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# Rancho Rosa De Castilla: Hispanic Continuity in Greater East Los Angeles

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# RANCHO ROSA DE CASTILLA:

## Hispanic Continuity in Greater East Los Angeles

by John R. Chávez

The nineteenth-century history of Hispanics in greater East Los Angeles has remained unclear despite an increasing number of works on the general area. While histories, such as Richard Griswold del Castillo's *Los Angeles Barrio*, Ricardo Romo's *East Los Angeles*, and George Sánchez's *Becoming Mexican American* have shed light on the central city and Boyle Heights, they have commented little on the rural areas to the northeast.<sup>1</sup> While few people resided in the countryside during the nineteenth century, their activities set the stage for the area's urbanized Mexican-American population of the twentieth century. Indeed, early real estate transactions involving Hispanics, including women, allowed for cultural continuity despite the Anglo-American conquest until massive Mexican immigration reasserted Hispanic culture on the Eastside. The major local property to change hands in this way was Rancho Rosa de Castilla, extending around an adobe that once existed at what is now California State University, Los Angeles.

As one of over twenty ranches belonging to Mission San Gabriel in 1830, Rosa de Castilla's limits were vague, given the metes and bounds system of measuring land during the Mexican period. However, an extant survey map of mission lands, drawn around 1860, suggests the size of the ranch at its greatest extent thirty years earlier. Embracing three square leagues (12,879 acres), Rosa de Castilla had the following boundaries, corresponding some-

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Griswold del Castillo, *The Los Angeles Barrio, 1850-1890: A Social History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), pp. 147-148; Ricardo Romo, *East Los Angeles: History of a Barrio* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), pp. 18-30, 74-75; and George Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 69-74.

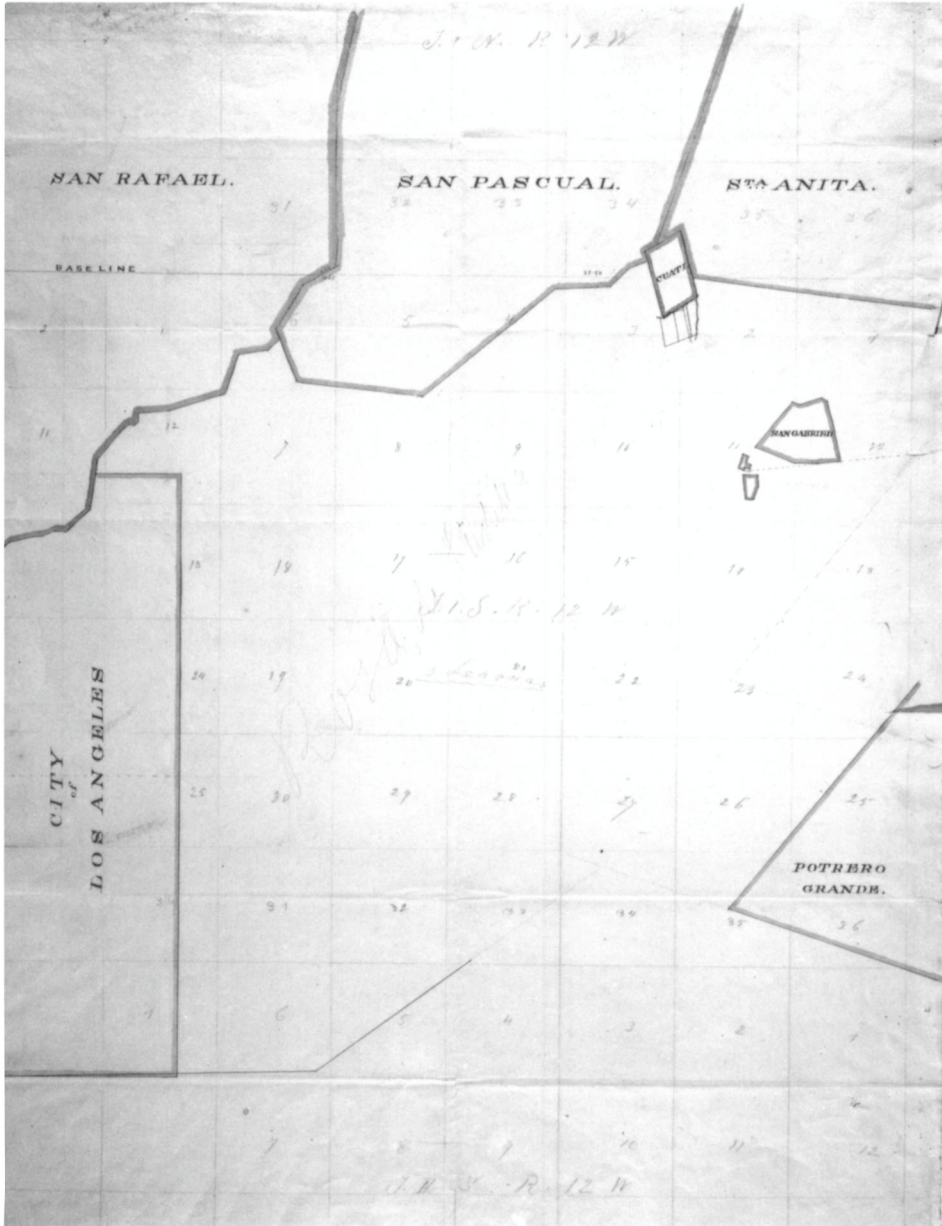
what to the modern geography noted. Counterclockwise, on the north the rancho reached the San Pascual land grant in lower South Pasadena and the San Rafael grant along the Arroyo Seco. On the west along Indiana Street, Rosa de Castilla abutted on the Pueblo de Los Angeles grant. On the south the rancho bordered the San Antonio grant, underlying lower Monterey Park and unincorporated East Los Angeles below 3rd Street. On the east the rancho extended indefinitely toward the mission core, but probably no farther than present Garfield Avenue in Alhambra and Monterey Park. Apparently, during the mission era Rancho Rosa de Castilla spread beyond greater East L.A. into the San Gabriel Valley.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, the rancho had its origins and major development in the Monterey Hills of the Eastside. According to some commentators, the Spanish named the area after the roses that grew wild on the hills, roses that recalled the images of Castile. *Rosa de Castilla* was specifically applied to a short arroyo that once existed where the Long Beach Freeway and a flood control channel run today. The Spanish also applied the name *Porte [sic] Rosa de Castilla* to the opening through which Monterey Pass Road traverses the hills today. Apparently, the ranch itself had its beginnings in the spring of 1776 when Franciscans from Mission San Gabriel had their Indian charges construct an adobe at the present intersection of Hellman Avenue and the Long Beach Freeway, the location of a parking lot at California State University, Los Angeles. Most observers agree that this same adobe, despite several reconstructions and additions, remained the ranch house until its final demise in the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> Until separation from Mission San Gabriel, the hill country of Rancho Rosa de Castilla served primarily as pasture for the mission's livestock.

The Ballesteros, the family eventually granted the ranch, derived from a couple that arrived separately but met in California in the eighteenth century. Juan de Dios Ballesteros of Mexico City married María Theresa [sic] Sepulveda of Villa de Sinaloa in 1787 at Mission San Juan Capistrano. As an eight-year-old child, María Theresa had been among the early settlers of Los Ange-

<sup>2</sup>Roy E. Whitehead, *Lugo: A Chronicle of Early California* (Redlands, Calif.: San Bernardino County Museum Association, 1978), p. 162; Survey maps of San Gabriel Mission, map 149, c. 1860, Solano-Reeve Collection, Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif.; cf. U.S. Geological Survey map, Los Angeles, California, 1966-(72 PR), 7.5 Minute Series (Topographic).

<sup>3</sup>Margaret Dean and Anna Edwards, *The Story of Monterey Park*, ed. Carolyn Sebastian (n.p., n.d.), pp. 9-10; Roy D. Allison, "History of Monterey Park Told," in *A Salute to the Pioneers of Monterey Park: (Articles from the Monterey Park Progress)*, ed. Roy D. Allison (n.p., n.d.), n. pag.; Survey map 153, 1871, Solano-Reeve Collection; Bob Lerner, "Mission Adobe on Campus," in *The History of the City of Monterey Park*, ed. H. Russell Paine (Monterey Park: Monterey Park Bicentennial Committee and *Monterey Park Progress*, 1976), p. 4; and Steve Tice, "L.A. Scene: The City Then and Now," *Los Angeles Times*, November 1, 1993, sec.B, p. 3.



Map of Rancho Rosa de Castilla as part of Mission San Gabriel, drawn c. 1860.  
Courtesy Henry E. Huntington Library.

les, founded in 1781. As a sergeant in the Spanish army, Juan de Dios met María Theresa in Los Angeles, apparently abandoned his post to marry her, suffered demotion, and spent the next thirty-two years as a corporal at various points on the California coast. During that time the couple had fourteen children, of whom at least half died in early childhood (the last six were baptized at San Gabriel). Between his retirement in 1819 and death in 1826, Juan de Dios no doubt lived off a small plot of pueblo land to which he was pensioned in Los Angeles.<sup>4</sup>

The eldest son of the Ballesteros, Juan Antonio, born at Santa Barbara in 1787, spent most of his adult life between San Gabriel and Los Angeles. As a member of two of the earliest families in California, he rose to prominence in the civic affairs of Los Angeles. During the turbulent Mexican period, he served several terms as a *regidor* (council member) of the *ayuntamiento* (city council) from 1823 to 1838. During these early years of Mexico's independence, many changes in government and governors occurred because of controversy over a variety of issues. For *Californios*, including Ballesteros, the most significant issue was secularization of the missions because it concerned the redistribution of vast stretches of the territory's most valuable lands.<sup>5</sup>

Secularization involved the question of how to integrate the Indians as well as the mission properties into Hispanic society. From the time of the conquest of Mexico, the Spanish missions were designed to break up once their charges became sufficiently Christian and hispanicized to become full members of society. Ideally, at that point the mission churches would become parish churches, and mission lands would be subdivided among the Indians.<sup>6</sup> In practice in the nineteenth century, secularization became a political and economic struggle between conservative missionaries and liberal Californios over control of the labor and especially the land of the Indians.

Ideologically, Mexican liberals committed themselves to the full integration of Indians into the nation. These reformers consequently perceived continued missionary control of the neophytes and their property as paternalistic at best and oppressive at worst. On the other hand, the Catholic Church, the Franciscan missionaries, and their conservative allies argued that the reformers only sought to despoil the missions of their lands. Conservatives claimed

<sup>4</sup>Marie E. Northrop, *Spanish-Mexican Families of Early California, 1769-1850* (2 vols., New Orleans, Louis.: Polyanthos, 1976), 1: 55-57.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 1:56; and Cecil Alan Hutchinson, *Frontier Settlement in Mexican California: the Hijar-Padrés Colony and Its Origins, 1769-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), pp. 94-95.

<sup>6</sup>Gerald J. Geary, *The Secularization of the California Missions (1810-1846)* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1934; repr., New York: AMS Press, 1974), pp. 17, 24-25.

the Indians needed more time to adapt to the larger society.<sup>7</sup> The liberal opposition countered that the missionaries would never properly prepare the Indians for full citizenship because the priests simply wished to maintain their own power over the neophytes and the land.

Unsurprisingly, the opinions of the mission Indians themselves rarely gained an audience. Judging from their behavior after full secularization, Indians held a variety of opinions, but one option received virtually no support from the Californios. Since the Spanish had originally forced Indians to labor on the mission lands, many if not most neophytes preferred to return to their traditional lives as hunters and gatherers. Working mission lands, *Californio ranchos*, or even small plots of their own had little to offer most Indians. Neither liberal nor conservative Mexicans endorsed a revival of Indian culture since to them this meant a return to barbarism and paganism.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, neither political faction wanted true Indian self-determination since this would deprive the territory of labor and strengthen threatening tribes on the frontier. However, the Californio elite, regardless of political stripe, realized that any lands abandoned by neophytes would be up for grabs.

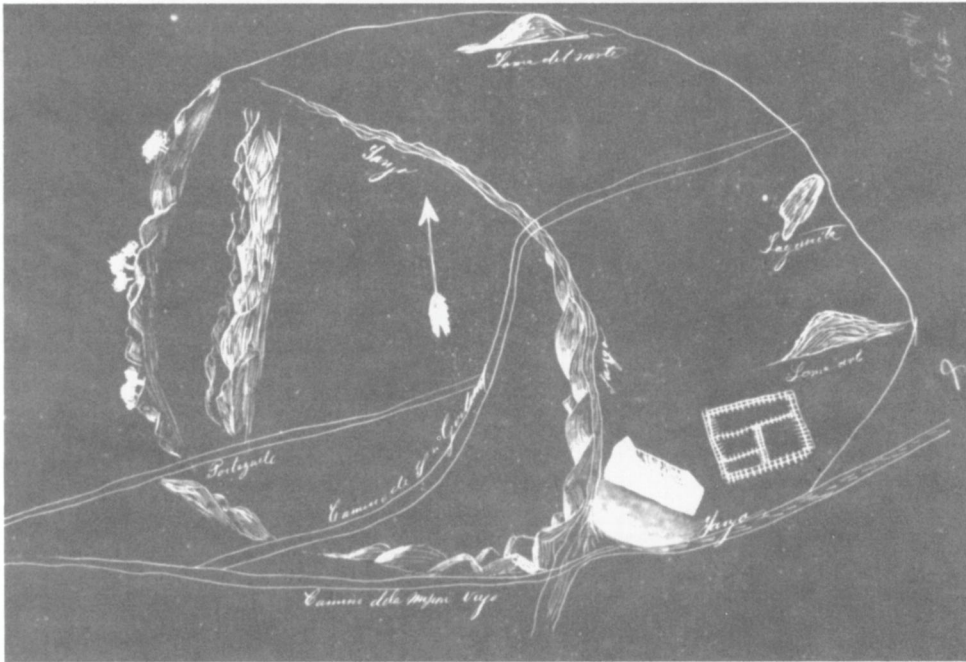
In the debate over secularization, Juan Antonio Ballesteros sided with conservatives and the church, yet curiously received a grant of mission land. When liberal Californios on their own moved to break up the missions in the late 1820s, the national government blocked the attempt. Appointed governor by a conservative administration in Mexico City, Manuel Victoria reversed the action of the locals because they threatened to deprive the Indians of their property. Ironically, in 1831 Governor Victoria himself broke off at least one piece of mission land—Rancho Rosa de Castilla.<sup>9</sup> No doubt Ballesteros received the land grant for his support of the governor in the controversy over secularization.

Governor Victoria made the Rosa de Castilla grant to Ballesteros, following earlier procedures that required the consent of the missionaries. (Such consent supposedly protected the interests of the neophytes.) Indeed, the land grant preceded the final secularization of Mission San Gabriel by three years. The latter process ultimately occurred with little regard for Mexican law or the welfare of the Indians. Father José Sánchez of San Gabriel agreed to the

<sup>7</sup>Hutchinson, *Frontier Settlement*, p. 109; and Geary, *Secularization*, pp. 154–55.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 171–172; and Hutchinson, *Frontier Settlement*, pp. 128–131.

<sup>9</sup>Geary, *Secularization*, pp. 113–115; Zephyrin Engelhardt, *San Gabriel Mission and the Beginnings of Los Angeles* (San Gabriel, Calif.: Mission San Gabriel, 1927), p. 161; and J. N. Bowman, "Index of the Spanish-Mexican Private Land Grant Records and Cases of California," unpublished typescript on microfilm, 1958, p. 265, Californiana Collection, County of Los Angeles Public Library, Rosemead, Calif.



*Diseño* of Rosa de Castilla presented to the California Board of Land Commissioners, 1852. Courtesy National Archives, Washington, D.C.

grant as long as the mission's cattle could continue to graze on the land. As usual, the grant was marked off by metes and bounds and covered one square league (4,293 acres), substantially less than the rancho apparently embraced under the mission. Rosa de Castilla straddled what is now Mission Road between San Gabriel and Los Angeles and included the Franciscan adobe on the arroyo running through the Monterey Hills. The outer boundaries were far less clear, but doubtless extended from the Arroyo Seco in the northwest to present Monterey Pass Road in the southwest. Ballesteros' widow later stated that he resided in the adobe until his death in 1840 after which his family continued to live there.<sup>10</sup>

María Faustina del Carmen Figueroa Ballesteros, daughter of Manuel Antonio Figueroa and María Gertrudes Silvas of Villa Sinaloa, was only thirty-eight years old at the death of her husband. By then she had had nine children and would later add an illegitimate daughter. Nonetheless, with her

<sup>10</sup>Docket No. 371, Board of Land Commissioners in California, 1856, Records of Department of Justice, Record Group 60, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Engelhardt, *San Gabriel Mission*, pp. 174-75; Bowman, "Index," p. 265; Northrop, *Spanish-Mexican Families*, 1:56.



eldest son Carlos in his early twenties, Señora Ballesteros stayed on at the ranch until war between the United States and Mexico disrupted the life of the family. Although the U.S. Marines occupied Los Angeles in August 1846, an insurrection ensued in southern California that lasted for several months, a movement young Ballesteros joined.<sup>11</sup>

In September when the rebellion against the United States began in Los Angeles, *ranchero* José del Carmen Lugo organized Mexican resistance in the San Bernardino area. He jumped into action after local Anglo-Americans under Benjamin Wilson threatened to arrest him, ironically to forestall his joining the insurrection. Lugo put together an armed party of Sonorans, New Mexicans, and Californios—from both Alta and Baja California. Carlos Ballesteros was among those heeding the call to arms. The Mexicans then proceeded to Rancho Chino in search of Wilson.<sup>12</sup>

At the ranch Lugo's force of twenty-one men surrounded about forty or fifty Anglo-Americans barricaded in the ranch house. Shots were exchanged all the afternoon of September 26, 1846. Finally, the next morning after arrival of about thirty reinforcements from Los Angeles, the Mexicans charged the house. According to Lugo,

we approached the house and surroundings, firing shots at the four sides of the building. Before reaching the house there was a ring of palings, against [sic] which those of us who were nearest made a rush. In this rush two horses leaped over the circle. Nearer the house was another circle of palings and within it an open moat. We knocked down the circle by driving our horses against it, Carlos Ballesteros and I leading. On jumping our horses over the moat, Ballesteros' horse did not make it and fell, throwing the rider. On recovering his mount, Ballesteros was struck in the right temple by a bullet and fell dead.

Two or three of Lugo's other men were wounded in the successful assault on Rancho Chino, but only Ballesteros died on September 27, 1846. Subsequently, the Mexicans succeeded in driving U.S. troops from southern California. However, reinforced by land and sea, United States forces returned to quell the rebellion, confirming the conquest of the region by January 1847.<sup>13</sup>

After the death of her eldest son, Sra. Ballesteros felt ill, fearful of the invaders, and less capable of managing Rancho Rosa de Castilla. Consequently, she decided to move to the family home by the Los Angeles plaza. In

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 1:55-56; Docket No. 371; and Whitehead, *Lugo*, pp. 286, 288, 294.

<sup>12</sup>José del Carmen Lugo, *Vida de un ranchero*, trans. Helen Pruitt Beattie (San Bernardino, Calif.: San Bernardino County Museum, 1950), n. pag., quoted in Whitehead, *Lugo*, pp. 290-293; or see Lugo, "Life of a Rancher," trans. Thomas Savage, *Quarterly Historical Society of Southern California* 30 (September 1950): 200-203.

<sup>13</sup>Whitehead, *Lugo*, pp. 292-293, 295, 311.

her absence, according to the widow herself, U.S. soldiers camped at the ranch, damaged the adobe, and ruined the property. At the end of the war in 1848, the rancho lay abandoned, a situation that would later undermine Sra. Ballesteros' title to the land grant.<sup>14</sup>

However, Sra. Ballesteros had not abandoned her interest in the property. In keeping with her husband's original agreement and in lieu of tithing, Sra. Ballesteros permitted the church to graze cattle there. However, the cattle were those of the plaza church in Los Angeles since the mission herds had been decimated after secularization. The widow's problems may have continued because in March of 1849 she mortgaged all of her properties, including Rosa de Castilla, to merchant John Temple for five hundred silver pesos to be repaid in just over three pounds of gold dust. On the other hand, this loan may have financed a trip by one of her other sons to the gold fields of northern California. By 1852 in her deposition for the California Board of Land Commissioners, the widow claimed her husband had left her the rancho unencumbered by debt, but did not state whether she had sold the land to cover her own debt. She may not have been able to repay Temple without selling the ranch.<sup>15</sup>

At this point Father Anaclet Lestrade, pastor of the plaza church, entered the picture. The transfer of California to the United States had created tumult in the organization of the Catholic Church. Diocesan jurisdiction over the region was unclear, and the expanding population demanded attention. The secularization of the missions had led to a decline in Franciscans and a shortage of priests in general. This situation led to the temporary presence of the Fathers of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts, a Catholic order with missions in various parts of the world including Asia Minor, South America, and the Hawaiian Islands. Having briefly ministered to California in the 1830s, the Picpus Fathers, so called after their headquarters in Paris, were asked to return by the local hierarchy during the Gold Rush. Among those arriving in San Francisco in 1850 was Father Lestrade.<sup>16</sup>

Originally from the department of Lot in France, Father Lestrade had directed colleges for his order at its missions in Asia Minor and Chile. After arriving in California, he briefly served at Mission San Carlos Borromeo

<sup>14</sup>Docket No. 371.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.; and "Archives of the Prefecture of Los Angeles," A: 613-615, MS Film 382, Huntington Library.

<sup>16</sup>Léonce Jore, "The Fathers of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts (Called Picpus) in California," trans. L. Jay Oliva, *Southern California Quarterly*, 46 (December 1964): 301-302; and Harold A. Whelan, *The Picpus Story: The Sacred Hearts Fathers' Missionary Activity in the Sandwich Islands and Early California* (Pomona, Calif.: Apostolate of Christian Renewal, 1980), pp. 162-163, 224.



Two of Carlos Ballesteros'  
five sisters, c. 1880.  
Courtesy Henry E.  
Huntington Library.

before moving to Los Angeles in 1851. There in addition to ministering to the spiritual needs of the parish, Lestrade was ordered to look immediately into the church's temporal affairs, particularly concerning donations of land from public and private sources. Prior to Lestrade's arrival, the municipal government had offered the church grants within the pueblo for construction of a college, but the church had not succeeded in carrying out the task.<sup>17</sup> Given his educational experience, Lestrade certainly qualified for the undertaking.

Investigating the various opportunities for land acquisition in and around the pueblo, Lestrade learned that Rancho Rosa de Castilla was available for purchase. While the land grant lay too far outside the pueblo to be a practical site for a college, the ranch might eventually provide income for such a school. Since livestock from the plaza church and Mission San Gabriel had grazed on the land for generations, Lestrade certainly knew its potential. In fact, he and Father Francisco Sánchez of the mission walked the property together to ascertain its extent and value. Knowing that Sra. Ballesteros had left the ranch and was probably in financial need, Lestrade purchased the land from her and her family for four hundred dollars.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup>Jore, "Fathers," p. 313, n. 38; and Whelan, *Picpus Story*, pp. 162-163, 174-175, 166.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 178; and Docket No. 371.

Lestrade made the purchase in his own name, rather than in the name of the parish or the bishop. Despite this, Lestrade doubtless held the property for the Picpus Fathers since he had taken a personal vow of poverty. Indeed, in 1856 on his departure for another assignment with his order, he sold the rancho and other properties to Bishop Thaddeus Amat for five hundred dollars. In effect this sale officially transferred the properties to another branch of the church. Unfortunately, the educational plans of the Picpus Fathers came to naught as the order decided it could not maintain adequate numbers in California.<sup>19</sup>

Given its grazing rights, the church had never completely lost its stake in Rancho Rosa de Castilla, a stake the Ballesteros had always recognized. Indeed, after the occupying troops left the ranch, the plaza church hired caretakers to manage the land and cattle. In 1848 José Bernardino López apparently filled that position until 1852 when his cousin José Francisco (Chico) Mauricio López took over in his stead. These men were logical choices since their father and grandfather respectively had served as majordomos of Mission San Gabriel twenty years earlier. Until 1848 Bernardino had lived at the mission where he had served as justice of the peace. In that capacity he had the support of the remaining Indians as he helped defend them from abuse by other Californios, as well as newly arrived Anglo-Americans. In the late forties Bernardino López, probably with Chico's help, reconstructed the Ballesteros's adobe ranch house, first built by Gabrielinos under the supervision of the Franciscans.<sup>20</sup>

When Father Lestrade purchased Rancho Rosa de Castilla, he did so fully aware that the federal Land Act of 1851 required holders of Spanish and Mexican grants to provide proof of ownership. No doubt one reason the Ballesteros chose to sell the ranch was to avoid the litigation necessary to retain title. With other properties under similar investigation and greater resources at his command, Lestrade no doubt believed he would prevail. The Board of Land Commissioners established by Congress to review grants in California met in San Francisco in January 1852. Saddled with the burden of proof, claimants from throughout the state gathered deeds, maps, depositions, and other sorts of evidence to support their claims before the authorities. Within the year Lestrade's case went before the commission with a copy of the original grant,

<sup>19</sup>Whelan, *Picpus Story* p. 178; and Jore, "Fathers," p. 308.

<sup>20</sup>Docket No. 371.; Marie E. Northrop, *Spanish-Mexican Families of Early California: 1769-1850* (2 vols., Burbank, Calif.: Southern California Genealogical Society, 1984), 2: 142-143, 146-147; "Archives of the Prefecture"; and Eva S. Fenyes, *The Batz House*, watercolor, 1916, Fen. 165, Braun Research Library, Southwest Museum, Los Angeles, Calif.



Barren bluff once part of Rancho Rosa de Castilla, now occupied by California State University, Los Angeles. *Courtesy Creative Media Services, California State University, Los Angeles.*

a map, and depositions from Sra. Ballesteros, the López cousins, and Juan Ramírez, a local rancher.<sup>21</sup>

Lestrade's petition to the commission gave the basic information regarding issuance of the land grant and its subsequent occupation. Except for stating that the Ballesteros had lived on the ranch until his purchase, his comments agreed with those of Sra. Ballesteros described above. He pointed out that there were neither competing claims to the grant nor opposing witnesses. Chico López and Juan Ramírez stated that they had known the ranch for at least eighteen years. Bernardino López claimed familiarity with the ranch going back thirty years to the time when it belonged to the mission. Each gave the boundaries of Rosa de Castilla as they remembered them and in reference to a map submitted by Lestrade.<sup>22</sup>

As with most of the cases brought before the commission, the amount and boundaries of the grant caused the most difficulty. Compared with other cases, documentation regarding Rosa de Castilla was particularly poor. For example,

<sup>21</sup>William W. Robinson, *Land in California: The Story of Mission Lands, Ranchos, Squatters, Mining Claims, Railroad Grants, Land Scrip, Homesteads* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1948), pp. 100, 102-103; Docket No. 371.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*

the original grant did not list the amount of land. The map presented to the commission was vague; it did not have the appearance of an original *diseño*, the map issued with most grants. Furthermore, the boundaries marked on the map hardly corresponded to those listed in the depositions. Chico López, a young witness, had given the clearest boundaries—Los Angeles on the west, San Pascual on the north, the mission to the east, and Rancho Cañada de los Alisos to the south. But since these were all also in litigation, the situation remained vague.<sup>23</sup>

In 1855 the Board of Land Commissioners issued its “Opinion and Decree,” rejecting the grant. The commissioners cited the problems over the amount and boundaries of the property. They also doubted that the Ballesteros had occupied the grant for a reasonable time because the Alvarado family had twice petitioned unsuccessfully for the land between 1840 and 1846. Most likely, Sra. Ballesteros’s absence from 1846 to 1852, despite her credible explanation, led the commissioners to suspect her family had never met the period of residency called for under Mexican law. The commissioners also seemed suspicious concerning the manner in which Father Lestrade had attained the grant, suspicions tinged with traditional Anglo anti-Catholicism.<sup>24</sup>

No doubt other controversial claims influenced the land commission’s decision on Rosa de Castilla. At least two such claims had been filed on the former lands of Mission San Gabriel. In 1846 during the Mexican-American War, Governor Pio Pico had “sold” a “grant” of at least six square leagues to Julian Workman and Hugo Reid. This vast grant including eastern portions of the mission’s Rancho Rosa de Castilla was eventually declared fraudulent by the federal courts. In addition, the pueblo of Los Angeles made an exaggerated claim overlapping the southern part of Lestrade’s, including the area of Monterey Pass Road.<sup>25</sup> Though eventually denied, these other claims could only cast doubt on Lestrade’s own.

The Catholic Church, having purchased Lestrade’s interest in Rosa de Castilla, appealed the commission’s decision through the federal courts. Curiously, the appeal, filed in the southern California district in 1858, proceeded on a technicality. The church asserted Lestrade’s attorney had had a conflict of interest that Lestrade as a foreigner did not recognize. The case wound its

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.; cf. Robert H. Becker, *Diseños of California Ranchos: Maps of Thirty-Seven Land Grants, 1822-1846*, from *The Records of the United States District Court, San Francisco* (San Francisco: Book Club of California, 1964).

<sup>24</sup>Docket No. 371.

<sup>25</sup>Docket No. 345, Board of Land Commissioners in California, 1853-1861, FAC. 700 (697), Huntington Library; Bowman, “Index,” pp. 265, 97; and Neal Harlow, *Maps and Surveys of the Pueblo Lands of Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: Dawson’s Book Shop, 1976), p. 20.

way through the judicial system until 1872. Twenty years after coming before the commission, the case was finally dismissed by the Supreme Court.<sup>26</sup>

Sra. Ballesteros had foreseen the impossibility of defending the grant in the face of an alien, more meticulous legal system. Despite the opinion of the courts, the Ballesteros had clearly established themselves on the ranch. Only by denying the honesty of several witnesses, including a priest and a widow, could the the judicial system have rejected the grant. The Ballesteros were unchallenged in their possession of the grant when the Mexican-American War dislodged them.<sup>27</sup> The requirements of the Land Act of 1851 simply assured they would never return.

During the twenty years of litigation, the hills of Rosa de Castilla remained lightly settled since title to the land was unclear. As early as 1852 Juan Ramírez had held Rancho Canada de los Alisos in the area, but at best he held a preemptive claim. By the sixties Los Angeles claims east of present Indiana Street had been denied and the area declared public land. Nevertheless, since Rosa de Castilla continued in legal limbo, the boundaries of that public land remained undefined. By 1865 more preemptions were filed in the area, few of which would be patented until the 1870s.<sup>28</sup>

According to an Anglo settler, Chico López may have stayed at the adobe on the Arroyo Rosa de Castilla during the mid-1850s. However, later in the decade a family of French Basques occupied the adobe and the ranch. After emigrating from France and residing in Argentina, Juan Bautista and Catalina Hegui Batz sailed round Cape Horn and arrived in California in 1850. Despite their arrival during the Gold Rush, the Batzes moved south away from the mining region.<sup>29</sup> Given Los Angeles's small population and their French nationality, the Batzes probably were acquainted with Lestrade.

The likelihood of this acquaintance increases when we consider other factors shared by the couple and the priest. All three had arrived in San Francisco in 1850. All three had lived in South America where they had honed their Spanish and become increasingly hispanicized. The Castilian first names of the

<sup>26</sup>Docket No. 309 (appeal of Docket No. 371, Board of Land Commissioners in California), Southern District, 1858, MSS Film 543: 37, Huntington Library; and Bowman, "Index," p. 265.

<sup>27</sup>Docket No. 371.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.; Harlow, *Maps*, p. 20; and Survey map 152, 1865, Solano-Reeve Collection; see also "Abstract of Title of . . . Rancho Rosa de Castilla . . . 1844-1884," MS HM 31537, Gillette and Gibson Collection, Huntington Library.

<sup>29</sup>H.D. Barrows, "Reminiscences of Los Angeles in the Fifties and Early Sixties," *Annual Publication of the Historical Society of Southern California*, 3 (1893): 60; and Edwin H. Carpenter, "The Batz Family and Rancho Rosa de Castilla," draft of interview with Esperanza and Margarita Batz, June 13, 1967, p. 1, enclosed with "Abstract of Title."





Though by the late fifties, Rosa de Castilla had passed out of the hands of the Mexican population, the ranch nevertheless remained Hispanic. It had not passed into the hands of westward moving Anglo-Americans; it had passed to settlers following a pattern of Spanish-American migration. Moreover, on arrival in California the Batzes adapted to the local Mexican culture in preference to Anglo-American ways. In addition, Spanish Basques followed the Batzes into the immediate area, resulting in several marriages of Batzes into families, such as the Huartes and Arosteguis. Significantly, intermarriages with Mexican families, including the Yorbas, eventually occurred.<sup>32</sup>

Rancho Rosa de Castilla continued to reflect culturally Mexican southern California, notwithstanding the Basque influence of the Batzes. Reflecting the area's Mexican pastoral economy, the ranch remained self-sufficient, providing its own foodstuffs through garden plots. Although sheep raising was early the major economic activity, the Batzes also owned cattle, horses, pigs, fowl, and other domesticated animals. As on other ranchos, meat was salted and bread baked at the site, with only grapes brought in for wine making. Because of drought and other ranching problems in southern California, sheep raising eventually gave way to farming, with hay and barley the main crops. Of course, the Batzes frequently took trips to and from Los Angeles, the region's major, predominantly Mexican town.<sup>33</sup>

Unfortunately, on one such trip in 1859, Juan Antonio Batz died in an accident involving a "runaway team of horses." Though widowed, Catalina Batz continued working the ranch despite the heavy burdens of family. Obviously a vigorous woman, Sra. Batz carried on despite having five children, all under ten years of age; indeed, she bore two more (twins) shortly after her husband's death.<sup>34</sup> Of course, as the children grew, they became assets, rather than liabilities in running the ranch.

Like Sra. Ballesteros before her, Sra. Batz faced the uncertainty surrounding ownership of Rosa de Castilla. But with greater resources at her disposal, the latter decided to seek clear title to the ranch. During the 1860s, this matter must have been a constant concern for Sra. Batz. Although the Monterey Hills and the San Gabriel Valley remained sparsely populated, she must have realized the area would grow as had the rest of the state, especially with the coming of the railroad. By 1865 squatters, including her future son-in-law Fran-

<sup>32</sup>Carpenter, "Batz Family," pp. 1-2.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 2; and *Being Here: An Autobiography of California State University, Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: California State University, 1987), pp. 46-47.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.; "Los Angeles Plaza Church Records," Burials-Book II, MSS Film 587, Reel 4, Huntington Library; and Carpenter, "Batz Family," p. 1.

cisco Huarte, had filed preemptive claims in the public land south of present Monterey Pass Road. With a final decision on the land grant imminent in 1870, Sra. Batz, her son, and sons-in-law, filed as many preemptions as possible in the area of Rosa de Castilla. Aware that the grant would probably be disallowed, others including the Southern Pacific Railroad had also staked claims. With the final appeal regarding Rosa de Castilla dismissed in 1872, the church lost all claim to the ranch, and it became indisputedly public land.<sup>35</sup>

Though illiterate, Catalina Batz had gained enough knowledge of Anglo-American real estate practices to expand her claims to Rosa de Castilla in anticipation of the court decision. Having staked claim to the acres immediately around the adobe, with her family holding others, she bought out her local competitors after the decision. She even succeeded in negotiating a deal with the Southern Pacific Railroad. Since Mission Road ran through her property, the railroad hoped to lay tracks through that area. Sra. Batz sold the right-of-way, but also purchased the claims the railroad had to other tracts in the area. By 1876 when she received the patent confirming her ownership to the adobe, she had secured nearly 3,300 acres, not to mention a house lot bordering the old Ballesteros property near the Los Angeles plaza. (Since the adobe at Rosa de Castilla was apparently unoccupied in 1871, Sra. Batz probably ran the ranch from the town house for an unknown period.)<sup>36</sup>

Nevertheless, at its greatest extent, Rancho Rosa de Castilla under the Batz family occupied a thousand acres less than the square league estimated as the least amount granted to the Ballesteros. Acquired in the sections used for the sale of federal lands, the ranch's boundaries under the Batzes were marked by straight lines and right angles, rather than the generally curved lines of the original land grant. Following present landmarks clockwise, the Batz ranch reached at least to Atlantic Boulevard in Monterey Park on the east, almost to Monterey Pass Road on the south, just past Eastern Avenue in El Sereno on the west, and just short of the South Pasadena city limit on the north. Of unincorporated East L.A. only a slice of City Terrace belonged to the ranch. Rosa de Castilla remained more or less at this extent until the death of Catalina Batz in 1882. Her children then divided the ranch among themselves by drawing straws for particular tracts.<sup>37</sup>

José Domingo Batz, the fifth of the seven children, drew seven hundred acres of Rosa de Castilla to the south, including the original adobe. Soon after,

<sup>35</sup>Robert G. Cleland, *The Cattle on a Thousand Hills: Southern California, 1850-1880* (2d. ed., San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1951), pp. 165-166; Survey maps 152, 153, Solano-Reeve Collection; Carpenter, "Batz Family," p. 2; and "Abstract of Title."

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.; Carpenter, "Batz Family," p. 2; and Survey map 153, Solano-Reeve Collection.

<sup>37</sup>Bowman, "Index," p. 265; "Abstract of Title"; and *Being Here*, p. 46.



Rosa de Castilla adobe as renovated after 1882. *Courtesy Henry E. Huntington Library.*

he hired an Austrian architect to enlarge the home rather dramatically. Photographs of the structure taken at the turn of the century reveal only one rectangular wall and window of the original adobe exposed. Clapboarded wings and a pitched roof with a dormer window have been added. The house has also apparently been lengthened with a veranda and picket fence. The architectural effect is decidedly more French than Mexican, though the adobe wall recalls the Spanish and Indian heritage. A panoramic photograph of the ranch buildings reveals the El Sereno hills to the northwest and the San Gabriel Mountains in the background. This landscape indicates the adobe faced east away from the bluff on which the present structures of Cal State LA rest. A map drawn in 1871 places the ranch house on the west side of Arroyo Rosa de Castilla, now the Long Beach Freeway, probably the parking lot at the base of the bluff. The Batzes would reside in the renovated adobe for over twenty years.<sup>38</sup>

Despite dividing the ranch at their mother's death, José Domingo Batz and his siblings apparently cooperated in its operation. For example, José Domingo employed Gregorio Arostegui, a relative by marriage as foreman of Rosa de Castilla. A craftsman at heart, José Domingo preferred to handle the ranch's blacksmithing and carpentry, even gaining prominence in local circles for the artistry of his hand-carved wooden canes. Despite this the ranch

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 21–22, 46–47; and Survey map 153, Solano-Reeve Collection.



Panoramic view of Rancho Rosa de Castilla, c. 1885.

*Courtesy Henry E. Huntington Library.*

doubtless ran at a profit. Moreover, the steady growth of Los Angeles County after arrival of the railroads assured that the ranch would appreciate in value regardless of the ups and downs of agriculture. Situated between booming Los Angeles and the increasingly suburban San Gabriel Valley, the Batz properties gained from the rise in prices for both urban and rural real estate.<sup>39</sup>

The expanding suburbs of Los Angeles reached out to Rancho Rosa de Castilla in 1906. That year José Domingo and his family sold all but a hundred acres of the ranch to Grider and Hamilton, real estate developers. The exact amount sold at that point is unclear, but the selling price of \$90,000 suggests the appreciation that had occurred since the 1870s. A depression in 1907 prevented subdivision of the ranch for some years, and the abandoned adobe fell into decay. Indeed, "People who believed there was treasure buried there used to dig in and around it, to the extent that a sign was put up, 'The Batz family left no gold here.'" Unfortunately, the adobe burned down in 1908 during the filming of a movie.<sup>40</sup>

On sale of the adobe, the Batzes had moved north of the old mission road and the railroad tracks to a new Victorian mansion at 2457 Endicott Street

<sup>39</sup>*Being Here*, p. 47; Henry Winfred Splitter, "Art in Los Angeles before 1900," Part I, *Quarterly Historical Society of Southern California*, 41 (March 1959): 52; and Glenn S. Dumke, *The Boom of The Eighties in Southern California* (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1944), pp. 76-77.



The Batz Family, c. 1885. Courtesy Henry E. Huntington Library.

where they remained until 1934. During those twenty-eight years, El Sereno grew in the surrounding area, most of the former ranch drawn into the Los Angeles city limits through the Bairdstown annexation of 1915. As subdivision progressed, the Batzes gradually sold their remaining acres, including finally the Endicott house. From that time to the late 1960s, the house served as a home for the mentally ill run by Valcrest, Inc. The old home was then demolished and replaced by a modern facility. From 1978 to the present the latter facility has functioned as the Anne Sippi Clinic for the treatment of schizophrenia.<sup>41</sup>

After José Domingo's death, his daughters Margarita and Esperanza had inherited his property and sold off the last of the Batz acres. Esperanza, thirteen years of age when the family left the adobe, had grown up speaking Basque and Spanish, in addition to English, because her mother had been a Spanish Basque. She and her sister continued to live and work in the area that had been Rosa de Castilla until their deaths in 1986 and 1981, respectively.

<sup>40</sup>*Being Here*, p. 47; and Lerner, "Mission Adobe," p. 4.

<sup>41</sup>Carpenter, "Batz Family," p. 3; *Being Here*, pp. 23, 46; "General Index from 1958 to 1991," 1978, s.v. "Anne Sippi Clinic," Real Estate Records Section, Los Angeles County Registrar Recorder/County Clerk, Norwalk, Calif.

Esperanza spent at least two decades doing social work, undoubtedly among the increasingly Mexican-American population of the Eastside. The sisters lived together at 2261 Lafler Road, on a hill above the site of the old adobe until they entered the Alhambra Retirement Home in 1979. The home where they passed away was appropriately located on South Fremont Drive, another site once part of Rosa de Castilla.<sup>42</sup>

Though developers had subdivided most of the ranch into residential tracts during the first half of the twentieth century, they had often bypassed the area's higher hills in favor of more easily developed terrain. Interestingly, the bluff directly west of the old adobe was one such site. The state of California had early acquired this area and eventually placed it under the Division of Highways. That agency used the topsoil off the property to landscape roads and freeways. Finally, in 1954 the Board of Public Works selected the 78-acre site for construction of the new campus of Los Angeles State College of Applied Arts & Sciences, now known as Cal State LA.<sup>43</sup> A hundred years after Father Lestrade's attempt to establish a college, land he had purchased was put to that purpose. Appropriately, that campus would eventually enroll one of the highest numbers of Mexican-American students in the country.

The significance of Rancho Rosa de Castilla to Mexican-American history is multifaceted. For one thing it demonstrates the constantly changing but continuous presence of Hispanic culture in Greater East Los Angeles from colonial times to the present. While Mexican dominance was broken after the Anglo-American conquest, marked by the dispossession of the Ballesteros, the Hispanic presence survived in the names, intermarriages, and language of the Batzes. Indeed, the Batz sisters died years after the area had become predominantly Mexican-American again. Secondly, the roles of Sra. Ballesteros and Sra. Batz especially suggest the importance of women not only as bearers of culture, but as economic actors in the area's history. While inheriting the land claims of males, these women, in the face of heavy family responsibilities, made critical decisions affecting the real estate of the Eastside.<sup>44</sup> Third, the ranch itself, divided and subdivided—contested on the battlefield, in the courts, and the marketplace—represents the stage on which the human drama takes place. Though ever changing, the land endures as peoples evolve, and individuals live their lives and pass away.

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<sup>42</sup>Tice, "L.A. Scene," p. 3.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>For other numerous examples of early California women engaged in real estate transactions, see J.N. Bowman, "Prominent Women of Provincial California," *Quarterly Historical Society of Southern California*, 39 (June 1957): 149-166.