

## RANCHO EL ENCINO

The modern period of valley history is generally dated from the first recorded Spanish explorations in 1769. Original manuscripts written by various members of the Portola-Crespi expedition have furnished historians with important descriptive data of life in eighteenth-century California. These initial explorations extended the California mission chain and led directly to the establishment of a mission at the present-day site of the town of San Fernando. Although these earliest journals contain certain discrepancies, characteristic of each are striking accounts of the awesome physical beauty of the valley. The Crespi diary (Bolton 1966), probably the best known of the period, named this beautiful area "El Vallee de Santa Catalina de Bononia de Los Encinos" (The Valley of St. Catherine of Bononia of the Oaks).

The valley known to the Spanish government as the Encino grant lay undisturbed until 1784. During this year, Francisco Reyes applied for, and received from Governor Pedro Fages, this extensive grant. D.C. Cutter has found evidence that the grant was provisional and never recorded as a legal document (1961:12). There are various accounts which claim that Reyes established small ranchos in both the northwest and the southern portions (present-day Encino) of the valley. Excavations at the historical monument were recently conducted under the aegis of the Los Encinos Historical Society, but no evidence was unearthed that would indicate the existence of a permanent structure that would predate the de la Ossa Adobe built in 1849 (Wallace 1962). What can be documented is the fact that "in 1797, Mission San Fernando was founded in the northwest end of the grant and Reyes was asked to relinquish the grant as it was needed for the mission" (Encino Community News March 25, 1940). During the ensuing years, Reyes stayed at the mission and continued to operate a profitable cattle venture.

With the onset of the Mexican period (1823-1847), the valley already supported a few important ranchos. The Mexican Government, determined to free the native population from the stringent control of the missions,

pursued a policy of secularization. "Secularization returned to the public domain, land supposedly held in trust for Indian converts" (Mayers 1976:28). Under Mexican rule, grazing rights were far more common than grants of deeded land tracts. The valley during the early nineteenth century was ideal for the grazing of cattle and the cash "crop" was the Andalusian longhorn. Little attention was paid to specific property boundaries. Few Indians were ever granted sizable land parcels, with Rancho El Encino being one of the notable exceptions. The popular tradition of the rough individualist "Californio" took definitive shape during these years.

By the 'forties, the rancho had entered the "del Encino" period. This name was commonly associated with the area by its Indian inhabitants, but was not widely known until the Indian Tiburico had established a permanent squatter's claim. Tiburico, a San Fernando Mission favorite, had with the padre's permission, been cultivating a small plot near the present-day rancho and raised a herd of cattle said to number about 50 head. "On July 8, 1845, Pio Pico issued a grant to the natives, Ramon, Francisco, and Roque, on their petition on the 4,460 acres of El Encino... Grantees Francisco and Roque both married daughters of Tiburico who died about 1845. All three grantees were living on El Encino land" (Mayers 1976:37).

Sometime during the next few years, original grantee Ramon, seized with gold fever, disappeared and was presumed dead. Rocque, Francisco, and his wife, also died during these years, leaving only Aguilla (wife of Rocque) and Rita (daughter of Francisco) to face the adjudication of the Encino grant. The situation was complicated further by the fact that Governor Pico had never officially recorded the grant.

With an eye on a portion of the Encino acreage, Vicente de la Ossa (Providencia Rancho) came to the Indian women and offered to present the case in the territorial Land Claims Court.

He petitioned and represented them, and after many hearings in San Francisco, the Mexican Government granted each party one-third of the property by supporting the claim in the light of the U.S. takeover and consequent respect for claims Feb. 2, 1848, by the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hildago. Of course, the Indian women felt indebted to Vicente de la Ossa for protecting their interests; they were eager to give him Ramon's one-third share, but Ossa insisted on paying them one-hundred dollars, Oct. 30, 1849. The record was signed by Juan Sepulveda (Stewart 1965:39). (Record of this official grant is signed by Niopitos and is presently housed in the Huntington Library).

Soon thereafter, de la Ossa began construction of the nine room adobe still standing on the Los Encinos Monument site. Within a short time, Rancho El Encino was grazing a herd of 500 head, or almost ten times the cattle that had been grazed by the Indians. By 1857, de la Ossa had completed the purchase of the rancho "in payment of many obligations" and controlled the complete Encino tract.

By the mid-fifties, the de la Ossa rancho was a true hacienda of elegant splendor. Located strategically along the road to Santa Barbara, Encino became a favorite rest stop for cowboys and travelers alike. In 1858, the Overland Mail Company (Butterfield's line) inaugurated its valley route and established a way-station at El Encino. The Butterfield line was important to the valley because, "the stage forced the first real American roadbuilding along the line that led through Cahuenga Pass, San Fernando Pass, and Lyon Pass. One route came through Dark Canyon and Tujunga Canyon to San Fernando, Rancho Encino, and Los Angeles" (Mayers 1976:55).

Economic difficulty soon caught up with the de la Ossa Rancho, and elegant Spanish hospitality gave way to "pay as one goes." An advertisement in the "L.A. Star" stated,

I have established at my Rancho known by the name of the Encino, situated at the distance of 21 miles from the city, on the road to Santa Barbara, a place for affording accommodations to the people travelling on this road. They will find at all times food for themselves and for their horses, beds at night, etc. I hope those wishing to call at our place will not forget to bring with them what is necessary to defray their expenses (Mayers 1976:56).

The Civil War years for Rancho El Encino witnessed a trend toward further economic decline. A severe drought (1862-63) reduced sharply the number of cattle in the valley. Earthquakes and intense summer heat were blamed for the loss of over 200,000 head. Lush valley grasses turned to barren desert. "Pastoral California was finished; a one-crop economy was bested by nature. But on the positive side, the valley was driven to farming" (Mayers 1976:58).

Adding further to the plight of the Rancho was the death of de la Ossa in 1861 (date recorded in the family Bible). After exhaustive probate proceedings, the grant was confirmed to his widow Rita on May 26, 1862. At some point during the next five years, James Paul Thompson gained control of the grant. Forced to sell out by a court order, the widow conveyed the deed to Thompson for a sum of \$3,500, or slightly more than the assessed valuation. The purchaser, whose first contact with the Encino tract came as sheriff and tax collector of the county, coincidentally happened to be the widow's son-in-law. "There is some suspicion of chicanery in this transaction by Thompson, husband of Manuelita Ossa; but he was not the first to marry the land" (Mayers 1976:60).

Thompson held the deed only long enough to reap a modest profit. In 1869 he sold El Encino to the French Garnier brothers for a consideration of \$9,000. The transfer to ownership was legally documented with the "plat" of the rancho which had been in preparation since 1868 and was officially recorded in 1873 at the request of Eugene Garnier (Figure 5).

With the infusion of capital from the homeland, the Garniers ushered in a "new golden age" of sheep herding for the rancho. High quality Encino wool was shipped the world over. In the course of the Garnier tenure the two-story limestone building was constructed and the spring was "walled up" for more efficient storage and use. Rancho El Encino was transformed into a thriving sheep ranch with as many as 20 employees. Improvements to the rancho raised the assessed valuation to a new high (\$10,000) (Truman 1874:13).

**PLAT**  
OF THE  
**RANCHO EL ENCINO**

Finally Confirmed to  
*Vicente de la Ossa et al*  
Surveyed under the instructions from the  
**U.S. SURVOR GENL.**  
by *G.H. Thompson Dep Sur.*  
September 1868

Containing 460.75 Acs

Scale to chs to links

Variation, 19° 45' E

Field Notes Approved:-

*Sherman Day*

U.S. Surr Genl. Cal

San Francisco, Cal. June 30<sup>th</sup> 1870

*Ex Mission*

No	Course	Distance
1	North	210 68
2	West	210 68
3	South	210 68
4	East	212 78

Approved Jun 7, 1873

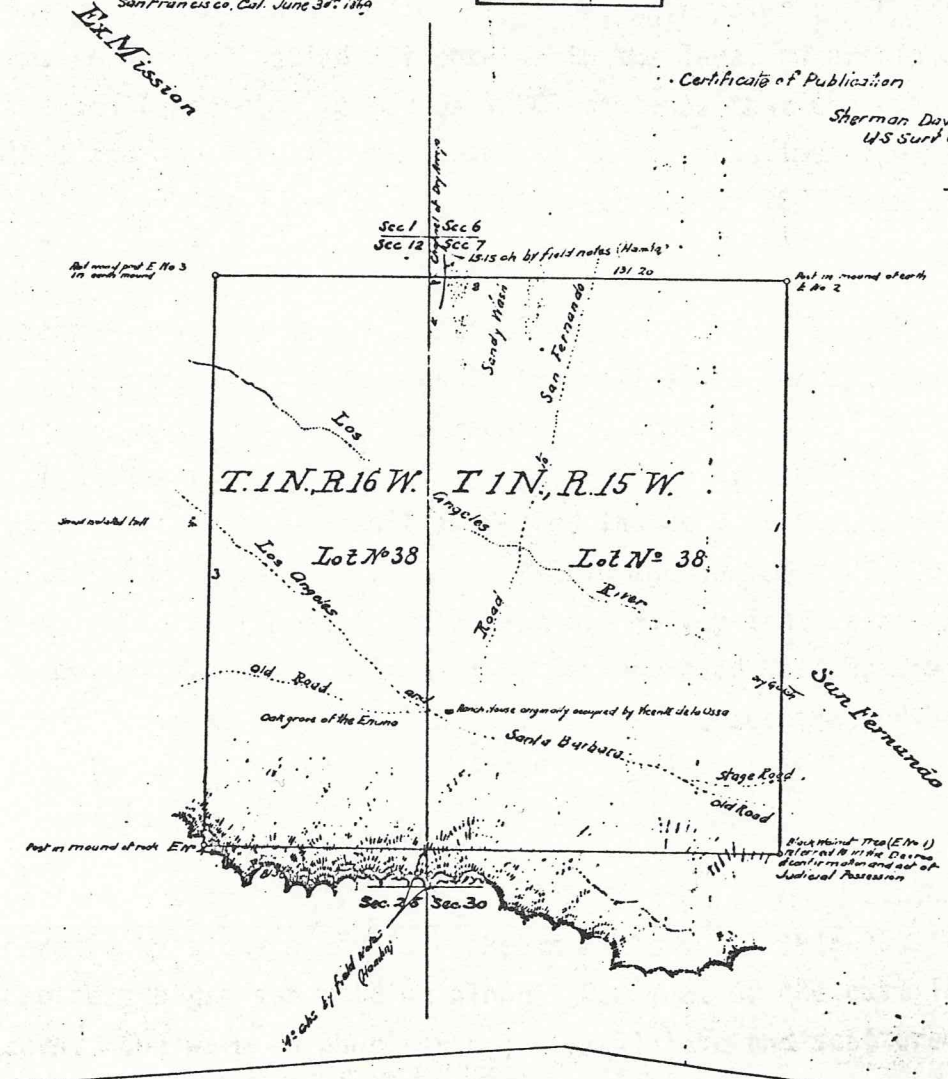
*Wm. Drummond*

Com of the General Land Office

Certificate of Publication

*Sherman Day*

U.S. Surr Genl. Cal.



Recorded Jan 29<sup>th</sup> 1873, at 12<sup>o</sup> P.M.

at request of Eugene Garnier

PATENTS I  
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Figure 5 . Plat of Rancho el Encino Confirming Ownership of de la Ossa, 1873. From: Los Angeles County Hall of Records.

Once again, nature intervened in the prosperity of the valley and a severe drought in 1874-75 brought ruin to many of the sheep concerns. In 1876, "the great agent of civilization," the railroad, diverted much of the stage business away from Encino. Illness and financial setbacks forced the Garniers to return for a time, to their native France. By 1877, overdue taxes had dictated the public auction of the rancho at the Courthouse door. Gaston Oxarart made the highest and best bid of \$29,322.69" (Mayers 1976:71).

During the first two years of ownership, Oxarart expanded the flocks to number 32,000. In a single transaction, Oxarart liquidated as much as 150,000 pounds of the finest merino wool. At this point (1878-1887), there seems to be conflicting evidence as to the legal ownership of the rancho. Rensch (according to Mayers 1976) contends that one Juan Bernard was involved and had actually purchased El Encino sometime after 1878. Furthermore, a sale by a Benita was duly recorded in 1887 with the grantee being Simon Gless.

Under Oxarart-Gless, the rancho continued to diversify. El Encino apiaries (one of 17 ranchos to keep bees in the valley) housed thousands of bees while the number of sheep was reduced to about 10,000. Gless, in 1887, married Juanita Amestoy. Against a backdrop of mounting pressure to subdivide for farming, Gless transferred the deed of El Encino to his father-in-law, Domingo Amestoy. Amestoy paid the sum of \$125,000--highest purchase price ever paid for the rancho. Valley land values were skyrocketing, but with even modest capital the land paid healthy dividends to successful farmers. Rancho El Encino, under the auspices of Peter and John Amestoy (sons of Domingo), developed a highly profitable sheep/grain business that flourished until the major subdivisions of 1915.

Encino, not yet a suburb in 1910, was still foreign to much of Los Angeles, being separated by a day's journey. Between the years 1911-15, "The Amestoy brothers began subdividing along 3,000 feet of the east line of Encino Ranch. The warm sulphur spring, a small lake and scattered oaks, were attractions. W.J. Petit, a grower of Ventura County, leased much

of Encino Ranch along the river for planting sugar beets. Eventually he bought 700 acres" (Mayers 1976:102).

An article that appeared in the L.A. Times June 20, 1915, called the Amestoy Ranch "the largest body of land ever put on the market at one time within the limits of Los Angeles." The article continued on to describe the transaction between the Amestoy Estate Co. and W.H. Hay, a Los Angeles real estate agent. Although it does not mention a purchase price, the deal was believed to be in excess of \$1,000,000, with the Amestoy's retaining a parcel of 100 acres which included the heart of the old rancho and the subject property. The Amestoy's retained possession of this tract until a short time before final subdivision in 1945.

The course of development throughout the years 1920-1945 were characterized by the increasing recognition of Encino as a "distinct urban center." The Depression years (1930's) signaled the beginning of two trends of paramount importance for the Encino area. First, the entire valley was under intense population pressure and by 1930 the figure had reached 78,497. Second, Encino became the hub of a "back to the land" movement by prominent Hollywood studios and their celebrities. According to Mayers "Hollywood kissed Encino," and many stars and movie personalities (e.g. Al Jolson, Clark Gable, Roy Rogers, E.R. Burroughs) took up residence in the scenic hills of Encino. These celebrities and the earliest homeowners in Encino cut a wealthy social profile that fit comfortably with the proud "Californio" tradition that had been associated with the area since the time of the de la Ossa Ranch.

#### ENCINO ROADHOUSE

The preceding pages of this study have been offered as a general summary of important dates and events associated with Rancho El Encino. Specific to the subject property is the discovery of an historic trash pit/privy which was associated with the former site of a roadhouse. The roadhouse was continually used from 1874 to around 1905 as 1) an important stage stop on the road to Santa Barbara, 2) an outpost of settlement in a remote area (a day's journey from the Plaza in Los Angeles), and 3) a clearing-house of Basque culture.

Stage lines (Los Angeles to San Francisco) and their inauguration have been a continual source of controversy among certain California historians. Butterfield's route did, after 1860, follow the "coastal route" and the present course of Ventura Boulevard through the valley. This road, "while legally a public highway [1851 court of sessions] it is doubtful if anything more than horses' hooves had ever traversed it before the Whitney party of 1861" (Outland 1973:110). (Figure 6).

Throughout Stagecoaching on El Camino Real, Charles Outland points to numerous discrepancies in the available historical evidence. Outland suggests that Bancroft, Newmark, Guinn, and others are guilty of an over reliance on the accounts furnished by Thompson and West (1880). The basic problem stems from the fact that the only stage lines running in the Los Angeles area (until 1858) were local links with the harbor facilities. During the early 1850's mail arrived from San Francisco by steamer.

At the time the Butterfield Overland Mail moved to the Coast Route in 1861, that portion of the Conejo Route to as far as present day Thousand Oaks was utilized until the Santa Susana Pass Road was completed in September. There is no record whatsoever in respect to stations on the route between Los Angeles and San Buenaventura at that time. The first would have been at Encino, and the second at Vejar's; but two other stations would have been needed. Their locations have been lost with time and covered with dust (Outland 1973: 164).

Butterfield began his overland mail service in September, 1858 (Outland 1973:75). The government had provided a subsidy of at least \$600,000.00 annually to guarantee mail delivery. Service would include, at minimum, two concords each way between Los Angeles and San Francisco. Postal revenue for the first year [1859] was but a paltry \$27,000 and politicians attacked Butterfield's company with great fervor (Newmark 1970:259).

During these initial years, the route through the valley turned north at Encino to San Fernando and through the Santa Susana Pass to the road that ran along the San Francisquito Canyon (Figure 6). In anticipation



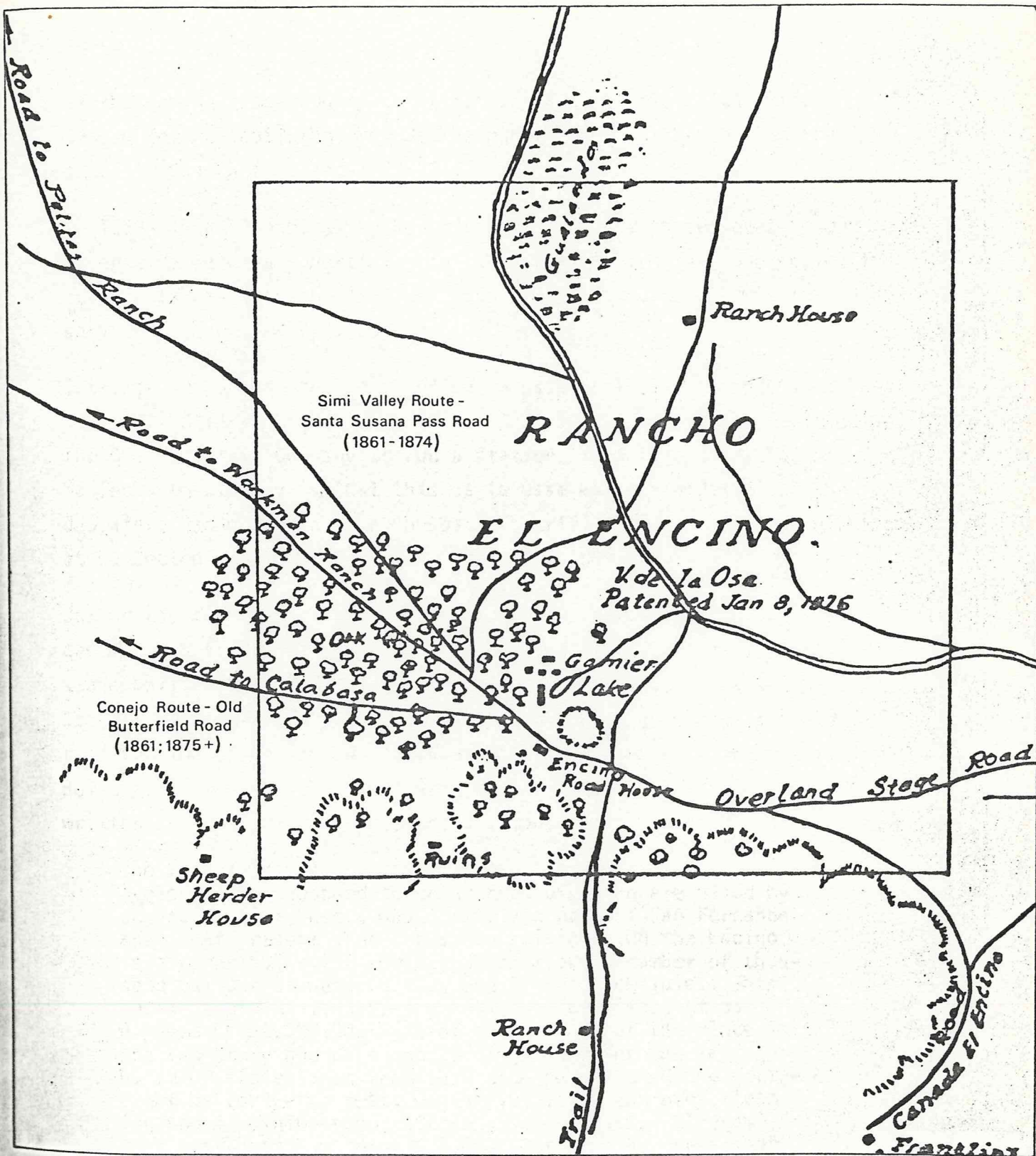


Figure 6. Enlargement of Rancho El Encino Boundary Map, Surveyed in 1874, Patented in 1876. Original copy from the 8th floor Vault, Los Angeles City Engineers. Stage Route names added by SRS, Inc.

of the coming line, County supervisors had appropriated the line \$3,000 for roadbuilding over San Fernando Hill and through San Francisco Canyon (Outland 1973:70).

In 1859 elegant hospitality had given way to "pay as one goes." Don Vicente de la Ossa advertising in the "Star" stated that one could find lodging in his spacious "Halfway House," but be sure to carry the necessary cash (Newmark 1970:253).

Details surrounding the death of de la Ossa in 1861 are sketchy at best. Keefer (1934:42) suggests that after 1861, a de la Ossa was employed by the Overland Mail Company to run a station at Chatsworth. What he neglects to clarify is that this de la Ossa was the widow Rita. A daughter, Manuelita, and her husband, Sheriff James Thompson, ran things at El Encino until the Garnier purchase in 1869.

During the first years of the Garnier tenure (1869-1874) travelers were accommodated in the old de la Ossa adobe and later the two-story limestone building. With the anticipation of the switch back to the Conejo Stage Route in 1875, the business conscious Garnier Brothers had begun construction of the Encino Roadhouse on the site across present Ventura Boulevard (Figure 6). In the work Semi-Tropical California, which was written as a promotional guidebook, a contemporary account is furnished:

The Encinal ranch, containing four thousand four hundred acres, three thousand three hundred of which are owned by Eugene Garnier, Esq., was formerly a part of San Fernando and is at present used for sheep raising...On the Encino is a remarkably fine spring, which flows a number of thousand gallons of water daily, and is inexhaustible...This water is piped all over the household premises, at an expense of \$1,500,00. One of attractions of the place is the two-story boarding and lodging-house for the men built of stone taken from the ranch one hundred and forty-eight by forty-two feet; containing large and airy sleeping rooms, dining-room, kitchen, bakery, etc. Already this gentleman has spent \$45,000.00 in improvements; not content, is he just finishing a public house, which will be the most complete roadside inn in Southern California. (Truman 1874:13).

At this point (1874), the historical backdrop for the Encino Roadhouse was completed. An important point of transit for passengers and mail, El Encino ranch had served a number of stage lines and travellers alike. In 1868, Flint, Bixby and Company had taken over the Coast Line, San Juan and Los Angeles Company with Encino listed in the inventory of stations. As the Southern Pacific Railroad was extended southward one by one these stations were discontinued. In 1873, the "Star" ran an article detailing the route from Los Angeles to Santa Barbara. "Los Angeles: to Encino Rancho, 18 miles, fare 1.50. In 1875, approximately two years after the above itinerary was published, the Coast Line of Stages moved to the Conejo Route for a period of slightly over a year" (Outland 1973: 163). Prior to this switch, the company had used the Simi Valley Route (1861-1874). The year 1876 witnessed the coming of the Southern Pacific to the valley which in turn signaled the end of the stage business at El Encino.

That "great agent of civilization," the railroad, had far-reaching effects throughout California. Migrating populations streamed west and many of the huge ranchos began to subdivide to accomodate small scale agriculture. Each year following 1872 hastened the eventual doom of the once prosperous sheep industry. According to Newmark, the Garnier brothers in that disastrous season (1872) had suffered irreversible losses. That year their clip had exceeded 150,000 pounds. Refusing an initial offer of \$.48 per pound, the market suddenly bottomed-out and the Garniers were forced to liquidate a year later at \$.16 1/2 per pound (Newmark 1970:438).

What, then, became of the roadside inn that had been constructed by the Garniers in 1874? Rancho El Encino entered a period of decline at least until the time of the Oxarart purchase in 1877. Specific details as to the fate of the Encino roadhouse (1874-1877) are sketchy. Most likely the emphasis of the place was shifted during this time to a tavern/store operation. Overnight guests could of course, find lodging but through traffic on the old road to Santa Barbara was kept to a mimimum by a number of highwaymen who preyed upon the traveler. The rugged hills of Calabasas provided numerous hideouts. Joaquin Murietta, reputed to be a

friend of Miguel Leonis, was known to frequent the west valley area (Gaye 1965:27).

With the Oxarart takeover in 1877, the ranch was revitalized and once again stocked with sheep. The fact that another Basque sheepman had secured title to El Encino contributed further to the lack of specific historical data. Basque language functioned as a secret code for insiders (Bilbao, Douglass 1975:3). Contemporary accounts by anglo writers made only a passing mention of El Encino.

Loners by profession (sheepherders), Basques seemed to thrive in the remote setting of the valley. Shepherding as principal occupation ruled out the ethnic concentration characteristic of other immigrant groups. For this reason, the Basque culture has been shrouded in mystique. Furthermore, this group has not been the target of typical discrimination. A self-conscious maintenance of an ethnic identity (i.e. language, fraternal societies) has insured a certain cultural aloofness. Traditional Basque values of thrift, hard work, and personal hygiene, made the transition to the American West less traumatic than was the general immigrant experience. In addition, Basque honesty was legendary (Bilbao, Douglass 1975:3,159).

Historians have included French Basques among the many immigrant groups that made their way to California after the discovery of gold in 1848. Although a significant number did work diggings in the north, this analysis does not tell the entire story. For the Basques that migrated to California after 1840 came in the majority from South America, were of peasant stock, and had previously been engaged in agricultural and sheepherding pursuits. The Basque sheepmen were soon the stereotype for they came to dominate every phase of the industry (Bilbao, Douglass 1975:122,155).

Interesting to note are the records of disembarking French Basques from Buenos Aires. One particular ship that departed for California in February, 1851, contained three future owners of El Encino.

Many of those making the journey, together formed friendships that were to last a lifetime, serving as the basis for later business partnerships and marriages. In the early California accounts the names of the shipmates Amestoy, Laronde, Gless, Oxarart, Erreca, and Indart appear in combination frequently, and it was this group of 'Argentine' Basques that was subsequently to stand out in early California society (Bilbao, Douglass 1975:210)

The Argentine Basques were well aware of the economic potential of open-range herding practices under frontier-like conditions. Contrary to popular belief, the ascendance of the Basque in the sheep industry of the American West was not a product of "Old World" experience.

To many Basques arriving in the state from the Rio de la Plata nations, the growth of the sheep industry in California must have seemed like a replay of Argentine industry. By the late 1840's, the competition in Argentina and Uruguay for adequate sheep rangeland was increasing, and we can only surmise that those Basques who emigrated to the California diggings were those whose achievements in South America had been modest at best (Bilbao, Douglass 1975:223).

In other words, this search for new opportunity meant, for the majority, entry into a frontier economy on the lowest rungs of the socio-economic scale.

Domingo Amestoy, owner of El Encino after 1889, provided an excellent case in point. His early days in the Los Angeles area (1850's) were spent traveling the city for the purpose of taking in laundry.

Amestoy's career is worthy of particular mention as exemplifying the three cardinal virtues of business: honesty, application and frugality. He and his wife took in washing; and while the husband went from house to house, leading a horse with a large basket strapped to either side to collect and deliver the clothes, the wife toiled at the tub. In the end, what they together had saved became the foundation of their important investments in sheep and land (Newmark 1970:311).

Prior to the entry of the Basques, herders in California were simply salaried employees. However, as early as 1854 we have evidence of contractual arrangements between a rancher and a Basque sheepman that are strongly reminiscent of those that were frequently obtained in Argentina (Bilbao, Douglass 1975:225).

At the basis of this new arrangement was the idea that a herder would care for a part of the total flock and at the end of the season would own a percentage of the increase. Of course there were mutual benefits. Most importantly, the rancher was assured of excellent care, for the herder had a stake in the ownership of the flock. Spared from the arduous task of capital accumulation, the herdsman was an owner by the end of the initial season (Bilbao, Douglass 1975:225).

Fortunately for the purpose of historical research Domingo Amestoy entered the sheep industry as a herdsman in the employ of Don Abel Stearns. Detailed documents of many of the business transactions of the Stearns empire are available in the Huntington Library.

Thus, on June 26, 1854, Domingo Amestoy signed a sheep raising contract, or 'conbenio,' with Don Abel Stearns of Los Angeles. The document was written in Spanish and witnessed by the Basque Ulpiano Indart. Under the agreement, Stearns entrusted 1829 animals to Amestoy, as well as rangeland for their maintenance on the Rancho de los Alamitos. For his part, Amestoy was obliged to care for and raise this flock for a period of two and a half years (Bilbao, Douglass 1975:226).

At the conclusion of the initial contract, Amestoy retained one-half the flock increase and a portion of the cash receipts at the time of shearing. Although this early arrangement did not yield instant riches, Amestoy was able to build these meager profits into a huge personal fortune. "In 1871, Amestoy purchased shares worth half a million dollars in the newly formed Farmers and Merchants Bank of Los Angeles " (Bilbao, Douglass 1975:227).

As mentioned above, the Basque Ulpiano Indart served as witness to the deal between Amestoy and Stearns. Coming to California in 1849, Indart had established himself as a merchant and his reputation was known to Don Abel Stearns. Bilbao and Douglass (1975:227) suggest that Indart's involvement reflects a relationship between an established "California" Basque and a newcomer fellow ethnic of more modest background. This pattern of socialization is exhibited throughout the Basque period of Rancho El Encino (1869-1945).

The Argentine pattern in the emergence of the successful Basque sheepman provides an interesting parallel to the Encino epic.

He would get his start either herding for a wage or working for a share in the flock's increase. Alternatively, he might begin as a fence stringer, or a 'lambrador.' In either event he acquired an intimate knowledge of the local terrain and range conditions. For many a future prominent Basque landowner or 'estanciero,' the next step was a stint as innkeeper or 'fondista.' The Basque inn, which doubles as a general store, was frequently the first business establishment in a developing rural area. The 'fonda' was the center for the social and economic life of a fairly extensive region, and hence a clearinghouse for local news (Bilbao, Douglass 1975:154).

Clearly, there are differences in the California case. But the Encino roadhouse did act to preserve many of these cultural traditions. By the decade of the 1870's, new arrivals could depend upon the assistance from a network of Basque hotels throughout California. "The hotels provided them with initial lodging, orientation, and job information in a familiar ethnic setting" (Bilbao, Douglass 1975:233).

Although many of the California Basques did not acquire land until late in their careers, this factor could be attributed to the belief that they would one day return to their homeland.

Many individuals [Basques 1850-1900] shared a life pattern that began with wage employment as a shepherd, followed by moderate economic success as an independent sheep operator, then the purchase or homesteading of acreage, a number of years devoted to cropping, and final retirement to an urban residence. In such families there appears to have been a continued involvement in agriculture among the first-generation American-born (Bilbao, Douglass 1975:241).

Although the success of the Amestoy family may be taken as exceptional, their annals conform quite neatly to the typical pattern.

#### LASSALLE PROPRIETORSHIP

The cultural materials recovered by SRS can be dated approximately 1890-1905 with a mean date of all materials of 1900 (See Part III). As indicated by the available evidence this time span corresponds with

the years that the colorful Jacques Lassalle served as "fondista" (inkeeper) of the Encino roadhouse (Figure 7). With the policy of "meals at all hours" and the inviting mineral baths, the Encino Inn became a popular social gathering place.

Jacques Lassalle was born in Haute-Garonne, France, on January 7, 1860. Lassalle first appeared on the voter registration rolls of Lankershim precinct in Los Angeles County in 1896. Listed as a merchant, Lassalle became a naturalized citizen on June 28, 1896. His post office box was in the area of Colgrove and at the time of his application for citizenship he was able to read the constitution and write his name in English.

Lassalle was believed to have been prone to occasional periods of drunkenness and his life ended tragically at the age of 45. An article in the French newspaper L'Union Nouvelle (August 26, 1905) contained the grisly details. "Jacques LaSalle, propriétaire, d'un auberge à l'Encino, a été trouvé mort vendredi dernier, sous un arbre sur le ranch Amestoy. A côté du corps était un revolver déchargé. On ignore les motifs du suicide." [Jacques Lassalle, proprietor of an Inn at Encino, was found dead last Friday under a tree on the Amestoy Ranch. Next to the corpse was a discharged revolver. The motives of suicide were unknown].

Lassalle died penniless and his funeral arrangements were handled by the French Benevolent Society which had been established in 1860. Lassalle had been an active member in the Society since 1888. (French Benevolent Society Membership Book entry No. 1813).

The Encino roadhouse displayed graphically a frontier culture with a unique Basque style. In general, certain remarks can be made about the tavern as a frontier saloon. When one considers the institutional development of the American west, the saloon must claim a place of prominence. In actuality, the physical place where men drank was far more significant than the fact that each man who imbibed, on the average, consumed five or six whiskeys per day (Brown 1978:80).



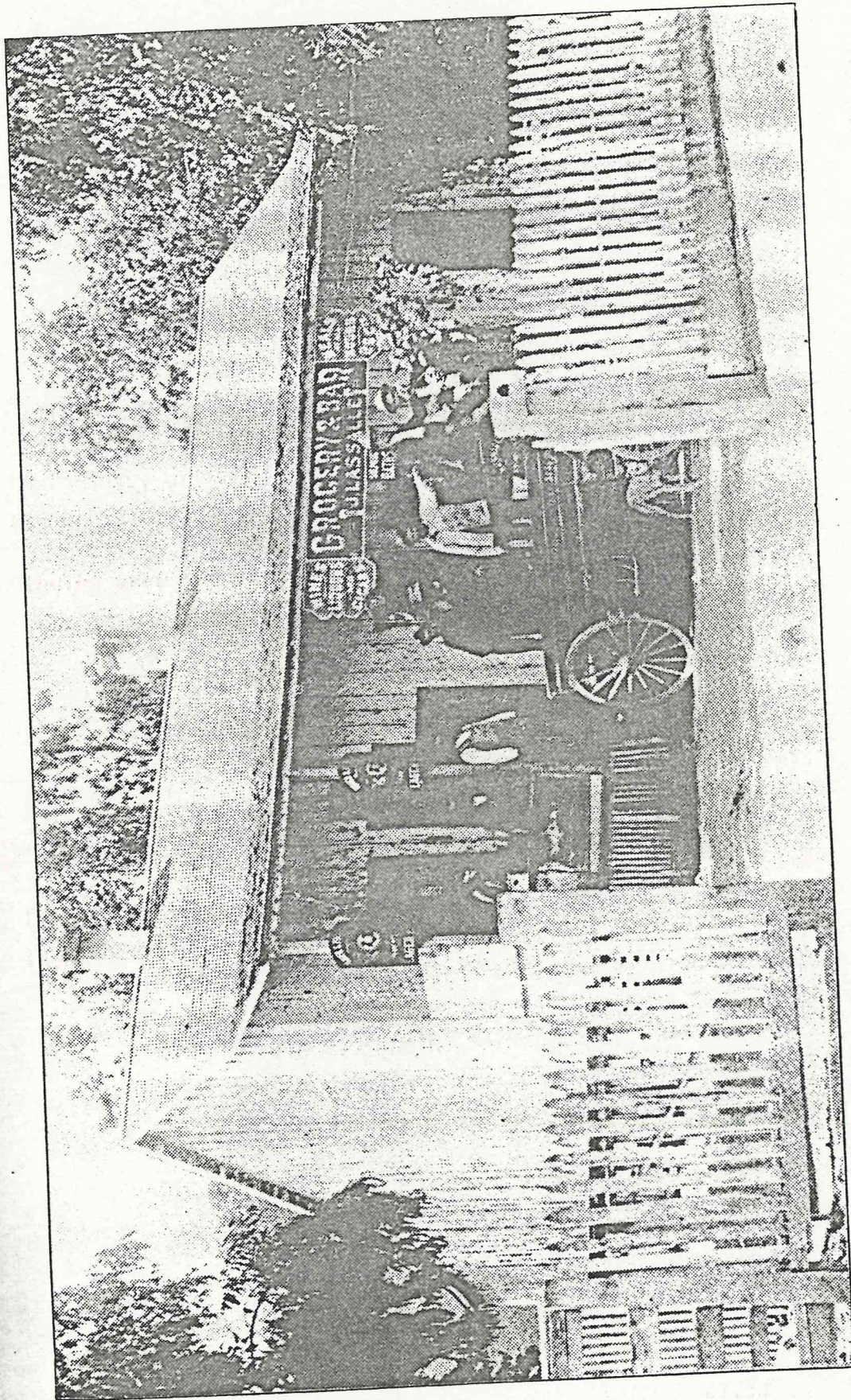


Figure 7. Photo of the Encino Roadhouse Under the Proprietorship of Jacques Lassalle. Photograph taken circa 1890-1900. Courtesy of Los Encinos State Historical Park.

Most importantly, the saloon filled the social vacuum characteristic of the American frontier.

In settlements peopled almost exclusively by lonely bachelors, saloons offered someone to talk with and a warm place in which to sit and relax among the heavy odors of tobacco smoke, sweaty clothing and whiskey. Saloons offered an emotional release from hard work and job, tensions, as well as sympathy for the lonely frontiersman (Brown 1978:15).

Almost universally, the western saloon was pervaded by a sense of equality. "In some districts peopled heavily with first-generation immigrants, drinking was almost the only recreation of the poor" (Brown 1978:9).

Finding enough customers never seemed to be a problem in early Encino since it was a day's ride distant from the Plaza in Los Angeles.

In the west at least the best saloon in town was frequently the town's stage coach station. Such facilities might be the only public place where the coaches could stop to unload. Scarcity of safe drinking water was also a factor dictating the choice, as did the availability of public sanitary facilities. Because few homes had indoor plumbing, many saloons maintained public baths as an added social service (Brown 1978:70).

In the case of Encino, an excellent quality of mineral water was available and inexhaustible (Table 3). The site that housed the inn was likened to a natural, spring-fed sink or cove (Stewart 1965:54).

Table 3. Encino Spring Water Analysis

Incrusted solids	
Grains per gallon	
Silica . . . . .	82
Calcium . . . . .	23
	TOTAL 1.05
Non-Incrusted Solids	
Sodium Carbonate . . . . .	21.70
Sodium Sulphate . . . . .	36.60
Sodium Chloride . . . . .	3.18
Volatile and organic matter . . . . .	5.85
	TOTAL 67.33

This water is free of alkali (Stewart 1965:95).

Architecturally, the Encino Inn represented the frontier conditions that existed in California until the last decade of the nineteenth century. Physical conditions in California favored a "colonialism" that called for a style that borrowed from a multitude of building traditions. More importantly, in the case of southern California, building styles were dictated by the availability of materials and labor. For this reason, the "balloon frame" was particularly suited for local conditions (Figure 7).

The reader will recall the inn was constructed during 1874-75. A contemporary traveler, Ludwig L. Salvator, visited El Encino in 1877 and recorded local building customs. Houses were wooden built usually of redwood with white pine flooring. The "balloon frame" (owing to its lightness) was employed by using boards or planks fastened only with nails. Foundations are not, as a general thing, very deep--usually one row of bricks in the middle corresponding to the breadth and two at the sides according to the length. Over this, strong planks are placed to conform with the way the rooms are arranged. Small structures in the country are frequently built directly on the bare earth. Two-by-fours are generally used and the paint is a gray or grayish (Salvator 1929:45).

There are certain details that are undoubtedly lost in the translation of Salvator's original work, but the restatement by M. Wittour (1929) furnishes critical details on early building styles. Kirker explains the origin of balloon frame:

An important factor in making the frame house a commonplace on the California frontier was the introduction of the balloon frame into western building practices. This technique, which substituted nails for the traditional mortises and tenons and utilized light two-by-four-inch studs, took its name from the scorn in which it was held by conventional builders, who insisted that such frames would blow away like balloons in the wind (Kirker 1970:59).

The finished structure, covered with clapboards and roofed with shingles, was barely distinguishable from the "historic colonial model." In frontier California the "balloon frame" enjoyed a popular acceptance where

a lack of skilled labor dictated the use of any practical substitute for costly heavy frame construction. Balloon frame was most prominent as an architectural style during the period 1860-1900.

Through the last quarter of the century [1875-1900] the price of redwood remained constant despite a duty on foreign lumber and a brief period of inflation resulting from the southern California building boom. In addition to its availability and economy, redwood eminently satisfied the current demands of taste by reason of its great facility for sawing and cutting (Kirker 1970:90).

In sum, recovery of building materials by SRS (Part III) tends to support and document the "balloon frame" and its use in the Encino Inn. Contrary to modern times, recycling was the rule rather than the exception, especially with valuable construction materials. It is probable that a portion of the materials recovered could have had a prior use in other out-buildings of Rancho El Encino.

Drawing from the available evidence, certain details can be added to furnish a more complete picture of the Encino roadhouse. Firstly, from the signs discernible in the photograph (Figure 7), the roadhouse featured wines, liquors, cigars, and "25¢ meals at all hours." As was customary, "Grocery and Bar" indicated the type of goods furnished at the establishment. Directly below the proprietor's name (Figure 7) sulphur baths were advertised. The wagon was owned by L.A. Soda Works so in all probability the roadhouse carried their line of beverages.

Secondly, the rectangular one-story structure faced the northeast and stood adjacent to a network of corrals. (Figure 8). Foundation material was most likely mortar and stone as was common in local architecture (Wallace 1965). Exterior wall material was vertical board and batten. The roof was the common wood shingle with two brick chimneys. Window openings were flat with plain molding. From the photo it would appear that the structure contained more than one entrance (Figure 7). The prominent porch was the open veranda extending across the front of the structure supported by square, wooden posts. Although there was little ornamentation in frontier architecture, the property did contain an extensive fence.

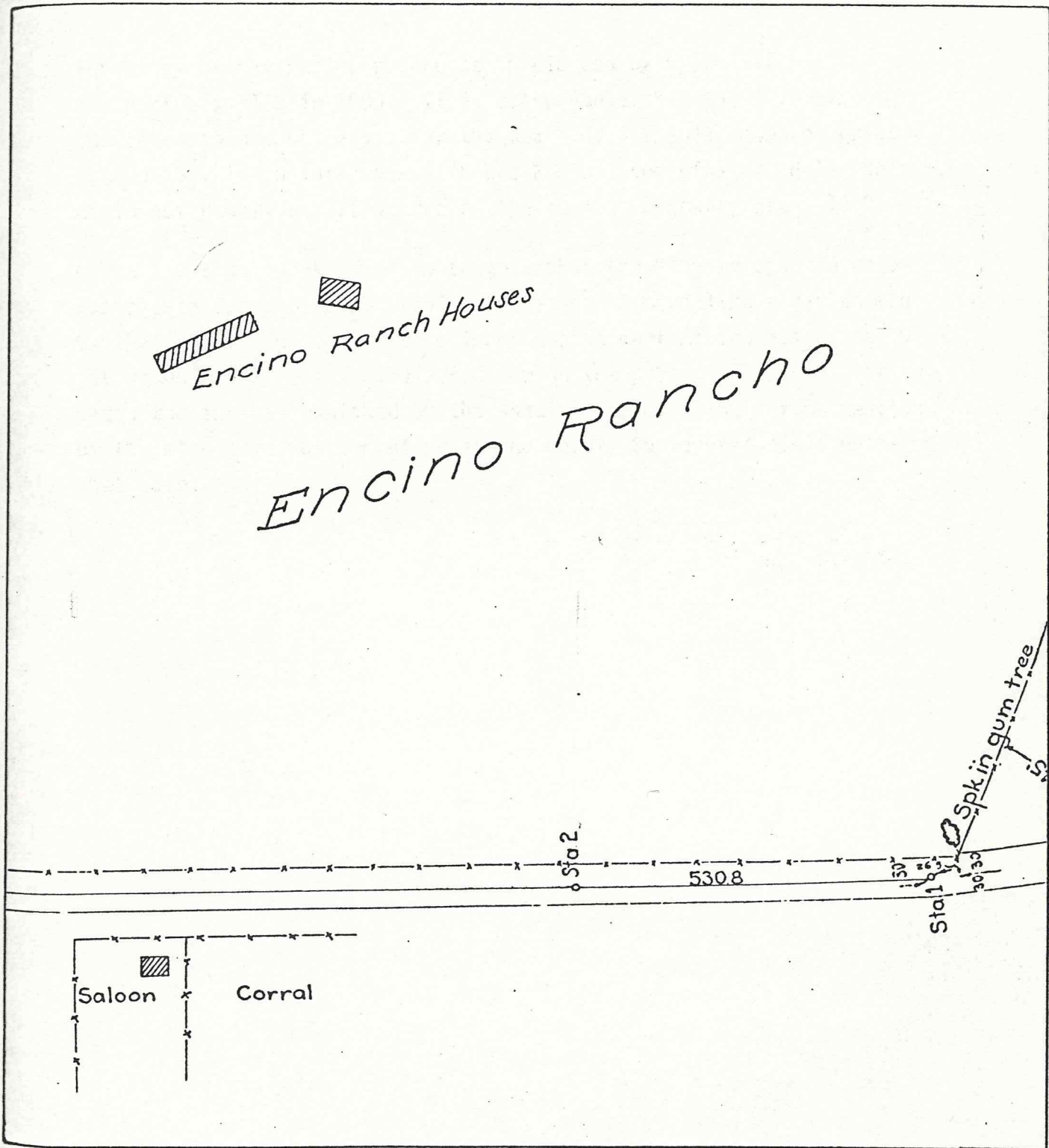


Figure 8. Plan Showing Tavern and Corrals in 1901. Scale 1" = 200'.  
 From Los Angeles County Surveyors, Map No. 3560, sheet 1  
 of 4.

The story of the Encino roadhouse is clouded by speculation after the death of Lassalle in 1905. It is conceivable that the tavern/store continued to do business after the death of its well known proprietor. Sy Amestoy, in an interview with Los Encinos coordinator, Helen Beiner, could not recall any structure on the subject property after 1910.

Marie Stewarts' book seems to suggest that the "inn across the road" was closed for violating prohibition laws. A more likely explanation is that the roadhouse was demolished during earthmoving associated with the widening of Ventura Boulevard during the period 1907-1909. At any rate, the inn had vanished by the subdivision of 1915, for no mention of the structure was contained in the County Surveyors' field notes of that date.