

GRAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT AGUA MANSA

By ARDA M. HAENSZEL

(Photos by the author)



Unmarked grave of Louis Robidoux lies under the pepper tree.

HISTORIANS have recently posed some intriguing questions concerning the burials in Agua Mansa Cemetery. Since the original chapel was on a terrace below and at the north end of the cemetery, why are the oldest burials at the south end so far from the church? Graves are usually close to it. Were the earliest burials placed at the south end of the graveyard in order to be nearer to the homes of the families? Was there once an earlier graveyard, down next to the chapel, that was used from 1852, when it was completed, until the great flood of 1862? At

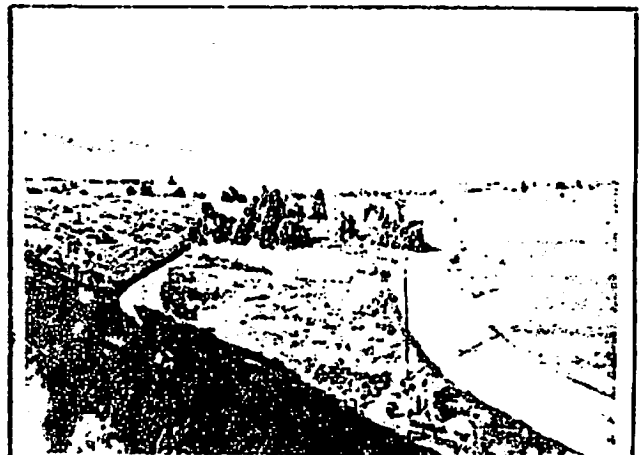
that time the water came just to the steps of the chapel. Was the graveyard moved to still higher ground then?

The earliest known burial upon the hill, dating back to the late 1860's, is that of Louis Robidoux, and since the marker disappeared long ago, the site was found only after considerable research. Robidoux, member of a family prominent in the frontier history of Missouri and New Mexico, acquired considerable means by hunting and trapping. He came to California in 1844 and bought the Jurupa Rancho near present Riverside. A progressive rancher, he put up fences and started raising grain, also building, in the 1840's the first grist mill in southern California. The site of this mill a registered State Historical Landmark, is marked by a monument containing one of the mill stones. In 1855 he served as Chairman of the first Board of Supervisors for the newly-formed county of San Bernardino. At his death in 1867, he was buried in Agua Mansa Cemetery, where also rest some members of his family.

Another early interment was that of Cornelius Jensen, a Dane who first visited California as a sea captain. Then, in 1854, after a short period in the gold country, he came south and opened a store at Agua Mansa. This was located on the high ground near the church and, with it, escaped the disastrous flood which wiped out the rest of the community. He married Mercedes Alvarado of Agua Mansa, and later bought a part interest in the Robidoux ranch. He died in 1886 and was buried in the cemetery, where his wife also rests, along with other members of her family. A stone monument marks the plot.

A real mystery, however, is the resting place of Lorenzo Trujillo, wise and beloved patriarch of the little colony of New Mexicans. The chapel at Agua Mansa was completed in 1852, and the graveyard was presumable opened then, for the official list of interments in this area kept by the Catholic Church begins in that year. Trujillo was buried at Agua Mansa in 1855. To indicate the love and respect in which he was held, a series of rock mounds, topped by a small cross, were erected along the route of the funeral cortege at points where the bearers of his body had rested. One would expect a stone monument at his grave. Perhaps it was stolen, as were so many

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Overall view of cemetery as seen from the north edge.