

History of Leona Valley

By William J. Sutton

Written in

41965-

The original name of our town was Leonis Valley, named after Miguel Leonis. He was a colorful Basque sheep and cattle raiser who claimed land from Leonis Valley to Calabasses. After his death in the 1900, his land was sold by court order. Among the buyers were Nichol Rouf, Manuel Andrade, Fred Godde, and Mr. Gortino, Leonis son-in-law. In 1913, Gortino sold his St. Anthony Ranch of 3000 acres to Frank Hall. 1915 saw 10 families residing in the valley. They were the Caseras, Boufs, Ritters, Eichenhoffers, Andrades, Wilsons, Squires, Youngs, and Halls.

1922 brought the first major change when Frank Hall put almost all of his 3000 acres in the hands of Phillips and Hambaugh Realty Corporation for subdividing. Phillips is the well known M. Penn Phillips, recent developer of Hesperia and many other projects in Southern California. The original gate of St. Anthony Ranch stood at what is now the intersection of 90th Street and Elizabeth Lake Road, but with the subdivision, the ranch shrunk to the present location at the south end of 90th Street and is now owned by Burney Starksen.

The present water system had its start with the subdivision putting in nine miles of pipe and a 43,000 gallon tank at the south end of Almond Lane, now known as 98th Street.

Springs were the sole source of water, and around 1931 there were about 15 users on the system.

Many years of hard work were put in by many people to keep the water flowing over the years. 1946 brought about

reorganization into a mutual water company. Alfred Johnson was one of the mainstays of the company for many years until a few years ago, the mutual was sold to the Antelope Valley Company. Since that time many improvements have been made.

1924 saw the start of the Leona Store which until this year was the only one closer than Quartz Hill or Palmdale. Mr. and Mrs. Nolenberger built it, but unfortunately, that same Christmas while playing Santa for the young ones at our school, his costume caught fire and he died from burns.

Mrs. Nolenberger ran it for several years and after changing hands a few times, Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Schwartz bought it in 1937. They ran it until 1952 when they sold to the present owner, Norma Kish.

The 4-H was started in 1944 by Mrs. Kline "Kate" Billet. Kate is the daughter of Fred Godde and lived for many years at the old Godde Ranch house. This is now owned by Mr. and Mrs. John Willis. At present, Mrs. Don Rackett is in

charge of Leona Valley 4-H.

The Leona Valley Women's Club had its start in 1934 as a mother's group to assist the needs of the school. Over the years, they sponsored youth activities, social events, and have been of great help to the entire valley.

The Leona School was started in 1879 at the summit of Bouquet Canyon. It was later moved to its present location on land donated by Fred Godde at Bouquet Canyon and Elizabeth Lake Road. At present, it only holds kindergarten and first grade and these on split schedule. In the early years it had eight grades with around thirty students. We look forward to the opening of the new school this next fall, but we can't help but join our longtime teacher, Alice Ford, in looking back with misty eyes at the closing of our little one room school house.

In talking over with longtime residents the writing of this article, many interesting facts, and tidbits have come forth about our beautiful valley in the early days. In the early thirties all roads were dirt.

Amargosa Creek ran water all year and there were two lakes in the valley, one at the west end of Northside Drive, and the other just west of the new school site on Leona Avenue. Both of these were good duck hunting areas. As the original subdividers pamphlet stated: "Leona Valley - The Land of Unwatered Fruits", so it was then. The grass at 90th Street and Leona got so high it hid a Shandler Touring car from view, with the top up!

"A source of fun for the kids in the late twenties and early thirties were the numerous water falls in the creek coming into Lost Valley from the west..

A source of fun for the kids in the late twenties and early thirties were the numerous water falls in the creek coming into Lost Valley from the west, as Ken Spangenberg remembers, such fun for all when they could sneak away.

About 1920 Susan and George Alston bought the Squires ranch but left a year later. Her father held on to the ranch for many years, except once when it was bought by two bootleggers during prohibition. After the still blew up and wrecked the cellar and they didn't make payments, he reclaimed the place, Mrs. Alston returned to it in 1947 after her husband's death. She still resides on the property and operates a Real Estate office at 90th Street and Elizabeth Lake Road.

The Eichenhoffer ranch still stands and is now the home of Ewell and Evelyn Moffett. Chris and Fritz Eichenhoffer have stayed on in the valley and now their sister has moved to Leona Valley.

The old Ritter Ranchhouse is now occupied by Mr. and Mrs. B.

W. Messier, and still has the old winery equipment on the grounds. Wine from this ranch was sold world wide up until Prohibition. Much of the equipment was smashed by Federal Agents in the twenties.

In 1940 a former Basque sheepherder bought the old Raugh place on Bouquet Canyon Road and began raising sheep and cattle. His herds grew, and now Juan Arrache is the successful owner of Antelope Valley Cattle and Milling Company in addition to grazing many heads of sheep and cattle from Mojave north to Mono Lake and into Nevada.

In 1949, the residents of Leona Valley founded the Leona Valley Improvement Association to promote the valley, its welfare and interests. It is the civic voice of the town and has been the main force in getting major improvements in the valley.

Among these the widening of Godde Pass, paving of roads, installation of street signs and fire hydrants, post office and phone improvements.

The Association owns a community building and furnishings which is used by all the clubs in the town for a meeting place and all social activities.

A few years back, an annual barbecue was held to honor old timers and raise funds to purchase and build the community building on a site donated by the Ritter brothers.

In 1948, Mr. and Mrs. Ross (a county welfare worker from

Newhall) started a Sunday School in the school house with 25 pupils. Since then others have taken over and continued on the Sunday School until 1955 when regular church services were started also.

1956 saw the church move to the community building and be incorporated into the Community Church of Leona Valley under the guidance of Ralph Thacker.

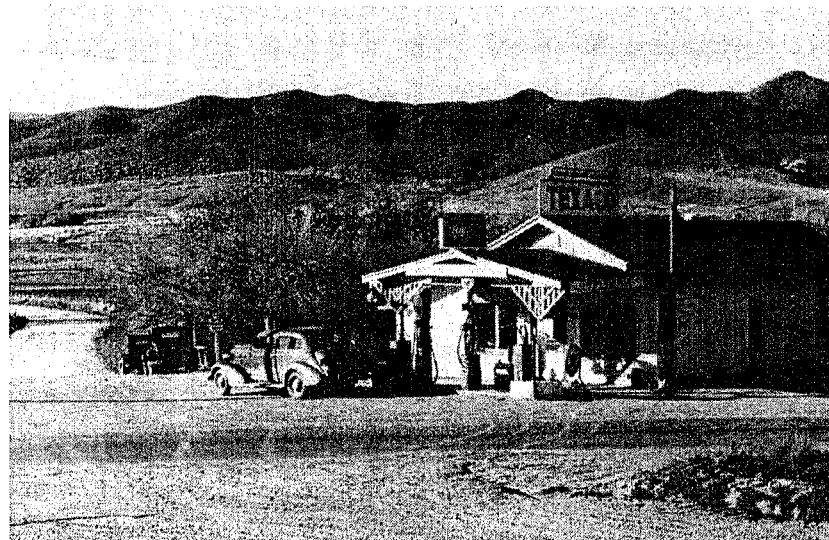
Reverend Milton Rutledge was pastor from 1958 to 1963 and the Church became affiliated with the Baptist General Conference. 1963 saw the present Reverend Ewald Eisele take over and under his guidance a beautiful new church has been built on land donated by the Johnsons on Leona Avenue.

1941 saw electricity reach the Valley and in 1946 the first telephone was installed. The water company records show 14 families were connected to the water system in 1946 plus several with their own wells.

There are now 200 families now living in the town with the population around the 1000 mark. Businesses in the town now include in addition to Alston Realty and the Leona Store: the Leona Valley Garage, Leona Valley Coffee Shop, Anita's Arts Crafts, Cody's Liquor and Delicatessen. Hermie's Beauty Shop, Thompson's Optical Laboratory, and the latest business-- Sale and Holloway's new branch office. Our Post Office is handling more mail every day, especially since the merging of the two separate delivery routes into one with our own Leona Valley address.

Of our town's residents, we have a few speculators, but most are content with the steady growth and since many drive miles to work each day it proves we live here by choice not necessity.

We look forward to continued improvements and growth and desire to maintain the rural, agricultural atmosphere.



This photo, taken in 1937, is the corner of 90th and Elizabeth Lake Road looking south. The Texaco Station is now our feed store. Thanks to Milt Stark

News from the past ...

-Los Angeles Daily Times, Saturday, November 22, 1884

Last week a hunter by the name of Cummings killed an eagle in the mountain back of Elizabeth Lake which measured six feet from tip to tip and weighed 15 pounds. It was in the act of swallowing a dead rabbit.

History of Leona Valley

Published by Leona Valley
Improvement Association

~1974~

L Bona Valley is located in the Antelope Valley, bound to the west by the Pitchfork Ranch at San Francisquito Canyon and to the east by 25th Street West. It extends to the summit of Bouquet Canyon to the south and reaches to the top of Portal Ridge to the north. The rural atmosphere, including fresh air, four seasons, a place to raise animals and open country for riding and hiking, has encouraged settlement of this beautiful valley. Many recreational areas are close by and all the attractions of a metropolitan area are available within easy driving distance.

The first people to live here were the Kitanemuk Indians, a branch of the Shoshone or Serrano tribe. Although the Indians no longer live in the Valley, artifacts such as arrowheads, flints or stone metates may still be found in the area.

Spanish explorers were the first white men to visit the Valley. In 1776, Father Garces and Pedro Fages, the first governor of Alta, California, traveled up San Francisquito Canyon and camped at Elizabeth Lake. Later, Spanish soldiers traveled all through the valley area in search of Indian deserters from the San

Fernando Mission. Before 1800, Stephano Lopez loaded his carretas at San Pedro with foods for the San Fernando Mission and ranches beyond. His route led through the San Fernando Pass, by Elizabeth Lake and through Tejon Pass to the lower San Joaquin Valley.

The period of the cattlemen was one of the most picturesque. In the 1840's Francisco (Chico) Lopez, who was the first discoverer of gold in California, owned a sheep and cattle ranch seven miles south of Elizabeth Lake and his cattle roamed all over Leona Valley and the Antelope Valley as far as Randsburg. Another infamous character was Miguel Leon is, "King of the Calabasas", for whom this valley was named. He acquired large acreage in this area and his sheep and cattle were grazing from Calabasas through Leona Valley.

In the 1870's and 1880's the settlers began to arrive and take up homesteads. Most of them were German. The four Godde Brothers settled in Quartz Hill, but owned property in Leona Valley.

John E. Ritter and his wife, who were both born in Germany, homesteaded 160 acres, where thirteen children were born to them. When they grew up, the boys formed a corporation with diversified interests; there was wheat, cattle, hay, bees, grapes and wine from the old stone winery. When the ranch was sold in 1957, it had grown to 12,000 acres.

Christian August Eichenhoffer, with his wife, Anna Pauline and their seven children arrived from Germany in 1907. At

first they lived with Christian's brother in a frame dwelling. In 1909 they built a two story white house, a replica of their home in Germany. The place is now known as the Moffett Ranch.

This was not an easy period for the pioneers. To reach Los Angeles, a day trip, they had to travel by way of San Francisquito Canyon or Soledad Canyon. Bouquet Canyon was not opened until 1905 and Mint Canyon in 1920. The Godde Pass was straight up one side of the mountain and down the other. A visit to the doctor in Lancaster was a long hard day's journey with a horse and wagon.

The first Leona Valley school opened in 1879 with thirty-five pupils, eight grades and one teacher. The small building was almost exactly one and one-quarter miles south of Bouquet Canyon - Elizabeth Lake Road corner. There was also a second school about a half mile south of this same corner. On March 5, 1895, the Leonis School District was formed. In 1903 or 1904, Fred Godde donated an acre of land at the corner of Elizabeth Lake and Bouquet Canyon Roads and residents gathered to erect a new school house. In 1915, a larger school was needed and again in 1938 population growth demanded a new building which was still a one room structure, but boasted indoor restrooms.

In 1948, the Leonis District unified with Westside Union School District which is still the local school district. In 1965, population growth forced the closing of the sixth and last one-room school in Leona Valley. The

local elementary school is now located at 9063 Leona Avenue and, since the 1971 -72 school year, has Kindergarten through fifth grade, with a teacher for each grade. Sixth, seventh, and eighth graders bus to Palmdale to attend Joe Walker Junior High School which opened in February, 1972. High school students attend Quartz Hill High School.

The schools were the center of the community and were used for all social gatherings. During warm weather, the children would swim or wade in the Amargosa Creek near the school. There really used to be water in that dry gulch that winds along south of Elizabeth Lake Road, and even in the late 30's there were still many places where a small dam could be built to make a swimming hole. In the winter there was a pond east of the Ritter Park Sportsman's Club which froze over and could be used for ice skating.

In 1900 Miguel Leonis was killed in an accident and his property was sold by court order. At this time, a number of new ranchers moved into the valley. Among them was Mary Gortino, the daughter of Leonis, and her husband, who built up the St. Anthony Ranch. A small chapel on the ranch was the only church for many miles around and priests would come from Tehachapi, Los Angeles, Ventura or Santa Barbara to read Mass. Marriages and baptisms waited upon their arrival. In 1913, the ranch was sold to Frank D. Hall, later to Arnold Munz, then the Ritter brothers, followed by Burney Starksens and is now owned by the Fred Harlans.

When Frank D. Hall bought the St. Anthony Ranch, he also purchased much of Leona Valley, the aggregate comprising 3,000 acres. After an unsuccessful attempt at dairy farming, he subdivided his property. The venture did not turn out to be a complete success either. It was at this time that the name of the valley was changed from Leonis to Leona. His land

The Leona Valley Mutual Water Company was formed when Phillips and Hambaugh started the subdivision in 1924. They put in nine miles of pipe line, a 43,000 gallon storage tank, and obtained the water from three springs. Later, during the 1930's when the land was in litigation, the water situation was precarious and many

and the other was the coming of electricity in 1941 and telephone in 1946. The smog and traffic problems "down below" have influenced many people to move here. The population has expanded to over 600 families in 1999, all of which proves that our valley is a most blessed place in which to live.



went into litigation and could not be sold for about seven years.

The Leona Valley store was built in 1924 and has been apart of the community center ever since. For years it was the only store in 12 miles and served the needs of travelers and weekenders.

The Pie Cherry Ranch is a landmark in Leona Valley. It was originally homesteaded in 1912 by Isaac Sharpe and planted in cherries and apples. Mr. and Mrs. Herman Stellar purchased it in 1940 and built it up to a seasons yield of 25, 000 to 30,000 lbs. of cherries in the 1950's and early 1960's.

times the 16 families on the line were without water for 2 or 3 days at a time. In 1946 there was a change of officers and a resident officer was put in charge. Two wells were added in addition to the three springs and a water reserve was built up. In 1954 there were 95 families using the water system. In the late 1950's, the water system was acquired by Wm. Taylor of the A.V. Water Company and in 1965 the company was sold to the Dominguez Water Corp. At present there are over 390 water customers connected to the system.

Two events brought new families to the valley. One was the return of the land to the market



News from the Past ...

As the story goes, "Revenooers" used to sit atop Godde during Prohibition and spy on the Ritter/Messer Winery in hopes of catching them making wine or other outlawed spirits. Of course, any wine that was made was for "religious purposes" only!

In a joint effort of SERTOMA, LVIA, WAVHS, and the LV Town Council, artifacts from the original winery are being collected and preserved for the Winery Museum being built next to the Old Leona Schoolhouse at the Community Center.

If you have an item from Leona Valley's past and wish to donate it to the museum, please contact SERTOMA.

News from the past. . .

Vasquez Still At Large

-from Los Angeles Herald, Saturday, April 18, 1874

Should Vasquez get beyond he Soledad Pass and into the wild country lying back of Elizabeth Lake, where he has made his headquarters for the past year, there will be little prospect of his being caught very speedily; at least not until he again ventures out upon a raid.

Leona Valley, California

by William H. De Witt

Written in
-1989-

he long narrow rift zone that stretches westward from about three miles west of Palmdale almost 35 miles to the vicinity of Gorman was formed by movement along the San Andreas Fault. Portal and Ritter Ridge lie along the northern border of the rift and the San Gabriel Mountain Range is the southern boundary. Natural features have caused distinct settlement patterns and different names to be given to various regions within the rift zone.

The Elizabeth Lake area was probably the first to be settled, most likely in 1854 when Ft. Tejon was being built and traffic to the northern gold fields through San Francisquito Canyon was increasing. John C. Fremont makes no mention in his journal of any settlement when he explored the area in 1844 and there was no one living there in 1849 when William Manly and John Rogers came through on their way to rescue emigrants stranded in Death Valley. Passengers on the first Butterfield Overland Stage in 1858 noted a small settlement at Elizabeth Lake. Several large ranches were developed and operated well into the 1950s; Frakes, Heffner, Kellogg, and Munz were some of the early ranchers. A school district was formed and for many years there was an Elizabeth Lake Post Office.

Most of the area is now residential or recreational.

Elizabeth Lake is a sag pond on the San Andreas Fault and has no outlet. The basin formed by this interior drainage area is rather small and limited on the east and west by uplifted divides. The western divide is about where old Munz ranch house stands and the eastern divide is approximately a quarter mile east of the intersection of San Francisquito Canyon Rd. and southern boundary is the crest of the San Gabriel Mountains. The Elizabeth Lake drainage basin almost exactly defines the area that has been considered, for at least the last one hundred years, as "Elizabeth Lake".

To the west of Elizabeth Lake another community developed around what is now known as Lake Hughes but was, until 1924, called West Elizabeth Lake. This section of the rift zone from the divide near Munz ranch house drains through Elizabeth Lake Canyon to the Castaic area. A few ranchers had settled in the area by the turn of the century, but by about 1920 the area around the lake had developed into a summer resort.

About the same time that the Elizabeth Lake area was being settled, Miguel Leonis was running cattle in the section of the rift zone to the east that very early became known as "Leonis Valley." This is true valley that is drained by Amargosa Creek whose headwaters are a spring a few hundred yards east of San Francisquito Road on the Pitchfork Ranch. At the end of Ritter Ridge at about 25th Street West, Amargosa Creek disappears into

the desert sand. To the west of Godde Pass the crest of Portal Ridge is the northern limit of this drainage and east of the pass the crest of Ritter Ridge is the northern limit. To the south, the crest of Sierra Pelona Mountain defines the drainage and Lincoln Crest is the southern limit of the drainage in Bouquet Canyon.

Numerous large ranches were established in Leonis Valley during the latter half of the nineteenth century and operated well into the 1950's. The Ritter family developed much of the largest ranch, some of the early ranchers were; Andrade, Godde, Eichenhoffer, and Arrache. In the 1920s a large area near 90th Street West was subdivided and the valley was widely promoted as "Leona Valley" this name caught on very quickly and soon replaced the earlier name.

The U.S.G.S. Bouquet Reservoir 15' Topographic Map, compiled in 1959, and the Lancaster Map of the same series show Leona Valley as that section of the San Andreas Rift drained by Amargosa Creek. The western end of the valley is about where San Francisquito Rd. and Elizabeth Lake Rd. intersect, and the eastern end about six miles west of Palmdale where the valley becomes quite narrow.

James Evans, in his 1966 study of San Andreas Fault, defines Leona Valley as starting "three miles west of Palmdale," *Geology: Field Guide to Southern California*, by Robert Sharp has Leona Valley starting just a little west of the Antelope Valley Freeway. A Sunset Book on the San Andreas Fault, *Earthquake*

Country by Robert Iacopi, both describes and maps Leona Valley as extending from about San Francisquito Rd. to about three miles west of Palmdale.

In a very detailed study of the entire Mojave Desert made in 1929. David G. Thompson describes Leona Valley as follows: *Amargosa Creek, which drains Leonis Valley, is a perennial stream, but no data are available in regard to its discharge. Its drainage basin, of about forty square miles, differs considerably from those of any of the other perennial streams, and the flow of the creek is probably affected accordingly. The highest point in the basin is more than 5000 feet above sea level. An even earlier study of the area made by David G. Thompson, in 1921 contains a map based on a survey made in 1917-1920 showing Leonis Valley extending from about the intersection of San Francisquito Canyon Rd. and Elizabeth Lake Rd. to near where the California Aqueduct now crosses the valley.*