

John P. Domecq

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John P. Domecq, a Frenchman who came to America in the 1860s, proved to be one of the pioneer exponents of ranch enterprise in San Bernardino County, where he developed and improved a fine landed estate and won substantial prosperity. At the time of his death, he was one of the honored and representative men of the county.

Born in the Pyrennes Mountain District of France in 1846, Domecq was reared in his native land, the recipient of good educational advantages in his youth, and he continued his residence in France until March 22, 1867, when he embarked for the voyage to the United States. He first settled at San Francisco, California, where he engaged in the dairy business, in which he had gained experience in his youth. He later established himself in the same line of enterprise at Los Angeles, and in 1882 he came to San Bernardino County, where he entered into a contract with John Anderson, Sr., to plant and develop a vineyard of 160 acres, a provision of the contract being that he should have the supervision of the vineyard until it became productive and was then to receive a deed to the ownership of one-half, or eighty acres, of the tract. It was on this homestead, two and one-half miles northwest of Colton, that he passed the remainder of his life, the place being eligibly situated on Rancho Avenue.

According to John Brown Jr. and James Boyd, the authors of "The History of San Berardino and Riverside Counties," published in 1922, "Mr. Domecq had meager financial resources when he came to this country, but his ability, ambition and persistent application enabled him to achieve large and worthy success of material order, the while he stood exemplar of loyal and liberal citizenship, and his sterling character gave him secure place in popular esteem." While he was in San Francisco, Domecq married Christina Kupferschlager, who was born in Cologne, Germany on June 24, 1852 and was like him a devout Catholic.

Politically, Domecq was aligned with the Republican party.

John and Christina had three children, only one of which, Peter J. Domecq, born on August 17, 1883 in Los Angeles, survived well into adulthood.

On the 24th of September, 1892, John Domecq died at the age of 46.

After John Domecq's death, his widow assumed active charge of the home ranch, setting orange trees on eighteen acres of the land and sold twenty acres of the property, at the southeast corner, to James Barnhill. The remainder of the place remained intact as a valuable and splendidly improved property for decades.

Peter J. received his early education in the public schools of Colton and San Bernardino, and he supplemented this with a course in the Los Angeles Business College. He was but nine years of age at the time of his father's death, and after leaving school he learned the machinist's trade.

On the 11th of July, 1909, Peter J. Domecq married Miss Nettie DeWitt, one of the daughters of Alonzo DeWitt. Nettie was born in San Bernardino on July 2, 1886, and reared and educated there.

Peter and Nettie continued to reside with Peter's widowed mother on the old homestead until, on

the First of September, 1913, Mrs. Domecq passed over into eternity. Peter remained on the homestead and continued to work as a skilled machinist until 1919.

After the death of his devoted mother, Peter J. Domecq added to the area of the old homestead by purchasing an adjacent tract of sixty-two acres, and this he planted to grapes.

According to Brown and Boyd, "The Domecq Ranch is one of the finest and most picturesque in this part of the county, the home standing on a terrace rising above Lytle Creek and commanding a fine view of the mountains, of Colton and of the City of San Bernardino, as well as the valley below." Peter J. Domecq was among the most prominent and influential citizens of the Colton District. Like his father, he was a staunch Republican. He had, for himself, no desire for political activity or public office. He was a member of Ashlar Lodge, F. and A. M., of Colton.

Peter and Nettie Domecq had three children, of whom two were living in the 1920s: Alvin Joseph, who was born December 22, 1914 and died in 1978, and June Irene, who was born June 1, 1918 and available records indicate is still alive. May Christiana was born February 23, 1916, and died July 24, 1918.

Peter Domecq's father in law, Alonzo DeWitt, came to live with the family on the Domecq Ranch. DeWitt was, in the words of Brown and Boyd, "a native son of this county and a representative of one of its sterling pioneer families."

Alonzo Dewitt was born on December 16, 1861, the son of John and Nancy (Long) DeWitt, the former of whom was born in Iowa and the latter in Texas. In the early 1850s John and Nancy crossed the plains with the pioneer colonists of the Latter Day Saints who founded Salt Lake City, the wagon train having fought many hostile bands of Indians on the long and perilous overland journey. Later John DeWitt and his wife came with another band of Latter Day Saints to found a new colony in San Bernardino, the journey having been made with wagons and ox teams. John DeWitt established his home on a tract of land that was later developed as a race track in San Bernardino near present day Mill Street, and there he grubbed the underbrush and cut off the timber to make the land available for cultivation.

"Both he and his wife passed the remainder of their lives in San Bernardino County and were upright and earnest pioneer citizens who commanded the respect and confidence of the community in which they established their home," Brown and Boyd wrote of John and Nancy. Nancy and John had five children: George, Alonzo, Jane, Nettie and Emma.

Alonzo was born in the house that stood on the site of the old race track and he was reared under the conditions and influences marking the pioneer period in the development of San Bernardino County. As a young man, he married Miss Orissa F. Boren, who was born and reared in California, her father having come to California with ox teams and having been a pioneer settler in San Bernardino County. The marriage of Mr. and Mrs. DeWitt was solemnized by Judge Knox, and from that union issued five children: William Henry, who in the 1920s was a foreman in the Hanford Iron Works at San Bernardino and had married Miss Emily DeLore, with whom he had one son, Arthur; Inez, the wife of J. E. Harris, with whom she had one daughter, Joy; Alonzo, who married Miss Eva Roberson and had a son, Elmer; Fay, the youngest of the children, who married Miss Bessie Olsen, with whom he had one daughter, Violet Belle; and May the wife of Peter J. Domecq. Peter Domecq died on July 22, 1970.

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