San Pedro, and the beach areas.)

By R. C. GILLINGHAM

Within the decade after the grant of the Rancho San Pedro in 1822, a series of partitions took place which brought changes in both the ownership and the size of the Rancho.

Following the death of Cristobal Dominguez, his family moved north to take up their residence on the Rancho, and the eldest son, Manuel, found himself in charge. Just 22 years old, Manuel was immediately plunged into a series of disputes with the other occupants of the Rancho.

During the next ten years, by various legal actions, all of these were settled in favor of the Dominguez family, with the exception of the claims of the Sepulvedas.

IN 1826, AFTER filing a petition, Manuel secured a confirmation of the Rancho title under Mexican law from Governor Jose Echazandia. This same document also decreed that the Sepulveda family should remove their cattle and leave the Rancho. However, in the meantime Jose Dolores Sepulveda was killed by Indians at La Purisima Mission while enroute home from Monterey, leaving his widow and five small children, all of them under 10 years of age. Partly as a result of this tragedy, the family was allowed to remain for the time being.

The dispute continued until 1834, when Governor Jose Figueroa, acting as a "judge in arbitration" granted the entire Palos Verdes area to the Sepulveda heirs. This involved more than 31,000 acres, extending from San Pedro Harbor to Redondo Beach.

THE FIGUEROA award was based on the early "partition" given by Gutierrez and subsequent continuous residence on the tract by the Sepulveda family, in addition to the failure of Juan Jose and Castobal Dominguez to make use of that portion of the Rancho.

By this partition, the Rancho San Pedro was reduced more than 40 per cent in size, leaving 44,000 acres in the possession of the Dominguez family. This was held in undivided ownership by the five surviving children of Cristobal Dominguez: Manuel, Victoria, Pedro, Nasario and Elena.

## City Ponders New Fire Station Site

A parcel of land now owned by the Del Amo Estate Co. is being eyed by city councilmen as a possible site for a new fire station to serve the west section of the city.

Fire Chief J. J. Benner recommended this week that the city acquire "at the earliest possible moment" that strip of land located along Torrance Blvd. between Ocean and Hawthorne Aves. The boundaries measure 125-feet wide by 150-foot deep.

Selection of a site by the fire chief came as a result of a survey made here recently by the National Board of Fire Underwriters which recommended a fire station be built to provide adequate protection for the commercial and residential areas of Western Torrance.

Benner stated that about half of the parcel of land under consideration would have to be filled and compacted.

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**THE FIRST CHANGE** in ownership among the Dominguez brothers and sisters occurred in 1835. This involved the one fifth interest of Nasario, the youngest brother. On June 30th of that year, Nasario transferred his share of the Rancho to his brother Manuel. The total consideration, as stated in the deed, was "forty mares each with colts, and a stallion." Thus, for a few horses, Manuel acquired over 8800 acres of the tract.

In 1852, this transaction was the basis of a lawsuit by Nasario against Manuel, seeking to recover his interest. Not being able to read, he claimed that he was deceived by his brother in signing away his share of the Rancho. The suit was of no avail, Manuel's title being upheld in 1855 by the California Supreme Court.

This argument, which became bitter and violent, thereafter left the two brothers and their families completely estranged.

**THE NEXT CHANGE** in ownership took place in 1850, and involved the share of the third brother, Pedro Juan Aguirre. This came about because of Pedro's accumulated debts, climaxed by the cost of an unsuccessful attempt in 1849 to get rich quick through a gold-mining venture.

On Feb. 9, 1850, Pedro sold one half of his interest to Jose Antonio Aguirre for the sum of \$4390. This was the amount due on a mortgage held by Juan Temple, the owner of the Rancho Los Cerritos. Temple had loaned \$2000 to Pedro a little over a year earlier, and was collecting more than double this amount in interest.

By the same transaction, Pedro transferred the other half of his share to his wife, Maria de Jesus Gots. The land sold to Aguirre, over 4000 acres, was located in the northeastern corner of the Rancho. Again mortgaged a few years later, it was sold for taxes in 1866, and was purchased for \$1700 by F. P. F. Temple and F. W. Gibson. Thereafter known as the Temple and Gibson Tract, most of this land is now within the present city limits of Compton.

IN 1852, MANUEL Dominguez acquired two other sections of the Rancho San Pedro from the shares of his sisters.

In one transaction, on June 12th, almost 2800 acres were purchased from Maria Rocha, the son of Maria Elena, the latter having died in 1843. Located in the Wilmington area, it was sold "for and in consideration of the sum of one thousand nine hundred dollars, which I received in this manner: One thousand four hundred dollars as the value of seventy head of cattle at the price agreed upon, twenty dol-

lars a head, and five hundred dollars in money."

Three weeks later, on July 1, 1852, Manuel's older sister, Maria Victoria, sold him her interest in the Rancho for \$5000. Victoria had married a Mexican army lieutenant and lived in San Diego. Manuel paid down \$4300 in cash, and the balance in two years, without interest. This tract extended west of Dominguez Hill to the ocean, including all of the present City of Torrance.

**THE FIRST SALE** of a large portion of the Rancho San Pedro to other parties took place in 1854. On December 2nd of that year, by the price of \$20,000, a tract of 2,200 acres was sold to a company headed by Poiness Ranning. This was the Wilmington tract, and marked the beginning of the inner harbor development.

Manuel Dominguez resisted this sale for some time, but finally agreed because of the need for funds with which to finance the litigation over the title to the Rancho, then under way before the United States Land Claims Commission.

After the tract was subdivided, Manuel re-purchased 32 lots and blocks, totalling 364.6 acres. Part of this property is still owned by the Dominguez heirs.

**THE SALE OF** Wilmington made necessary a legal partition of the estate of Cristobal Dominguez, and brought about a survey of Rancho boundaries for the first time under American law. By a map approved in 1855, it was determined that the Rancho San Pedro contained 44,216.62 acres. This included over 1600 acres of the inner San Pedro Bay and Battlesnake Island. The final partition decree, dated Dec. 16, 1855, showed that Manuel Dominguez was the owner of 27,845.82 acres, or 63 per cent of the entire Rancho, apart from the transfer of Los Palos Verdes to the Sepulveda heirs. The remainder was held by the family of Pedro, and by the surviving heirs of Elena Rocha de Dominguez.

**DURING THE NEXT 30** years after the Partition of 1855, the holdings of Pedro and Elena were sold in various parcels to American settlers,

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(Signed) **UNCLE BILLY**

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**ON DISPLAY**... The spectacular display kitchen developed recently as part of the Decorator's Show at the Pan Pacific Auditorium will be shown daily for area residents on the floor of the Southern California Gas Co. office at 158 So. La Brea in Inglewood. The kitchen incorporates many of the latest ideas in homemaking design and appliances for Southland families.

and thus passed entirely out of the ownership of the Dominguez family. In contrast, Manuel added to his original interest, and then lent on to most of his land, with the exception of two transactions, he not only made many improvements, but was able to pass on this large estate to his six daughters upon his death in 1862.

(Disputes over title to the land form an interesting sidelight to the history of the area, and a look at some of the major controversies will be published in Sunday's HERALD.)

## Nardones Pizza House Reopens

Nardone's Pizza House, 1810 S. Catalina, in the Hollywood Riviera district, reopened last week when the owner, Louis and Angela Nardone, returned from a two-month vacation.

The restaurant will remain open six days a week - Tuesday through Sunday. Pizzas are prepared both to go and to be eaten on the premises.

Welcoming the customers, some of whom come regularly from as far as Hollywood and surrounding areas, is Angela's function. Louis is chief chef.

**To Attend Convention** will be delegates Nov. 18-19 to a Los Angeles convention of Mobil service station dealers from seven western states and Alaska.

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