

1
A Fourth of July at
Mission
San Fernando, in 1856.

In 1856 while attending school at the home of Mr Wm. Wolfskill I had the pleasure of being one of a party of school boys who were ~~on~~ with their teachers, invited to spend a week at the San Fernando Mission as the guests of Gen. Andres Pico, who then occupied the mission as a home. Our teacher Mr H. D. Barrows, and Mr McKee who taught the only Public School then in Los Angeles were invited with a few of the older boys. Mr McKee's school was on Spring and Second Sts the old historic ^{brick} first Public School building. It was used for many years with many additions as a grade school. Mr McKee took 6 of his boys and Mr Barrows took Timothy Wolfskill and me. Don Andres Pico was a

2. bachelor, but maintained a large and well-kept establishment at the old mission ranch for several years. We went out on the 2d of July and on the Fourth we had a rodeo, which was a source of great entertainment to all the boys as we were allowed to take part in it as far as our skill permitted. We were all furnished gentle saddle horses and had great sport helping the ranch vaqueros. San Fernando Mission was then in good condition. It was one of the largest of the Southern missions, and the buildings were on a large scale, and were very imposing. A description of this mission given in Capt. Williamson's report of the R.R. Road Survey, of which he was in charge three years before, is so graphic that I shall give it, as it so thoroughly describes

3. the mission as it appeared to me. The only difference was that his first view was from the north and ours from the south. They had camped late on the previous evening under some fig trees a few miles north of the mission. See page

"Soon after leaving our camp under the fig trees, we found that we were entering a widely extended valley without trees or verdure, and bounded on all sides by distant mountains. On turning the point of a hill, we suddenly came in sight of the mission buildings, which, with its surrounding gardens, stood isolated in the seemingly desert plain, and produced a most beautiful effect.

The gardens were enclosed by walls, but the graceful palms rose above them all, and groves of olive, lemon and orange trees could be seen within. Outside the walls the surface was barren and gravelly, and the fertility within is the result of irrigation. The buildings present an imposing appearance, having a long portico formed by a colonnade built of brick or adobe and plastered and white washed. The floor is paved with tiles, and a

4. pleasant promenade in front of the edifice is thus afforded. The remains of a large fountain was directly in front of the main entrance, and gave evidence of the splendor of the establishment in former days. The grape is cultivated here, and we purchased a quantity of a very pleasant red wine similar to claret. Several men were employed in filling a large still with the fermented pulp and skins of grapes from which the juice had been pressed, with the intention of distilling brandy from it."

The buildings constituted a large rectangle facing west, forming a patio, or court in the center or inclosure. The church, the dimensions of which, were approximately 180 by 35 ft, with a height of fifty feet, was situated at the north side of the patio, and connected with the convento or house of the padres on the south by a long row of work-shops.

5, This colonnade was some 300 ft long
and besides the work shops there
were granaries, ^{store houses} and the old mill for
grinding the flour. This formed the east
side of the rectangle; the convento
forming the south side. This south
side of the building is the ruin still
standing. In the patio were still
to be seen the large cauldrons set
in masonry which had been used for
trying out tallow in the mission days.
The tan vats for curing hides were
here also, as well as the old
fountain which was set in a pool
of constructed of masonry. The foun-
tain was the gathering place of
the pigeons of the ranch and many
wild birds during the hot summer days.
Our rooms were the guest rooms of
the convento or monastery, and we had
the full benefit of the early

6.
matin songs of the wild birds. A cheerful awakening for a long busy day on the open range with the vaqueros who were rounding up the cattle. The archards and vineyards of the mission including the gardens must have comprised close to one hundred acres. In fact 176 acres were confirmed to the church by the U. S. Land Commission as mission property, and given back by the government during Lincoln's administration. Gen Pico used the buildings as a residence and maintained a large stock ranch on what had been mission lands before secularization. He lived in a luxurious style, and had a large household of trained servants, mostly Indians. Like the grande that he

7. was, he entertained lavishly. His silver and china table service made a brilliant display. His household furnishings were plain, but massive and luxurions. The plain old mission furniture was retained, but many an expensive and more ornate piece had been added. His table afforded an ample style of living. The dinners consisted of 3- to 6 course, all of the famed California-Spanish cooking, which no nation - not even the French have ever excelled. Two young Indian boys served as waiters. They were clad in the simple white tunic of the day. Before the meal began, one of them stood by the host Don Andres at the head of the table, and said

8. grace. At the close of the meal
the other one took his place and
returned thanks. At the midday
and evening meals, and on the
veranda in the evening, we were
delightfully entertained by native
musicians, who played on the three
stringed instruments then mostly
in vogue - the harp, violin and
guitar. They played the dreamy old
Spanish airs, and this was to
me the most enjoyable feature of
the day, which with the long rides
after the stock on ~~to~~ a spirited horse
was in itself all that the heart of
a western boy could desire. After
the noon dinner, all work was
suspended for the customary 2 hour
siesta; when the cool rooms of the
thick-walled adobe made a

9. refreshing change from the
July sunshine of the open plains.
and a very welcome interval, a
after a strenuous morning's work,
for we were all out on the
range before the sun was well
over the Tejuanga peaks. One
of the most beautiful sunrises
I ever saw. was over these same
peaks. We were out unusually
early that particular morning,
to get a certain bunch of cattle
that were ranging off at some
distance. Ramon, the head vaquero,
had located them the day before,
and had planned for an early
drive on account of the heat.
We boys were sure not to miss

10,

an early adventure like that,
so we were all up, mounted,
and out on the plains before it
was light. We had our bunch
headed for the corral, by the time
you could see to drive, and
were riding toward the east by
the time the sun was putting
out the stars. The rugged peaks
of the Sierra Tejuca slowly emerged
from the shadow of night, tinted
rose and purple; and as the stars
faded from sight, a bank of cloud
behind them turned to rose, then to
gold, and the whole plain and ~~the~~
^{the} mission buildings just coming into
view, were flooded with a transparent
golden light.

San Fernando mission was said to
have one of the largest of the

11,
stock rankest of the south as well
as the tallest palm trees in cultivation
in the state. Also besides the fame of ^{made} #
its orchards and the grove of sweet ^{little}
-scented acacias and locust trees, were ^{change}
a distinctive feature. This was in the ^{and}
arroyos between the orchards and ^{here}
the mission grounds. Don Jose
Maria Romero who was a very old
man when I knew him, was major
domo at San Fernando during the
mission period, when this mission
was at the zenith of its prosperity.
He has told me much of its
extensive commerce in hides and
tallow when the old mats and
candelions were in active use.
He said that much of the meat
from the animals butchered for
the hides and tallow was dried
and having more than could be

12.
used by the Indians and for
the mission was sold. They had
the reputation of turning out a
very superior quality of carne
seca (dried meat) the mission
stock in that day pastured
not only upon the whole
valley of San Fernando, but
on the San Francisco as well.
This was over the mountain in
the Santa Clara valley. They
also cultivated a large acreage
in grain. Don Jose Maria always
spoke with pride of the horses
of San Fernando, which he said
had the best saddle horses
of any ranch he knew. Whether
some of the old stock was left
during Don Andres Pico's time I do

13, not know, but he had many fine ones. What ever may be the doubts as to the Pico title to the mission lands I cannot say, but the General took good care of the building and the orchards during his occupancy, and he surely knew how to entertain his friends, and the boys committed to their tutelage.