

Dry Years of 1862-65 Changed O.C. Life

■ **Drought:** It brought financial ruin to many and led to the breakup of the great ranchos, changing the landscape.

By DAVID REYES
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The killer drought arrived after two years of rain, striking with the wallop of a lethal blow.

Heavy rains had prompted the area's cattlemen, buoyed with confidence by years of abundant, water-soaked pastures, to overstock their ranches. But two months of dryness were followed by a third, then another, and another.

Soon, Southern California was caught in the middle of what some historians labeled the Great Drought. The year was 1862.

"Hundreds of gaunt, skeleton-like forms moved slowly over the plains in search of food," historian James M. Quinn wrote. "It was a pitiful sight. The loss of cattle during the famine was fearful. The plains were strewn with their carcasses."

The five-year dry spell of the late 1980s and early 1990s may seem like the worst ever, after generating rising water bills, Metropolitan Water District penalties and great media attention. But while it has indeed changed lifestyles and harmed the economy, the impact has been small in contrast with the financial ruin and change in the landscape caused by the drought of 1862-65, considered by historians to be the granddaddy of all California droughts.

And the offspring of that drought remain evident today. The development of Orange County, which grew out of the death of the ranchos of the pre-Civil War era, has a legacy extending almost directly back to 1862.

The 1862 drought "did lead to the breakup of the great ranchos," said William Hendricks, director of Corona del Mar's Sherman Library, which houses an archive. "It helped push many of these ranchos to the wall, and

DROUGHT

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therefore led to them selling off these ranchos [for] farmlands, and then development."

The highly profitable ranch lands dried up with the three-year drought, historians said. Thousands of animals were slaughtered for hides and horns. Cattle that had sold for 6 cents a pound were being skinned for \$2 a hide. Meanwhile, vaqueros from the great ranchos were forced to drive the remaining cattle from the area, then known as the Santa Ana Valley, to Mojave Lake, historians noted.

The California Historical Society Quarterly noted that remaining cattle "faced starvation and were driven over cliffs at San Pedro" as a "merciful solution" to the problem.

Jim Sleeper, an Orange County historian, said that land baron Don Jose Andres Sepulveda, who had acquired the vast Rancho San Joaquin, was devastated by the loss of tens of thousands of cattle.

In 1864, at the height of the drought, Sepulveda sold 50,000 acres of his rancho for \$18,000, roughly 36 cents an acre. Before the drought, land values were assessed at 50 cents an acre but eventually fell to 25 cents as the drought worsened.

One of the four buyers was James Irvine Sr., whose land eventually became part of the Irvine Ranch, where the cities of Laguna Beach, Newport Beach and Corona del Mar now stand.

Don Abel Stearns, another major landowner, sold his Rancho Los Alamitos to a Michael Reese of San Francisco, who held his note for \$20,000 "with interest." That note granted Reese a strip of land about eight miles wide, from the ocean at Seal Beach inland to what is now Cypress.

Droughts are not uncommon

when viewed through the historical looking glass, Sleeper said. For example, Sleeper said that in 1876-77, just a scant 4 inches of rain fell in what was then the Anaheim Colony. In the late 1800s, annual rainfall for the Santa Ana Valley averaged 13 to 14 inches, which would qualify the 1876-77 year as a drought, Sleeper said.

"Anytime you get such a low rainfall figure in Southern California, which is essentially a desert, you get a drought," Sleeper said.

Water experts cite studies finding that California history is laced with five-year droughts. But these experts hesitate when it comes to drought predictions.

"I'm rather skeptical that there is any cycle that is useful for predicting droughts," said Maurice Roos, chief hydrologist for the state Department of Water Resources. "About the only thing we're certain of is that droughts are irregular."

California has had worse droughts in terms of rainfall, Roos said. But in terms of economic loss, the so-called Great Drought was probably most devastating because the early ranchos lacked today's reservoir water storage.

Among that drought's destructive effects:

■ The wheat crop was ruined, and hay became so scarce that it sold for \$60 a ton, several times more than what it was worth before the drought. In the spring of 1864, not one cent of taxes was collected in Los Angeles County, which included the ranchos, because of the drought and foreclosures.

■ Stockmen built huge steam vats along the coast from San Francisco to San Diego. These establishments were called *matanzas*, a Spanish word for a place where cattle were slaughtered. Some of the sheep and cattle that were able to travel were driven to the *matanzas* and slaughtered. Their hides were taken off and

dried for shipment, and the carcasses were thrown into the vats and steamed, reducing them to tallow, which was used in making candles and soap.

■ The Anaheim Colony was an enclave of German winemakers. The colony had built ditches to hold water and protect its wineries. To prevent thirsty cattle from invading the grapevines, the winemakers hired Luis Aguilar, a vaquero, to keep the cattle out for \$60 a month, a handsome sum in those days.

The impact of the drought was not lost on Irvine, who eventually owned Rancho San Joaquin. After buying the failed ranchos at low prices, Irvine and his son, James Irvine Jr., started stringent methods of water conservation, Sleeper said.

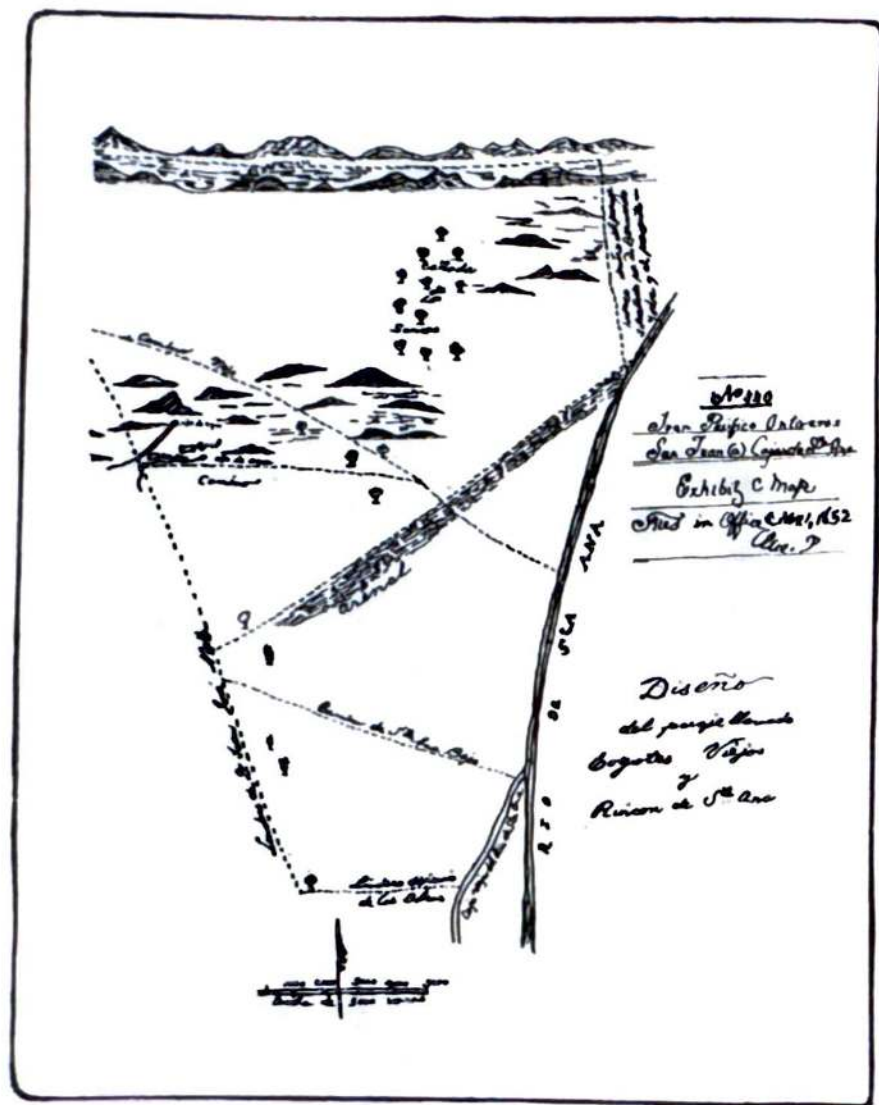
"Everybody said he [Irvine's son] was water crazy because he had crews who, people thought, worked around the clock drilling for water," Sleeper said.

The drought was officially over when a severe flood followed by several years of normal rainfall replenished the water table and produced artesian wells that were Santa Ana's first water source, Sleeper said.

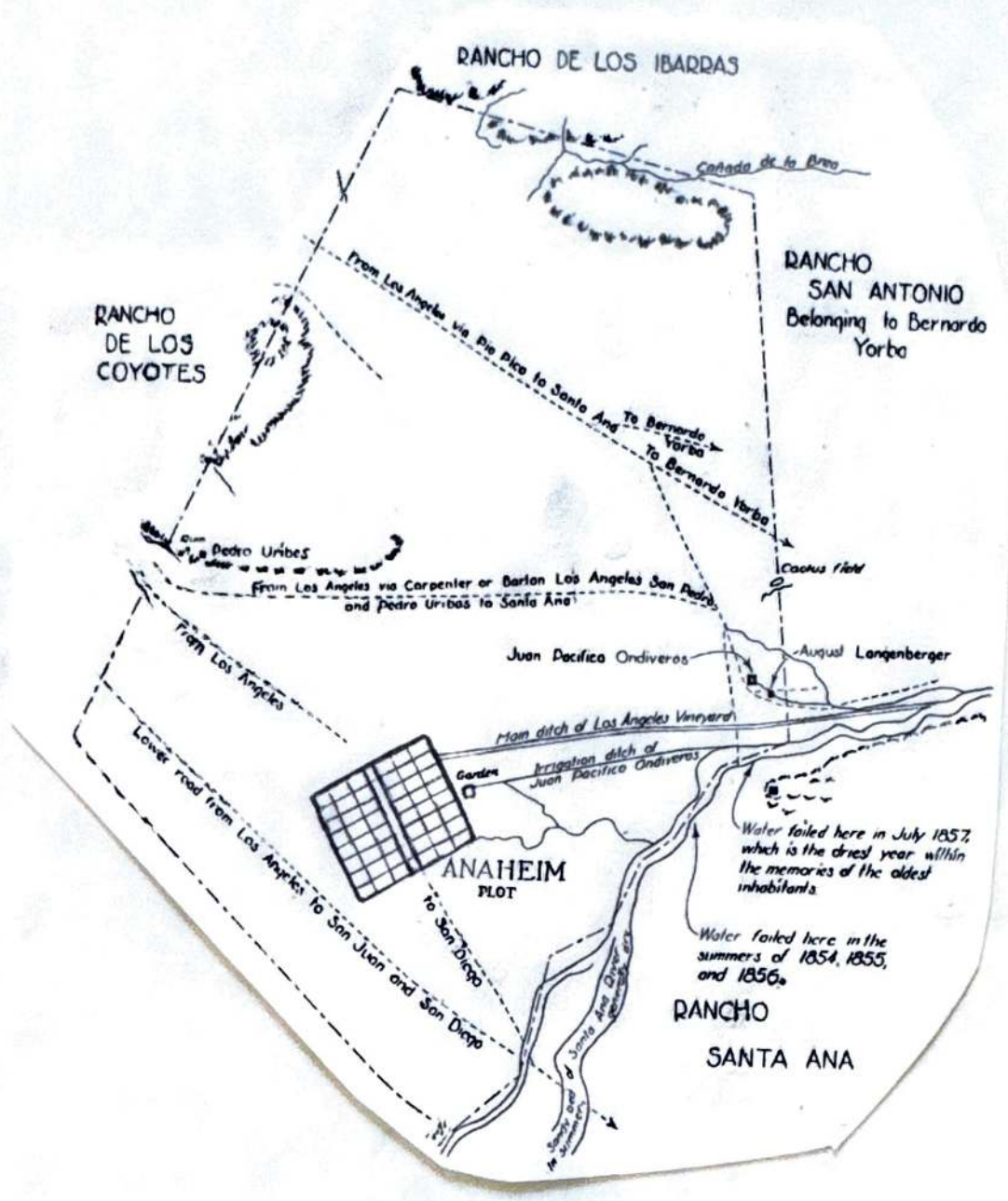
"Our water table in Orange County used to be so high, it used to have artesian springs, and in the old days you could stick a pipe in the ground, and you could get water going through and spilling over the pipe," Sleeper said.

As early as 1910, Irvine's son believed that his ranch could profitably use 1,000 more inches of water from outside sources. Because that was not available, he added more and more wells until he drilled 1,200 wells, spending \$3 million to \$4 million.

Eventually, the Irvine Co., which became the largest landholder in the county, introduced a major program of water conservation and incidental flood control, parts of which are still in use today.



Diseño
 2-L Land... Rancho
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RANCHO DE LOS COYOTES

RANCHO DE LOS IBARRAS

RANCHO SAN ANTONIO
Belonging to Bernardo Yorba

ANAHEIM PLOT

RANCHO SANTA ANA

Water failed here in July 1857, which is the driest year within the memories of the oldest inhabitants.

Water failed here in the summers of 1854, 1855, and 1856.

Pedro Uribe

Juan Pacifico Ondiveros

August Langenberger

From Los Angeles via Carpenter or Barton Los Angeles San Diego and Pedro Uribe to Santa Ana

From Los Angeles

Lower road from Los Angeles to San Juan and San Diego

Main ditch of Los Angeles Vineyard

Irrigation ditch of Juan Pacifico Ondiveros

Garden

Cactus field

Arroyo de Santa Ana

San Juan

San Juan

San Juan

San Juan

San Juan

San Juan

San Juan

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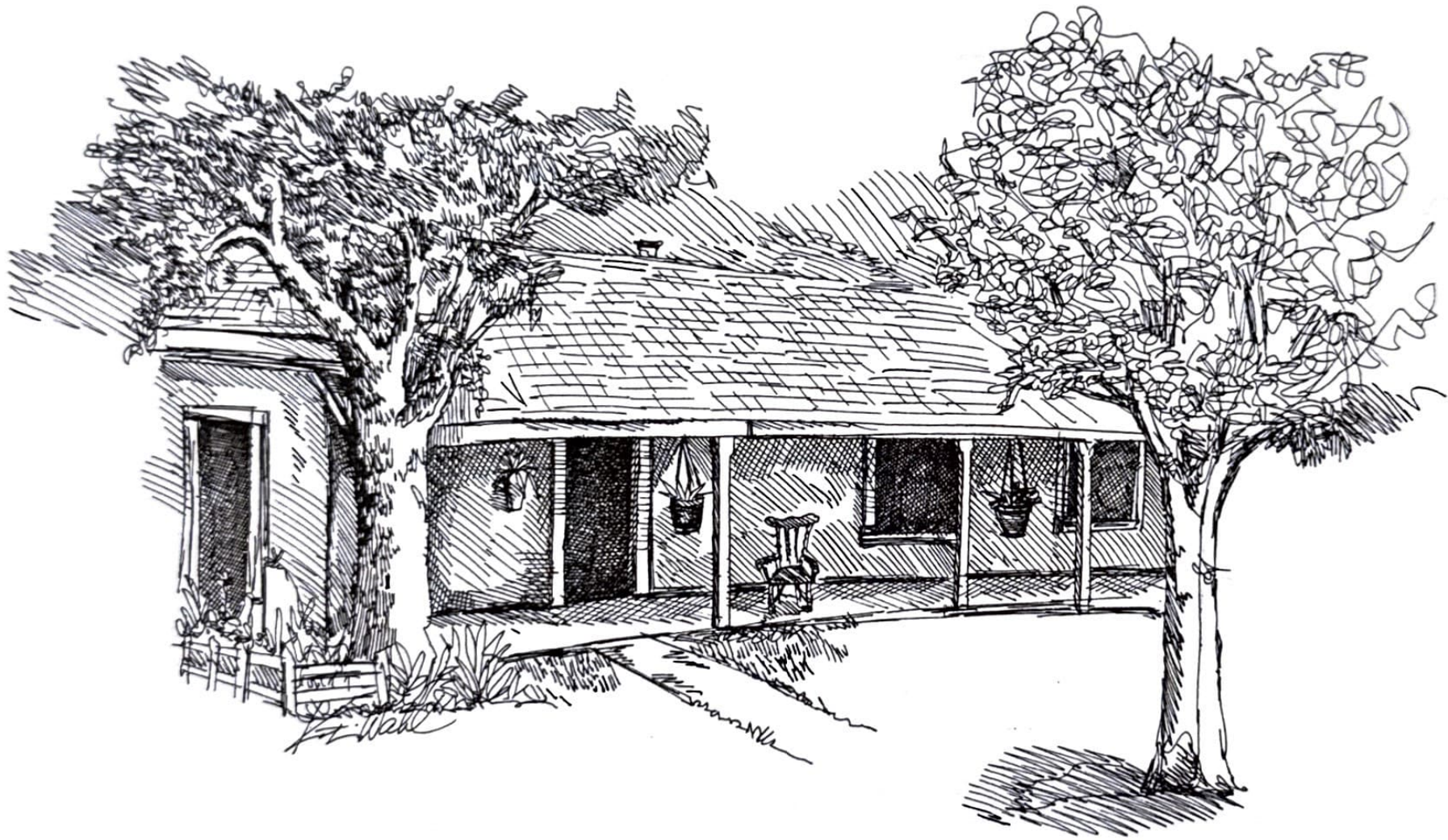
San Juan

San Juan

San Juan

San Juan

San Juan



ONTIVEROS RANCHO TIME-LINE

- Aug. 18, 1781 Jose Antonio Ontiveros and his wife, Ana Maria Carrasco, their 9 year old son, Juan Patricio and 13 year old daughter, Juana de Dios, arrive at San Gabriel Mission with the Rivera Expedition to found Los Angeles.
- Jun. 1, 1794 Patricio married Maria Antonia Rodriguez.
- Sept. 24, 1795 Their son, Juan Pacifico, was born at Los Angeles.
- Nov. 24, 1825 Pacifico married Maria Martina Osuna. They had 13 children.
- 1825-- Patricio, Pacifico and a married sister lived on Rancho Santa Gertrudes, part of the Nieto grant. Patricio worked for Nieto.
- March 8, 1833 Patricio petitioned for Rancho Los Alamitos. Nieto claimed it, but offered another place. Controversy over a spring on that.
- 1834 Patricio died. His son, Pacifico, continued the petition.
- May 18, 1837 Pacifico was granted Rancho San Juan Cajon de Santa Ana, 35,970 acres, by Mexican Governor Juan Alvarado. The boundaries were approximately the Los Angeles County Line to the Santa Ana River and Ball Road to Tustin Ave. It was partly from Rancho Los Coyotes and partly from San Gabriel Mission lands. Pacifico had a house south of the Old Road, probably east of Buena Park.
- 1841 Juan Baptiste Leandry, new owner of Los Coyotes, sued Pacifico over the boundary between their ranchos and won. Pacifico had to move and built an adobe in the present city of Placentia, it was north of the Old Road.
- Jun. 17, 1856 Pacifico buys Rancho Tepusquet in Santa Maria Valley, Santa Barbara County for 350 picked cattle and 30 picked mares. 8,900 acres.
- Sept. 12, 1857 Pacifico sold 1165 acres of San Juan Cajon to Frohling and Hansen.
- 1857 Pacifico moved his family to Rancho Tepusquet. They built Anaheim on it.
- May 22, 1863 Pacifico gave 3900 acres to his sons, Patricio and Juanito. and sold the rest of the rancho to Abel Stearns for \$6,000.
- May 10, 1864 The two sons sold their 3900 acres to Augustus Langenberger for \$3480.
- Apr. 27, 1865 Langenberger and his partner, Benjamin Dreyfus sold the 3900 acres to Daniel Kraemer for \$4600.
- The City of Placentia is on this land, near the Ontiveros adobe.
- Mar. 7, 1877 Pacifico died on Rancho Tepusquet.
- Mar. 6, 1877 Benjamin Kraemer, Jr. died in Placentia, last of original owners.
- 1979 The adobe torn down by new owners of the land.

CATTLE BRANDS OF THE MISSION
AND RANCHO ERAS



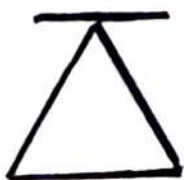
Mission San Gabriel Archangel

Planned to be built near the banks of the Santa Ana, San Gabriel took a brand commemorating the fearful earthquakes Portolá recorded near this "rio de temblores." The entwined S and T stand for this word.



Juan Ontiveros

Two brands are recorded in this name, possibly for Juan Patricio (father) and Juan Pacifico (son).



Brand



Counter Brand

Abel Stearns

Stearns bought many of the southland's largest ranchos, including San Juan Cajón de Santa Ana.