



DON ANTONIO MARIA LUGO

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(Portrait by B. Pelcher)

FOLLOWING the mission period in California history comes the "days of the dons," a romantic time of vast cattle herds, expert horsemen riding on silver saddles, beautiful señoritas generous hospitality, and huge land grants. One of the most capable at acquiring land grants in those days was Antonio Maria Lugo.

Although his elder brothers were born in Spain, Lugo was a native Californian; his birthplace, in 1775, was the Mission San Antonio de Padua. He was a soldier until his retirement in 1809 and in the following year received his first grant of land, Rancho San Antonio, located near the present site of Compton. He went on to become one of the most prominent and wealthy men of California despite the fact he had no formal education and could neither read nor write. Like many California families of the time, he fathered a large number of children, ten by his first wife and several by his second.

Lugo served in several political offices such as alcalde (mayor) of Los Angeles, juez del campo (judge of the plains) and a term on the ayuntamiento (council). Besides the influence derived from these offices and his great wealth, he put to good advantage his family ties, and that included just about every prominent family in California. This influence aided Lugo in securing the Rancho San Bernardino for his sons against the petition of two members of the Pico Family, formidable opponents for such a prize.

Land grants to individuals were restricted to eleven square leagues, or about 48,000 acres, but the size could be greatly increased, under Mexican law, if other families could be induced to settle on the property. The Lugos therefore proposed to establish a colony in the San Bernardino and Yucaipa valleys, and a petition containing the names of twenty-seven persons applying for land within the colony was submitted to the Governor. In 1839, the Governor issued the permit allowing the plan to proceed. The permit was issued to Antonio Maria's son, Jose del Carmen Lugo, who then exerted himself to make the colony a success. Joined by two of his brothers, the younger Lugo built an adobe house (located where the courthouse now stands) and brought four thousand head of cattle to the valley.

Land in the valley was parceled out among the colonists, but times were tough and the colony failed. Raids on the colonists' stock by Indians and Americans played the major role in this failure. The Lugo brothers and their cousin, Diego Sepulveda, decided to stay after all the other colonists except the Bermudez family had given up and left the valley. In 1842, the valley was changed from colony to Rancho. Out of a total of 18 leagues which comprised the San Bernardino and Yucaipa Valleys, the Lugos were to select eight leagues as their private property (about 35,000 acres) and the rest they could use for grazing.

Two more adobe houses were constructed, one near Bunker Hill and the other in Yucaipa, and the asistencia buildings, built under supervision of missionaries from San Gabriel in the early 1830's, were repaired. These buildings served only as outposts of the Lugo empire, however, as the brothers continued to look out for the family interests throughout southern California. Several incidents which occurred over the next few years must have been discouraging to the Lugos, and probably influenced their decision to sell the rancho in 1851.

One incident occurred in September 1846, during the Mexican-American War. There were

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