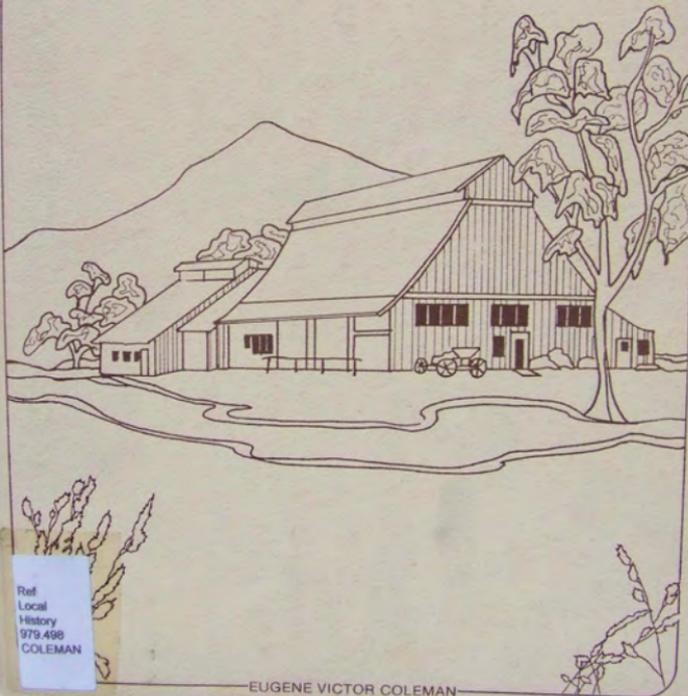


THE URBANIZATION OF THE SWEETWATER VALLEY

SAN DIEGO COUNTY



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Local
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EUGENE VICTOR COLEMAN

*Bonita first 1985
To Shelma Krantz, Grand
body of the Sweetwater Valley
and to dear friend.*

THE URBANIZATION OF THE SWEETWATER VALLEY, *Eugene Coleman*

SAN DIEGO COUNTY

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A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State
University, San Diego

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Geography

by
Eugene Victor Coleman
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All photographs were provided through the courtesy of the Title Insurance and Trust Company, San Diego, California.

FOREWARD

On December 31, 1769, Father Junipero Serra and Gaspar de Portola rode southward from Presidio Hill, bent on inspecting lands which had newly become a part of the Spanish Empire. In camp that night, Father Serra wrote in his diary:

We took a straight cut, leaving on the right the travelled road. And in a little more than an hour we found that besides being a fine pastureland, there ran a beautiful brook of good water, and there we stopped.¹

The lands covered by Father Serra and Portola that day would later be known as Rancho de la Nación, and the stream they found so pleasing would be called Sweetwater River.

When the writer first visited the Sweetwater Valley in 1950, it offered a refreshing change from the urban atmosphere in the rapidly-growing, adjacent cities of Chula Vista and National City. An equestrian-oriented, truly rural life style existed, and well-maintained, custom built homes were widely scattered throughout. Citrus orchards dominated the landscape, and there were no non-agricultural industries and a minimum of commercial establishments present. There was no direct access to the valley from the main north-south highway to the west, U.S. 101 (later changed to Interstate Highway 5), and access from the east was via a winding, rural road from Spring Valley, entering just west of the Sweetwater Dam, placing the valley outside the mainstream of vehicular traffic, a rural enclave on the periphery of an otherwise urbanized area. The gently rolling terraces and valley floor were, however, ideally suited for residential development, and by 1972 pasture lands had been converted to golf courses, and farm roads were covered by pavement which provided streets for the many residential dwelling which had replaced orchards.

A preliminary investigation in 1970 disclosed that little of the historical geography had been compiled, and the present writer gladly accepted the challenge of preparing a descriptive synthesis.



¹Junipero Serra, Diary, 1769. Translation on file in Serra Museum,
San Diego, Ca. (Typewritten.)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of Purpose	
Statement of the Problem	
Selection of Time Frames for the Study	
Methodology	
II. THE STUDY AREA	4
General Location and Description	
Specific Boundaries	
Geomorphology	
Local Relief	
III. CLIMATE, SOILS, VEGETATION AND LOCAL RELIEF	10
Pattern of Climate	
Patterns of Soils	
Patterns of Vegetation	
IV. EL RANCHO DE LA NACION	15
Pattern of Human Culture	
Historical Background	
V. EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF THE VALLEY	19
Early Agriculture	
Transportation	
Water Development	
The Valley and the Land Boom	
Period of Readjustment	
VI. THE QUIET YEARS--1900-1947	35
Introduction	
The Lemon Industry	
The Dairy Industry	
Miscellaneous Agriculture	
Floods	
The Status of the Valley in 1947	

Chapter	Page
VII. URBANIZATION--1948-1972	52
Subdivisions	
Commercialization	
Civic Action Groups	
Piece-Meal Annexations	
Flood Control	
Public Safety	
Schools	
Utilities	
VIII. THE COMMUNITY--1973	68
Census Data	
The People	
Land Use	
IX. SUMMARY	75
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	77
ABSTRACT	84

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Temperature Means and Extremes Bonita, California	12
2. Average Monthly and Annual Precipitation, and Greatest Monthly and Annual Precipitation During Thirty Years of Record (In Inches) Bonita, California.	13

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure		Page
1.	Location of Sweetwater River Valley	5
2.	Sweetwater River Basin	6
3.	Sweetwater River Valley Base Map.	7
4.	Sweetwater Gorge in 1886	26
5.	Sweetwater Dam and NC&O Railway	27
6.	Crew planting citrus orchards on Bonita Ranch of Sweetwater Fruit Company, 1891	30
7.	Sweetwater Fruit Company packing shed, Bonita, California 1900	32
8.	Sweetwater River Valley population growth	36
9.	Original Bonita School, Bonita, California 1900	37
10.	Sweetwater River valley Road and Railway System 1900	38
11.	Mixed farming, Windsor Ranch, Bonita, California, 1915.	43-46
12.	Flood scene, Sweetwater Valley, January 1916.	48
13.	Breach in north abutment of Sweetwater Dam, January 1916.	49
14.	Sweetwater Dam after repairs, January 1918.	50
15.	Sweetwater River Valley Land Use 1948	53
16.	Sweetwater River valley subdivision activity 1946-1968.	55

Figure		Page
17.	Sweetwater River Valley subdivision activity 1946-1968	56
18.	Sweetwater River Valley Land Use 1972.	69

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Purpose

The objective of this study is to produce a synthesizing document of the historical geography of the Sweetwater Valley, San Diego County, California. Emphasis will be placed on sequent occupance during the period 1868 to 1973, with consideration given to the influence of weather and climate on major land use changes occurring during the study period.

Statement of the Problem

The Sweetwater Valley has been found worthy of mention in numerous studies done of the San Diego area, studies encompassing history, anthropology, and geology, performed by members of government bodies, educational institutions, societies, as well as the many performed by individuals. Richard F. Pourade records that the Spanish explorer, Velasquez, traversed the valley late in the 18th Century when using the Sweetwater River corridor in his efforts to find timber and pasturage in the mountains.¹ In his discussion of ghost towns in Southern California, Glenn S. Dumke lists the valley among areas invaded by unscrupulous promoters participating in the land boom of the late nineteenth century.²

In spite of its inclusion in previously published and unpublished works, no definitive study of the historical geography of the Sweetwater Valley has been undertaken as a separate research effort. Valuable and interesting information concerning the valley is being lost in obscurity as death claims early settlers, and documents are lost or inadvertently destroyed. This study, then, will attempt to accumulate, assemble, and sort pertinent facts relative to the development of the Sweetwater Valley during the period 1868 to 1973.

The justification of the study of a microregion such as the

Sweetwater Valley can be found in the typicalness of the situation in the valley to similar areas throughout California wherein unwise, or inadequate planning has resulted in the loss of rich agricultural lands, the loss of potential urban greenbelts, and floodplain development which in turn generates a need for flood control works. Further, a study of this nature offers an observer an opportunity to view the efforts of citizens' groups to influence jurisdictional bodies in matters related to land development, and to view in retrospect the successes and failures of those groups.

Selection of Time Frames for the Study

The process of "Americanizing" Southern California had been in progress for more than two decades before its influence was felt in the Sweetwater Valley. It was in 1868 that the Kimball brothers, Frank, Warren, and Levi, purchased a 26,000 acre tract of land from Francois Ploche, a San Francisco businessman, called Rancho de la Nacion, which included the valley within its boundaries, marking the beginning of a developmental pattern which was to prevail for more than a century.

The early 1970's saw the completion of the first major residential development in the valley, Bonita Glen Subdivision, containing 230 single family dwelling units on 90.87 acres. Grading had begun for other large-scale developments, and the rustic appearance of the Sweetwater Valley had changed to one of rapid urbanization.

Methodology

The material for this paper was collected during two years of investigation. Standard geographic field recording practices were followed in cataloging existing physical and cultural features in the valley. Library research was based mainly on published and unpublished manuscripts, documents, journals, letters, and business records found in the libraries of California State University, San Diego, Southwestern College, city libraries of San Diego, Chula Vista, and National City, as well as in the San Diego Historical Society, the Museum of Natural History, and Serra Museum.

Libraries and records of the following public and private agencies were used: South Bay Irrigation District, University of California Agricultural Extension Service, San Diego County Department of Agriculture,

the Planning Departments of San Diego County and the cities of Chula Vista and National City, Title Insurance and Trust Company, and The Sweetwater Valley Civic Association. Extensive use was made of official maps filed in the office of the San Diego County Recorder.

Guidance and counselling were frequently received through personal interviews with present and former residents of the valley, and interviews with state, county, and local city officials were of immeasurable assistance in the preparation of this paper.

¹Richard F. Pourade, Time of the Bells (San Diego, CA.: Union-Tribune Publishing Co., 1961), p.60.

²Glenn S. Dunke, The Boom of the Eighties in Southern California (San Marino, CA.: Huntington Library, 1970), p.194.

CHAPTER II

THE STUDY AREA

General Location and Description

The Sweetwater River drainage area encompasses about 220 square miles and lies in the western part of San Diego County, approximately fifteen miles north of the United States-Mexican border. The drainage area is bounded on the north by the San Diego River basin, on the east by the Laguna Mountains, on the south by the Otay River basin, and on the west by San Diego Bay. The river rises near Cuyamaca Peak at an elevation of nearly 6,000 feet and flows west-southwest for a distance of about fifty-four miles before discharging into San Diego Bay (Figures 1 and 2). The stream gradient ranges from 850 feet per mile near the headwaters to six feet per mile near the mouth.

At a point approximately eight miles east of San Diego Bay the Sweetwater Dam was constructed to impound the river waters in the Sweetwater Reservoir, and it is that portion of the river valley lying between the dam and Edgemere Avenue, approximately one mile east of San Diego Bay, that was selected for study.

Specific Boundaries

The study area is a part of the Sweetwater Subregion of the San Diego County Planning Department, and encompasses portions of both Chula Vista and National City. The northern boundary is clearly defined by 30th Street in National City, and the South Bay Freeway, California Highway 54. Edgemere Avenue was arbitrarily selected as the western boundary primarily due to the writer's inability to determine precise land use west of that point prior to approximately 1920. The southern boundary is delineated by the highest contour of the slope along the east-west length of the study area within which drainage is directly into the valley. The Sweetwater Dam marks the eastern extent of the study area (Figure 3).

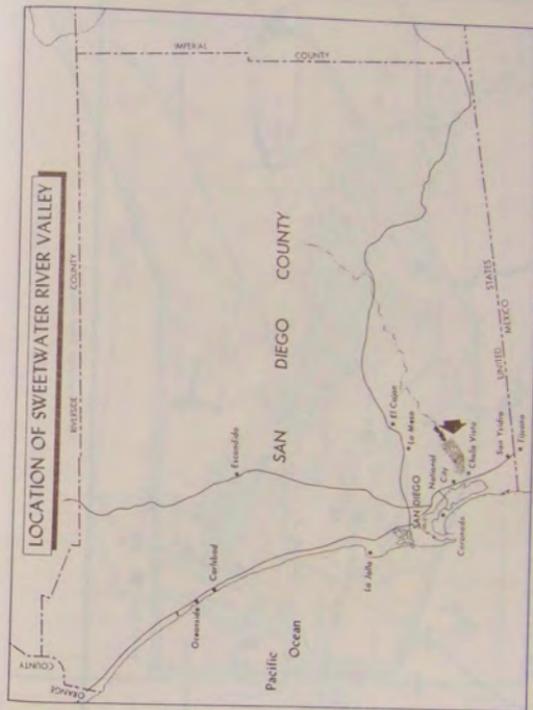


Fig. 1. Location of Sweetwater River Valley

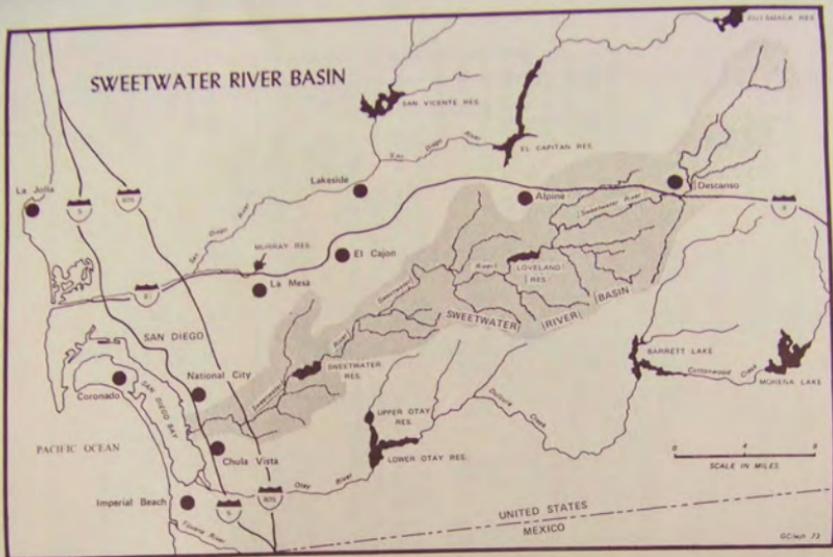


Fig. 2 Sweetwater River Basin

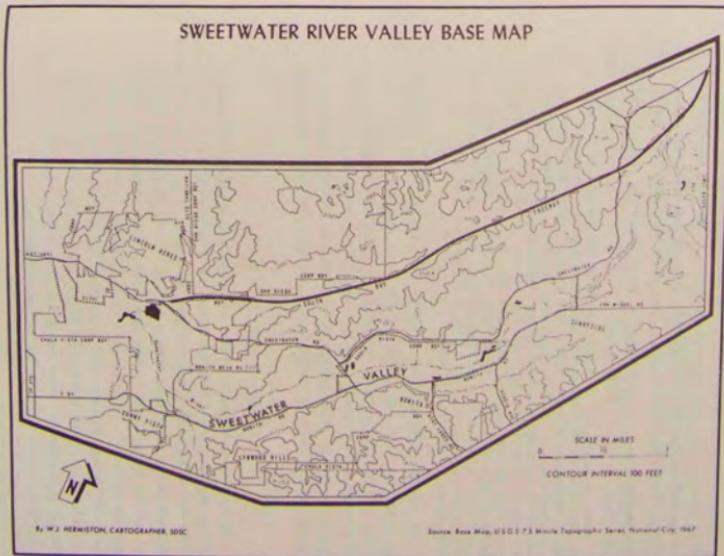


Fig. 3 Sweetwater River Valley Base Map

Geomorphology

The present drainage pattern of the Sweetwater River was formed during early Tertiary time when the high mountains to the east were built and a previously formed peneplain along the coast was partially broken up. The present drainage lines were carved as the stream underwent a period of topographic readjustment. In describing the formation of the coastal valleys of San Diego County Arthur J. Ellis states:

Oscillatory movements, or alternate elevation and depression of the land, characterized the succeeding Quaternary period. During an epoch of depression the west edge of the coastal region was submerged and received deposits of Pleistocene age. During a subsequent epoch of elevation these deposits were lifted high above the sea, and most of the deposits which had been laid down in the larger valleys were carried into the sea again by river erosion. The land was raised probably as much as 200 feet higher than it stands at present, and the principal streams excavated deep valleys. A still later subsidence of the land brought about a refilling of all these channels to the present levels of the valley floors.¹

The Sweetwater Valley shows evidence of having been deeply drowned during the latter period of subsidence, but the river continued to fill its drowned lower course with sediment, and today the floodplain presents a picture of a broad, flat-floored, alluvial surface.² In contrast to neighboring river valleys which are relatively straight in their lower courses, the Sweetwater meanders through the eight miles between the dam and San Diego Bay.

Local Relief

The meandering Sweetwater River Valley follows a general east-west course through the study area, with the elevation of both north and south rims ranging from approximately 400 feet near the dam to about 100 feet at the western end of the study area. There are distinct terraces along the north wall and the contours are rounded and shallow where ravines have been cut through the terraces. The south wall rises in slopes of 20-30 per cent and has been cut through by three small, steep-walled canyons, Long Canyon (Acacia Drive), Short Canyon (Otay Lakes Road), and Rice Canyon, all running from southeast to northwest. There are no terraces on the south wall; however, terrace remnants exist in the vicinity of Bonita.

¹ Arthur J. Ellis and Charles H. Lee, *Geology and Groundwater of the Western Part of San Diego County, California*, U.S. Geological Survey, Water Supply Paper 446 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1919) p.75.

² George F. Carter, *Pleistocene Man at San Diego* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1957), p.73.

CHAPTER III

CLIMATE, SOILS, VEGETATION AND LOCAL RELIEF

Three great patterns dominate the earth and are of tremendous importance to man--the pattern of climate, the pattern of vegetation, and the pattern of soils. When the three patterns are laid one upon another their boundaries coincide to a remarkable degree because climate is the fundamental dynamic force shaping the other two. . . .¹

Pattern of Climate

A description of the climate of the Sweetwater Valley is a relatively simple process, but any explanation has complex nuances and overgeneralization may tend to exaggerate the influence of one or more factors. Of the five major area climates established for the State of California by the University of California Agricultural Extension Service, the Sweetwater Valley is included in Type II, the Coastal area climate, on the boundary of Type I, the Maritime area climate.² The climate of the valley, as in most of San Diego County, is strongly influenced by its proximity to the Pacific Ocean with its semi-permanent pressure systems. Seasonal variations exist primarily because of the displacement of the subtropical anticyclones and migratory cyclones which reach the west coast. The summer northerly migration of the Pacific high pressure system generates winds which parallel the coast, producing little or no precipitation from orographical lifting, resulting in summer dryness.

The pressure system retreats southward during the winter months allowing greater cyclonic activity along the coast, bringing highly variable precipitation with generally increasing intensity from November through March.³ Early summer months in the valley are characterized by the presence of low stratus clouds, the persistence of which prompted one of the early Spanish explorers to refer to them as "el velo de la luz," the veil that hides the light.⁴ Also occurring at times in early summer is a dense nighttime fog which frequently restricts visibility to as little

as twenty-five feet, but which usually dissipates by mid-morning. This fog results from advectional cooling of moist air passing shoreward over a cold coastal current.⁵

From mid-summer into late fall the daytime skies over the valley are generally clear, interrupted only by infrequent convectional thunderstorms which occur when moist air crosses the peninsular range of mountains to the east. The fifty year cumulative annual average precipitation from such storms is less than one third inch.⁶

A weather station has been maintained in the village of Bonita since 1940, and Tables 1 and 2 are compilations from that station.

Patterns of Soils

The soils of the valley exhibit varying characteristics, but, except for isolated pockets of clay adobe and clay loam, they fall into three general groups. They are: (1) unweathered alluvial soils, (2) moderately weathered alluvial soils, and (3) maturely weathered soils.

The unweathered alluvial soils are loose, friable soils found on the floodplain, having been deposited there by floods on the Sweetwater River. Both surface and subsols in this group are loose and porous with a low water-holding capability. When used for agriculture these soils require irrigation during the dry season.⁷ Tests being conducted in the western part of the study area for purposes of flood control channel construction indicate the depths of these soils to be in excess of 200 feet.⁸

The moderately weathered alluvial soils are found on low terraces above the floodplain, and have slightly compact and heavy textured subsols, enhancing their moisture-retention capability. These soils have a depth of six feet or more but their location on lower slopes makes crops grown on them susceptible to frost damage in winter months.⁹

The maturely weathered soils are found on the higher terraces and are very shallow, ranging from eight to sixteen inches in depth. They are underlain by a layer of clay which is nearly impervious to air or water, and when used for agriculture, suitable only for shallow-rooted crops.¹⁰

Patterns of Vegetation

In April 1870, two contrasting reports appeared in the San Diego Weekly Union CONCERNING THE Sweetwater Valley. The first article chronicled

TABLE 1
TEMPERATURE MEANS AND EXTREMES*
BONITA, CALIFORNIA

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Year
Highest	88.0	91.0	93.0	102.0	100.0	101.0	98.0	115.0	106.0	100.0	93.0	91.0	115.0
Mean Maximum	66.3	66.7	68.4	70.8	72.7	74.4	79.1	80.2	80.5	76.8	74.0	69.1	73.3
Mean Temperature	53.2	54.3	56.2	59.7	62.7	65.2	69.4	70.3	69.1	64.3	59.1	55.3	61.6
Mean Minimum	40.0	41.9	44.0	48.6	52.6	56.0	59.6	60.3	57.6	51.8	44.1	41.4	49.8
Lowest	21.0	28.0	30.0	33.0	38.0	43.0	47.0	49.0	39.0	36.0	28.0	24.0	21.0

*University of California Agricultural Extension Service, Climates of San Diego County, Agricultural Relationships, November 1970. Data from 1940 to 1969.

12

TABLE 2
AVERAGE MONTHLY AND ANNUAL PRECIPITATION, AND GREATEST MONTHLY AND ANNUAL PRECIPITATION DURING THIRTY YEARS OF RECORD* (IN INCHES)
BONITA, CALIFORNIA

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Year
Average	2.13	2.26	1.76	.89	.29	.06	.01	.08	.16	.50	.93	2.05	11.12
Greatest	4.74	6.05	7.32	4.18	1.68	.52	.14	1.19	3.40	3.12	4.33	7.10	24.43

*University of California Agricultural Extension Service, Climates of San Diego County, Agricultural Relationships, November 1970.

13

the fact that there were fourteen ranches in the valley with a total of 250 acres under cultivation producing crops of sweet corn, potatoes, tomatoes, peanuts and melons. The report further stated that 100,000 mulberry trees had been planted on the first step toward the development of sericulture.¹¹ The second report was from an anonymous gentleman who described a camping experience near the Sweetwater Gorge where he spent the night in an area surrounded by sycamore, willow, and cottonwood trees, between hills covered by grass and wild mustard.¹² Subsequent rapid expansion of agricultural activity and a need for firewood by early settlers served to eliminate the natural vegetation from the landscape by the end of the nineteenth century. Grain fields soon covered the floodplain as riparian vegetation was converted to fuel, and orchards replaced much of the grass and low chaparral growth along the valley terraces. The tree species which came and remained to dominate the landscape were the eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus cladocalyx*), or Sweet Gum, which was first introduced to the valley in 1869 by Frank Kimball.¹³ As development of the valley progressed other exotics were introduced, many of which are still prevalent, including the weeping willow (*Salix babylonica*) and California pepper tree (*Salix Molle*).

Following extensive flooding in 1895, a decrease in agricultural activity on the floodplain permitted the return of limited stands of willow (*Salix hindsiiana*) and Cottonwood (*Populus fremontii*). Undeveloped areas along the terraces are covered by a sparse growth of chaparral, including Chamise (*Adenostoma fasciculatum*), and California Buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*). Also present in isolated patches are the cacti species of prickly pear (*Opuntia engelmanni*) and Cholla (*Opuntia fulgida*).

¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Yearbook of Agriculture: 1941 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1941).

² University of California Agricultural Extension Service in cooperation with Environmental Sciences Services Administration, Climates of San Diego County, Agricultural Relationships, U.S. Weather Bureau, November 1971, p.18.

³ B. Haurwitz and J.K. Austin, Climatology (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1944), p. 202.

⁴ Ford A. Carpenter, The Climate and Weather of San Diego (San Diego, Ca.: San Diego Chamber of Commerce, 1913, p. 5.

⁵ Haurwitz and Austin, Climatology, p. 203.

⁶ Ross LaPorte, U.S. Weather Bureau, personal interview, August 2, 1971.

⁷ R. Earl Storie and E.J. Carpenter, Soil Survey of the El Cajon Area,

CHAPTER IV

EL RANCHO DE LA NACION

Pattern of Human Culture

The Sweetwater Valley first felt the influence of man approximately 12,000 years ago at the hands of the San Dieguito Indians, a vanished tribe of which little is known. No skeletal remains have been found, and few tools have been discovered in archeological sites. The San Dieguito were followed by the La Jolla tribe which occupied the valley during the approximate period 7,000 B.C. to 2,000 B.C. The La Jollans were succeeded by the Comeyal, or Dieguino, tribe and it was this group which occupied the valley when the first Spanish explorers arrived in the area.

The Comeyal had learned to live in harmony with the elements of climate, vegetation and soils in the valley, using within the limits of their culture each to its advantage. During late summer and early fall they would set fire to vegetation and after the fires had burned themselves out, the Indians would broadcast seed grains over the land, harvesting their crops after the winter rains had come. Using stone tools, they fashioned throwing sticks from the trunks of shrubs and small trees found growing along the water courses. These sticks were used to kill rabbits, ground squirrels, and rats which abounded in the area, providing some meat for the camps to supplement their diet of fish and mollusks taken from San Diego Bay. These Indians, from whom the Spanish claimed the Sweetwater Valley in the name of the King of Spain, were removed from the valley to the San Diego Mission lands once the mission was completed. They were a relatively passive force during their period of occupation in the valley.¹

Historical Background

Subsequent to the visit of Father Serra and Gaspar de Portola in 1769, the Sweetwater Valley became a part of the grazing lands set aside for the Pueblo of San Diego, one of the many Ranchos del Rey, or King's Ranches, found in California. These lands were to be held in perpetuity as royal lands, under the control of the Comandante of the Presidio, using the ranch

for grazing purposes. The local rancho, also known as El Rancho de la Purisima, remained intact until 1821 when Mexico gained independence from Spain, at which time it was renamed Rancho de la Nacion.²

Private ownership of the Sweetwater Valley was first established on December 11, 1845, when Governor Pio Pico, 12th Mexican governor of California, acted in Los Angeles to declare Don Juan Forster "... owner in California of the land named Rancho de la Nacion without any condition whatever of those that are expressed in the last decree."³ Forster, a nationalized Mexican of English extraction, built the first residential dwelling in the valley as a condition of the grant which required that "within one year he shall build a house on the ranch which shall be inhabited."⁴ Forster fulfilled the requirements by having an adobe structure erected on the site of what is now Rohr Park, and remnants of the original building are still visible in the park.

The lands granted to Don Juan Forster embraced "six square leagues, a little more or less, according to the best calculation which could be made."⁵ Following the war between the United States and Mexico, and subsequent statehood for California in 1850, Forster's claim to the Rancho de la Nacion was challenged by local authorities and he petitioned the U.S. Board of Commissioners for Ascertaining and Settling Private Land Claims in the State of California as follows:

Your petitioner would further represent that judicial possession of said tract of land was given to the said grantee on the Twenty Fifth day of August 1846 and the boundaries thereof designated and defined, and that he has been in the peaceful possession thereof ever since, and that he has no knowledge of any interfering claim.

Your petitioner herewith presents the original grant, approval of the Departmental Assembly and certificate of judicial possession in the Spanish language with translations of the same and will make further proof of title if required by the Board.

Your petitioner prays your Honorable Board to take into consideration his claim to said tract of land and decree his title to be valid and confirm the same.⁶

The Board's decision to recognize Forster's claim to Rancho de la Nacion withstood several appeals and on February 27, 1866, a patent signed by President Andrew Johnson for a grant of 26,631.94 acres was reregistered in San Diego.⁷ The patent was not registered in the name of Forster, however, for he had sold the land to J.B. Bayerque of San Francisco on September 22, 1856, for the sum of \$25,000.00 and thereby established for the first time a

dollar value for lands encompassing the Sweetwater Valley.⁸ The rancho changed hands twice more in the ensuing decade, and on June 18, 1868, Frank A. Kimball, acting in behalf of himself and his two brothers, Warren and Levi, accepted a deed from Mr. Francois Ploche in San Francisco for the rancho covering 26,681.94 acres for a sale price of \$30,000.00. The transaction involved a down payment of \$10,000.00, and three equal payments of \$6,667.00 to be made on June 18 each year for the following three years, all payments to be made in gold coin, at an annual interest rate of 8 per cent.⁹

In July 1868, the Kimball brothers employed Mr. George S. Morrill and a party of engineers, for a fee of \$10,000.00 to complete a precise survey of the ranch to determine boundaries and exact size. This survey showed the ranch to cover a total of 26,612.27 acres, and based on that survey the first subdivision map was drawn.¹⁰ On August 24, 1868, the following entry was made in the diary of Frank Kimball: "Sold to Davis and Wheeler all of section 135 lying south of the river for \$10 per acre."¹¹ The "sections" to which Mr. Kimball made reference were actually quarter sections, 160 acres, but the significance of the sale lies not in the size of the parcels, but that it marked the beginning of the breakup of the Sweetwater Valley into parcels of land with individual ownership. The remainder of the year 1868 saw Mr. Kimball making numerous entries in his diary relative to ranch land sales, including the two shown below:

12/14/68 Rode out to the Sweetwater with Mr. Crane and sold him a block of land on the river adjoining Gil Davis' line at \$24/acre.
12/29/68 Sold to Mr. Pettit $\frac{1}{4}$ of $\frac{1}{4}$ section 161 and 20 acres running to the river for \$2,000.00.¹²

In a period of slightly more than six months, the enterprising Kimballs had brought an end to the Spanish/Mexican era during which the valley had remained relatively pristine.

Frank Kimball began a personal promotional campaign to bring settlers to the valley, visiting such places as Los Angeles, San Francisco, New Orleans, Chicago, Boston, and Cincinnati. In addition to using the slogan, "Bay and Climate" to attract settlers, he took or sent samples of fruit produced in the area to fairs and expositions throughout the United States.¹³ Of the many people attracted to the area, only the wealthy could afford to purchase valley lands which, by 1886, were selling for \$200.00 per acre.¹⁴ This resulted in a small valley population living on relatively large

parcels of land, an exclusive area where each farm or ranch was the private estate of a gentleman farmer. National City had been carved into residential building-sized lots, and Chula Vista, when developed in 1888, was subdivided into parcels ranging from five to twenty acres in size. The contrast became one of valley residents "living in the country" compared to their neighboring "city dwellers," creating an identity for the valley that has been retained in the minds of succeeding generations in both the valley and the cities right up to the present time.

¹Mrs. Charlotte McGowan, archeologist at Southwestern College, personal interview, September 20, 1972.

²Hubert H. Bancroft, California Pastoral, 1769-1848 (San Francisco, Ca.: The History Co., 1888), pp. 221-222.

³Proceeding Instituted by Don Juan Forster Petitioning for the Land Named Rancho Nacional, pp. 1-2. Translation on file in Junipero Serra Museum, San Diego.

⁴Ibid., pp. 6-7.

⁵Ibid., p. 12.

⁶Petition of Juan Forster to the Board of Commissioners for Ascertaining and Settling Private Land Claims in the State of California, pp. 1-2, Junipero Serra Museum, San Diego.

⁷Book of Patents I, p. 7, Office of San Diego County Recorder.

⁸Abstract of Title to Rancho de la Nacion. Copy on file in Junipero Serra Museum, San Diego.

⁹Diary of Frank A. Kimball, June 18, 1868. Original in city library, National City, California.

¹⁰Francis X. King, "Frank A. Kimball, Pioneer of National City" (unpublished Master's thesis, San Diego State College, 1950).

¹¹Diary of Frank A. Kimball, August 24, 1868.

¹²Ibid., December 1868.

¹³Irene Phillips, Development of the Mission Olive Industry and Other Stories (National City, Ca.: South Bay Press, 1960), pp. 21-22.

¹⁴T. S. Van Dyke, The City and County of San Diego (San Diego, Ca.: Leberthon and Taylor, 1888), p. 52.

CHAPTER V

EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF THE VALLEY

The Kinball Brothers have made extensive improvements on the Ranch. They are ready to take advantage of the season's early rains. The supply of lumber is limited. The garden on the Ranch is now in the course of cultivation (and is one of the main features of improvement). They have exercised good judgement in selling farms only to actual farmers who pledge themselves to improve and cultivate the ground purchased. Commanding, as the whole of the ranch does, fine views from the Bay (sic), these farms, so soon as the grain begins to shoot from the earth, will add greatly to the beauty of our harbor, and eventually add materially to the wealth of our country.¹

The above observation of the San Diego Union writer in 1868 was somewhat premature in judgement, even though early land sales involved parcels large enough to provide for successful farming. The writer did not consider the vagaries of weather, the lack of a ready supply of irrigation water, and the lack of transportation to eastern markets. Nor could he foresee the land boom which would invade the San Diego area within a few years.

Early Agriculture

During the early years of American ownership, the Sweetwater Valley was the scene of extensive agricultural experimentation, not the least of which was performed by the Kinball brothers, and some of the Kinball experiments were successful to the point where they provided revenue for further development of the land. In addition to moderate success with barley, oats, and wheat planted in late 1868 and early 1869, Frank Kimball achieved national fame for his accomplishments in cultivating olive trees. His groves were started from cuttings which he had obtained from the old Spanish missions at San Diego and San Luis Rey. The olive trees at these missions were native to Spain, having been brought to Mexico by Franciscan Monks and thence to the California missions. The cultivation of the olive was so successful that Warren Kimball chose to

name his personal estate "Olivewood" even though his orchards were located in, and on the north rim of, the Sweetwater Valley adjacent to Highland Avenue, several blocks from his residence. Frank Kimball planted the cuttings from San Luis Rey Mission farther east in the valley on four acres of what is now Rohr Park.² Success of the olive industry was not unchallenged, however, for the area experienced a severe drought in the 1876-77 rainfall year when only 3.65 inches of precipitation were received.³ The Kimballs instituted a program of hand-watering the olive trees but losses were high the next year as well as temperatures reached new records in the fall of 1878, prompting Frank Kimball to record in his diary, "The thermometer stood at 100°, the hottest ever known in San Diego County."⁴ The infant olive industry fell victim to weather extremes again the following year when in December 1879, Frank was prompted to record in his diary, "Hoar frost has destroyed half of all my trees."⁵

Weather notwithstanding, other farmers followed the lead of the Kimballs in cultivating olives, and in November 1882, a Mr. John C. Moore, Sweetwater Valley rancher, sent an olive branch bearing several ripe olives to the editor of the National City Record, stating that the branch was taken from a two-year old tree which had been grown from a cutting imported from France. Mr. Moore said of the tree:

It has grown to be nearly eight feet high; robust and is well branched; it has borne considerable fruit for a small tree. It is remarkable as illustrating the influence and adaptability of our genial climate for the growth and early bearing of the olive.⁶

By late 1886 the olive culture was so extensive throughout the area, including the valley, that Frank Kimball began construction on an olive processing mill in National City, and his diary during the entire decade tells of his being engaged in a large-volume business of selling and shipping cuttings from his trees, including 50,000 cuttings which he reported shipping to Los Angeles in 1883.⁷

The agricultural endeavor which would have the greatest impact on the valley was started in 1869 when Frank Kimball planted the first citrus trees on his personal estate in National City. This first grove consisted of 800 lime trees, 75 orange trees, and 125 lemon trees, grown from trees and seeds which Kimball had obtained from Los Angeles, San Francisco, and the Hawaiian Islands. Success was achieved with the orange and lemon

plantings in terms of both rate of growth and yield; however, Kimball discouraged the cultivation of the lime on the basis that "... the seeds outweighed the fruit."⁸ Within two years Henry H. Higgins had established citrus orchards on his Bonnie Brae Ranch in the Sweetwater Valley, marking the beginning of the most successful agricultural venture in the history of the valley.⁹

Henry Higgins was a musician, composer, and piano dealer who left a successful business in Chicago and came to California in 1871 because of ill health. He purchased seventy-six acres of land from the Kimball brothers in the eastern end of the valley on the site of what is now Bonita Woods subdivision, and planted thirty acres in fruit trees of all kinds. He established a nursery for the cultivation of citrus trees by planting seeds from the best oranges and lemons available in Los Angeles.¹⁰ He concentrated most of his efforts in growing thin-skinned lemons, using seeds from the Messina variety, and it was from these efforts that the Bonnie Brae lemon evolved, a fruit which was to win many prizes for the thin rind and almost total absence of seeds.¹¹ Higgins was the first valley settler to utilize the fertility of the terrace soils for citrus orchards and he accomplished it by establishing the first irrigation system in the valley. He excavated an area in the Sweetwater River bed below his property and through the use of both steam pumps and windmills he was able to lift water to his ranch using unique water pipes, unique in that they were hollowed-out redwood logs.¹² The enterprising Mr. Higgins also introduced the practice of sub-irrigation pipes twenty inches below the surface, with a vent below each tree. He reported that the system provided for more rapid growth and fewer insects around the trees.¹³

By 1877 Mr. Higgins had more than 2,000 trees on his ranch, 400 of which were 5 years old.¹⁴ From the Bonnie Brae Ranch nursery valley pioneer citrus growers S.S. Whitney and J.C. Frisbie obtained trees with which to establish their groves.¹⁵ The prosperity of the citrus growers in the valley did not go unnoticed by Frank Kimball, for in 1875 his diary reports that he went to the Sweetwater Valley with two workmen where they planted 400 orange trees.¹⁶ Two other pioneers who would become major citrus growers, Mr. R.C. Allen and Mr. Henry Cooper, arrived in 1884, and the latter established the Bonita Ranch which would later give its name to the town of

A short-lived agricultural venture undertaken by the Kimball brothers was their introduction of sheep ranching to the valley on the last day of December 1873 when Warren arrived with 1,300 sheep which had been purchased from the San Luis Rey ranch of Mr. L.H. Ott. An article in the San Diego Union in April 1874 reported that: "Kimball Brothers started sheep business on their ranch in December 1873, with a flock of 1,280; Friday they marked 1,378 lambs, the increase of four months."¹⁸

Sheep ranching did not prove to be profitable for the Kimball brothers and by 1883 all mention of the project had disappeared from the Frank Kimball diary. Several reasons may be assumed for the termination of sheep-ranching in the valley, including the absence of qualified herders, the distance to market and lack of transportation for wool, the incompatibility of grazing sheep and attempting to grow fruit and vegetables in the same area, and the paucity of graze and watering places during the long dry summers. The unseasonably cold weather in December took its toll of new-born lambs, too, but it is highly probable that the Kimballs were forced to divest themselves of sheep ranching, which was demanding of both time and energy, because of their involvement in so many other business ventures.

The diaries of Theron Parsons and Frank Kimball, along with the newspapers of the period, made mention of numerous agricultural experiments in the valley among which were efforts to grow cotton, peanuts, almonds, and English walnuts, and this writer believes that these crops were more a reflection of the cultural background of the planters than it was of knowledge of the potential of the climate and soils of the Sweetwater Valley.

Transportation

Within a year of completing the purchase of the National Ranch Frank Kimball was busily engaged in efforts to bring rail transportation to National City. His diary entry on July 7, 1869 read:

Made a bid on 500 acres of land to the Memphis and El Paso Railroad Company to come to the Bay of San Diego, and a further bid of 500 blocks of land for a terminus. Left the bid with General Hunter.¹⁹

General Morton C. Hunter, railroad representative, accepted the Kimball offer in behalf of his company and agreed that the rail terminal

would be located in National City, along with a depot and necessary repair shops. The planned rail line did not materialize, however, and this became the first of several abortive attempts by the Kimballs to provide the ranch with direct transportation to eastern markets. More than ten years were to pass before the following entry in the Kimball diary reported the successful conclusion of an agreement that would bring rails to National City, and ultimately to the Sweetwater Valley:

At the railroad office at nine o'clock and met Mr. Wilbur, Mr. Pierce, Captain Joseph Nickerson, and President Thomas Nickerson, and made private contract to pay \$11,500 in six months. Also signed the bond with representatives of the A.T. and S.F. Company to send commissioners to San Diego and see port on harbor, etc. The Santa Fe is to build the road from San Diego to Yuma.²⁰

Many major disappointments remained for the owners of the National Ranch and their financial backers in and around San Diego who had labored so diligently to bring rail transportation to the bay. Before the first through train arrived in National City on November 21, 1885, Frank and Warren Kimball had surrendered ownership of 16,000 acres of ranch lands to the Atcheson, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway. The Articles of Agreement signed by Frank Kimball and officials of the AT&SF Railway stipulated in part:

... That whereas the party of the first part desires to obtain railroad connection from the Bay to San Diego to the eastern end of the United States, and in and of the same, is able and willing to donate lands, privileges, and franchises hereinafter mentioned. And whereas the party of the second part is willing to furnish such connection and receive such donation.

... Also south of National City, quarter sections 174, 179, and 160, and so much of quarter sections 173, 180, and 161 as may be necessary in the judgement of the engineers of the party of the second part, to control the channel of the Sweetwater River, and then selecting alternate half miles of waterfront, measuring on the base line, said Kimball Brothers making the first selection, until two miles of waterfront (as near as may be) have been taken south of National City (making about three miles of waterfront in all) and then starting back from said waterfront and running back, selecting tracts alternate (as near as may be) exclusive of those already conveyed to sundry persons, until the full complement of ten thousand acres, as aforesaid, has been completed. Together will all tide lands and riparian rights belonging to or in anyway appertaining thereunto and to any

and every part thereof.²¹

When the articles of agreement were executed, the San Diego Land and Town Company was formed to control the sale and development of the land. Besides the 10,000 acres called for in the Articles of Agreement, the Kimball brothers donated an additional 6,000 acres to the Land and Town Company, and sold the Company 9,000 acres which they had purchased from the Otay and Janel Ranchos. In return the Kimballs received \$100,000.00 plus a one-sixth interest in the Company.²² Donations from other businessmen in the San Diego area, coupled with other purchases made by the Company brought the holdings of the Company to approximately 38,000 acres, and in total included a major part of the Sweetwater Valley.²³ By mid-1886 the Company had initiated promotional activity in land sales, and the directors recognized need for a local transportation network to facilitate the movement of prospective buyers over the vast holdings. On December 27, 1886, a franchise was received from San Diego County, and the National City and Otay Railroad was formed with routes running from National City to San Diego and Otay, and a spur up the Sweetwater Valley to la Presa.

Water Development

By mid-1887 the Sweetwater Division of the NC&O Railway was complete, making it possible for both people and produce to travel directly from the valley to the eastern United States by rail.²⁴ One inadequate factor now remained as a barrier to commercial-scale agriculture in the valley, a factor which prompted T.S. Van Dyke to write, "Prior to 1888, citrus fruits were just specimens for the wealthy to play with."²⁵ This factor was the absence of a reliable source of irrigation water. It was a problem that the seemingly boundless energy and talent of Frank Kimball could not overcome during his years of leadership in the area, but the vast resources of the Land and Town Company would provide the solution through the construction of a dam on the river in the Sweetwater Gorge, approximately eight miles inland from San Diego Bay.

Even though Frank Kimball was never able to utilize the natural damsite provided by the Sweetwater Gorge, its potential had not gone unnoticed by that industrious individual. On June 5, 1868, thirteen days before his purchase of the National Ranch was consummated in San Francisco, the following entry appeared in his diary: "Jm and I started at 9 o'clock and rode all around the National Ranch. Saw the finest water power site

that I ever saw in my life on the Northeast corner of the Ranch"²⁶ (Figure 4).

On June 8, 1869, Frank, Warren, and Levi Kimball formed the Kimball Brothers Water Company and the following day rode up the Sweetwater River over the Jamacha Ranch, purchasing water rights from all settlers living on the watershed at an undetermined cost. Efforts to interest potential developers in the damsite are reflected in the Kimball diary in 1873 and 1874 when officials of the Texas Pacific Railroad were conducted to the site, and in 1879 when engineers from the Santa Fe Railway inspected the gorge but refused to make a commitment. For lack of financial backing, the Kimball Brothers Water Company was forced to rely entirely on wells drilled in or near the river bed, a system that was never satisfactory since both domestic and irrigation water had to be hauled in barrels from the wells. Even with limited development on the ranch conditions would become critical during periods of drought, and with an influx of new settlers coincidental with the arrival of the railroad it became obvious that a storage and distribution system would have to be provided. Recognizing the part that water would play in the development of their lands, the directors of the San Diego Land and Town Company obligated the required \$200,000.00 and work on a dam in the Sweetwater Gorge was started on November 17, 1886.

The Sweetwater Dam, when completed on April 7, 1888, had a height of 90 feet, then the highest in the United States, a thickness varying from 46 to 12 feet, and was 396 feet in length across the top (Figure 5). It is constructed of dark blue meta-volcanic rock quarried less than a quarter of a mile downstream from the site and moved to the site in wagons pulled by horses and mules. Locally produced cement was rejected as being too poor in quality, and the cement used was imported in barrels from Belgium.²⁷

The opening of the water system from the Sweetwater reservoir marked the beginning of a new era in the development of the valley where grain farming would be replaced by large scale production of citrus fruits. Nearly 3,000 people attended a water festival on April 19, 1888 in National City to celebrate the historic event. In viewing fruit exhibits at the festival a reporter from the Otay Press wrote: "The display of fruit was taken from the National Ranch and if this was a specimen of what could be raised without this water supply, what may be expected of this land in the future?"²⁸



Fig. 4. Streamwater Change in 1985



Fig. 5. Streamwater Dam and NCSLO Facility

The existing image of the valley in which it was viewed as an exclusive area was enhanced when the NCSO Railroad established weekend excursion trips through the valley to the dam, with the neat farms and orchards pointed out to the visitors enroute.

With rail transportation leading directly from the valley, and an abundant supply of irrigation water available from the Sweetwater Reservoir, the stage now appeared to be set for rapid development, but a turn of events occurred which may have been providential for future residents. The great land boom which had swept into Southern California in the mid-1880's collapsed. Dumke described the end of the boom thusly:

Despite hopeful prognostications and repeated assurances by both buyers and sellers that the boom had come to stay, the spring of 1888 witnessed a rapid decline in land values and in buying enthusiasm. Common sense told the investor that the end was in sight.²⁹

The Valley and the Land Boom

The completion of the railroad to National City in November 1885 linked the area to the transcontinental system and opened the flood gates to settlers rushing westward in response to land promotional schemes. A major contribution to the land rush was made by the Southern Pacific and Santa Fe railroads when the two engaged in bitter competition for passenger trade, competition which forced the fare between Kansas City and Los Angeles to drop to one dollar on March 6, 1886.³⁰ Determined to take advantage of the phenomenal growth being experienced in the area, several landowners in the valley subdivided their land, creating a number of "paper towns" which were destined to remain undeveloped. Among them were Avondale, Englewood, and Bonnie Brae. Two ranches, Bonita and Sunnyside, owned by Henry Cooper and J.C. Frisbie, respectively, were among those subdivided and sold in 1887 but not developed, although a few new families were added to the valley population.³¹ The names of Bonita and Sunnyside remained and villages ultimately developed. The first valley post office was established in Sunnyside in 1893 and the Bonita post office was established in 1898.

Period of Readjustment

When the land boom ended the Sweetwater Valley had its transportation and its water supply, and the agricultural potential had been proven

by the men who had hauled water in barrels to irrigate their gardens and orchards. The early dreams of Frank Kimball could now be realized for commercial-scale agriculture was certainly possible, especially in the citrus industry, but capital was scarce and even the enterprising New Englander who had once owned the entire valley was left nearly penniless and landless through his dealings with the Santa Fe Railway and the San Diego Land and Town Company. It remained for an eastern syndicate to move into the void and expand valley agriculture into commercial status by acquiring and consolidating a number of small ranches into one large operation under the control of the Sweetwater Fruit Company.

The Boston banking firm of Kidder and Peabody, an organization connected with the Santa Fe Railway and San Diego Land and Town Company, entered the valley citrus industry in 1891 when the firm purchased the Bonita Ranch from Henry Cooper and formed the Sweetwater Fruit Company. Mr. Russell C. Allen, a native of Cambridge, Massachusetts, who was known to members of the firm, was ranching in the Dehesa, California, area and Mr. Allen was induced to take over the management of the company. Under his guidance the company expanded to eventually control more than 300 acres of fertile valley lands. Initial efforts were directed to planting 110 acres of lemon trees in the Bonita area and 40 acres of walnuts on a part of what is now the Chula Vista Municipal Golf Course (Figure 6). The walnuts did not thrive, and no effort was made to replant the site after extensive flooding occurred in the valley in 1895.³²

Prosperity did not come instantly to the new company, nor to the valley, for the last decade of the nineteenth century was to be one of near stagnation in all of Southern California because of a combination of national economic conditions and adverse weather. Smythe said,

The decade between 1890 and 1900 was a negative period in the history of San Diego. By the national census of the former year it had a population of a little less than 17,000; by the census of the latter year, a population of a little more than 17,000.³³

On December 31, 1891, the Board of Directors of the San Diego Land and Town Company reported that, "From all commercial and financial standpoints, the past year in San Diego has been one of great depression."³⁴ Economic conditions alone were not completely responsible for local depression, however, for weather again became an active agent in 1891 when San

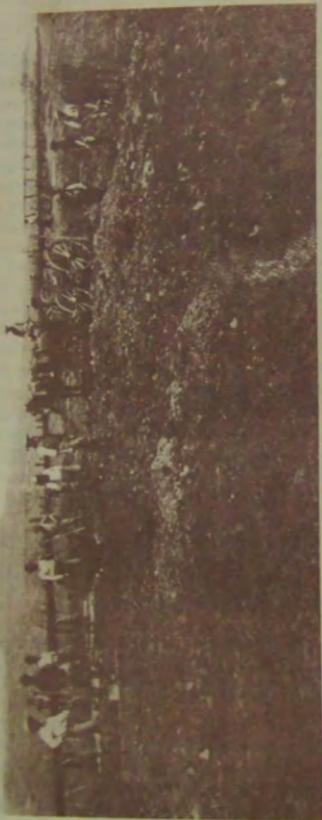


Fig. 6. Crew planting citrus orchards on Bonita Beach of.

Diego County was subjected to severe flooding. The Sweetwater Dam contained the Sweetwater River, protecting the valley from damage, but flooding in the north washed out the rail lines connecting San Diego with San Bernardino, leaving San Diego, and the valley, at the end of a branch line.³⁵

The Sweetwater Fruit Company survived the transportation crisis and in 1894 reached a production level which made it economically feasible for the company to construct its own packing shed, and as a result, a landmark was established in the valley which was to survive until the spring of 1960. The original packing shed was constructed of adobe and was situated in Bonita on a site now occupied by the Bonita Branch of the San Diego Trust and Savings Bank (Figure 7). After undergoing many modifications the shed, at some point in its history, became known as "The Old Red Barn." It withstood drought, flood and freeze, and in its day served as a temporary residence for the Allen Family, was used as a blacksmith shop, stable, feed store, fire station, and at one time housed braceros who were employed in the local orchards. It was demolished in 1960 to make way for a small shopping center.³⁶

In spite of the degree of success achieved by the Sweetwater Fruit Company in 1894, the agricultural potential of the valley was not to be realized until several more years had elapsed. From mid-December 1894 through mid-January 1895 the area experienced unusually heavy rainfall, and on January 16, Frank Kimball wrote in his diary: "Heavy rain and wind began at midnight and has continued all day. Sweetwater Reservoir full and overflowing. Water covers National Avenue from bank to bank."³⁷ The January 17 edition of the National City Record reported that twenty-two inches of water were flowing over the top of the dam, creating flood conditions in the valley which washed out several hundred feet of the main pipes of the water distribution system and demolished sections of the N&D Railroad tracks.³⁸ The San Diego Land and Town Company, owner and operator of both the water system and the railroad, suffered heavy losses from which it never recovered, resulting in the company being placed in a receivership in 1895, and sold to a committee representing the stockholders in 1897. The new owners continued to operate under the same name until the company was reorganized in 1902.³⁹

The flood of 1895 was not the last of the problems of the company for the following year marked the beginning of a generally dry period that



Fig. 7. Sweetwater Fruit Company packing shed, Bonita, California, 1900.

was to last for nearly seven years. The optimism of the editor of the *National City Record* was unfounded when in March 1888 he wrote:

The bottom of the Sweetwater Lake above the noted dam will never be seen again by mortal eyes unless the crystal fluid can be penetrated to a depth of sixty-four feet or more.⁴⁰

The Land and Town Company started to drill wells in the valley in 1898 to supplement the reservoir supply, and by 1900 there were 257 wells being pumped, including several on the floor of the reservoir itself, which was by that time completely dry.⁴¹

The end of the nineteenth century found the valley residents struggling for survival, victims of weather extremes which had periodically plagued them throughout the first thirty-two years of American stewardship. Excursion trains still ran, however, and residents of adjacent cities continued to view the Sweetwater Valley as a special place to visit on weekends and holidays.

¹ *San Diego Weekly Union*, December 24, 1868.

² *Diary of Frank Kimball*, 1870-1876.

³ T.S. Van Dyke, *The City and County of San Diego* (San Diego, CA: Leberthon and Taylor, 1886), p. 52.

⁴ *Diary of Frank Kimball*, September 10, 1878.

⁵ *Ibid.*, December 16, 1879.

⁶ *National City Record*, November 23, 1882.

⁷ *Diary of Frank Kimball*, 1883.

⁸ Herbert J. Webber and Leon D. Batchelor, *The Citrus Industry*, Vol. 1: *History, Botany, and Breeding* (Berkeley: University of California, 1943), p. 36.

⁹ *San Diego Union*, October 21, 1962.

¹⁰ T.F. McCamant, "Bonnie Brae," *The Golden Era*, XLX (1891), 1020.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1021.

¹² Spencer L. Menzel, "The Development of the Sweetwater Area" (unpublished Master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1942), p. 80.

¹³ *National City Record*, October 19, 1882.

¹⁴ *San Diego Weekly Union*, June 21, 1877.

¹⁵ McCamant, "Bonnie Brae," p. 1022.

- ¹⁶Diary of Frank Kimball, June 3, 1875.
- ¹⁷Irene Phillips, The Story of El Rancho de la Nacion (National City, Ca.: South Bay Press, 1959), p. 78.
- ¹⁸San Diego Union, April 26, 1874.
- ¹⁹Diary of Frank Kimball, June 7, 1869.
- ²⁰Ibid., October 5, 1879.
- ²¹William E. Smythe, History of San Diego, 1542-1907 (San Diego, Ca.: The History Co., 1907), pp. 408-412.
- ²²Glenn S. Dunke, The Boom of the Eighties in Southern California (San Marino, Ca.: Huntington Library, 1970), p. 136.
- ²³San Diego Union, October 2, 1881.
- ²⁴Phillips, Story of El Rancho, p. 54.
- ²⁵Van Dyke, San Diego, p. 58.
- ²⁶Diary of Frank Kimball, June 5, 1868.
- ²⁷The Water Story of the Sweetwater District (San Diego, Ca.: California Water and Telephone Co., 1955), p.10.
- ²⁸Utay Press, April 26, 1888.
- ²⁹Dunke, Eighties, p. 259.
- ³⁰Ibid., p. 24.
- ³¹Menzel, Sweetwater, p. 79.
- ³²Information extracted from the personal papers of the Russell C. Allen family, in custody of Mrs. Butler Ward, daughter of Russell C. Allen, Bonita, California, April 4, 1972.
- ³³Smythe, History, p. 506.
- ³⁴Fifth Annual Report of the Board of Directors of the San Diego Land and Town Company, December 31, 1891 (on file in California-American Water Co., Chula Vista).
- ³⁵Richard F. Pourade, The Glory Years (San Diego, Ca.: Union-Tribune Publishing Co., 1964), p. 224.
- ³⁶San Diego Union, October 21, 1959.
- ³⁷Diary of Frank Kimball, January 16, 1895.
- ³⁸National City Record, January 17, 1895.
- ³⁹The Water Story of the Sweetwater District, p. 6.
- ⁴⁰National City Record, March 15, 1888.
- ⁴¹Records of the California-American Water Company, Chula Vista, California.

CHAPTER VI

THE QUIET YEARS--1900-1947

Introduction

The beginning of the twentieth century found the Sweetwater Valley established as an agricultural community with a population that would not expand drastically over the next four decades (Figure 8). Little change would occur in the character of the valley during the period covered by this chapter as immigration was balanced by emigration. The drought which had existed for two years would continue for another four years, and a number of citrus orchards located on the higher terraces where irrigation water was not available were abandoned.

Lemon crops had come to dominate the valley citrus industry in orchards ranging in size from 10 to 300 acres. A limited number of acres were devoted to oranges even though experience had shown that the valley climate produced fruit inferior to that of inland valleys at higher elevations. The only agricultural experimentation remaining from the Kimball era existed in Sunnyside where Mr. William Ballinger was attempting to cultivate mulberry trees in support of sericulture, an experiment that was abandoned before the drought ended, according to Mr. Anson Favel, who was born in the valley in 1894.¹

The number of families present in the central and eastern portions of the valley had warranted building the first school in 1888 and the site chosen was on the Bonita Ranch of Mr. Henry Cooper (Figure 9). Children in the western part of the valley attended school in National City. The NC&O Railroad provided daily freight and passenger service, and a road network existed on both the north and south sides of the valley (Figure 10).

The drought was officially broken in the 1904-05 rainfall year when 15.36 inches of rain were recorded at the Sweetwater Reservoir, marking the beginning of an eighteen year period of above-average rainfall.² A new industry, dairying, had been added to the economy at the end of the nineteenth century when the Sam Williams dairy was started at the

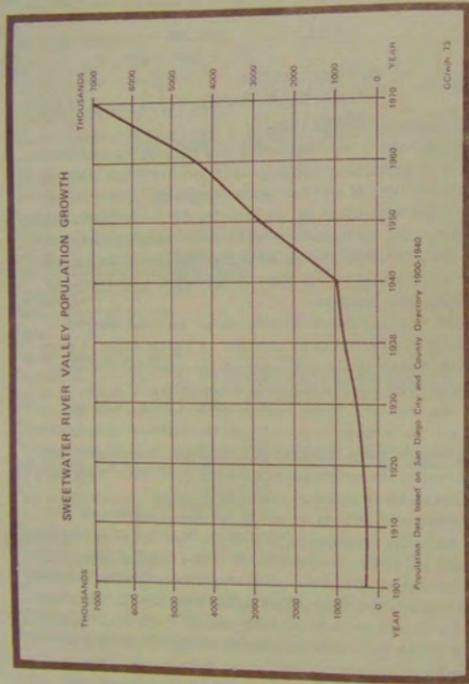


Fig. 8 Sweetwater River Valley population growth

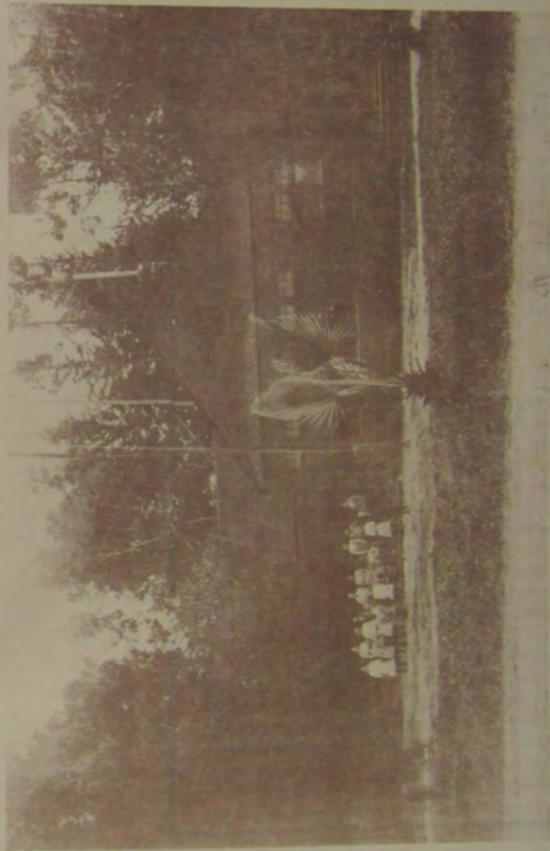


Fig. 9 Original Bents Schwabacher, Colburne, 1890



Fig. 10 Sweetwater River Valley Road and Railway System 1900.

eastern end of the valley, the first of many dairies that would dot the landscape in the ensuing forty-five years. Some minor agriculture was practiced in the early years of the century but lemon culture provided the major income source, with dairy farming a distant second, land use patterns that were to exist through the end of World War II.

Two small parcels of land were subdivided during the period covered by this chapter. Bonita Hills Subdivision Map No. 2139 was filed with the San Diego County Recorder on November 22, 1928, dividing forty-three acres in Long Canyon (Acacia Drive) into eighty-six lots averaging one-half acre in size, and the Sweetwater Manor Map No. 2159 filed May 9, 1929, dividing approximately thirty-five acres on a north-central terrace.³ Home construction did not commence immediately in either of the two subdivisions, and it was not until the years following World War II that urbanization pressure was felt in the valley.

The Lemon Industry

The long period of drought at the beginning of the century had severely curtailed the yields of lemons in valley orchards but the return to wetter years quickly restored the orchards to full production. The period of prosperity was short-lived, however, for in January 1913 the entire area was subjected to an invasion of cold arctic air resulting in almost forty-eight hours of sub-freezing weather during which time a low temperature of eight degrees above zero was recorded at the Sweetwater Fruit Company in Bonita. Most young trees were completely destroyed by frost, and limbs under two inches in diameter were destroyed on mature trees. No orchards escaped damage, and two years would pass before trees recovered enough to produce even a limited crop, and three years elapsed before full yield was again attained.⁴

As a result of the 1913 freeze, an important change occurred in lemon culture in the valley. Prior to the freeze most orchards were devoted to producing Lisbon and Villafranche varieties and although lemons were harvested every six weeks throughout the year, those two varieties gave the greatest yield in late winter and early spring months, necessitating storage of most of the crop since the greatest market demand existed in the east during summer months. After the freeze orchardists replaced their damaged and destroyed trees with the Eureka lemon which

produced the heaviest crop in warm summer months.⁵

The greatest single catastrophe in the history of the Sweetwater Valley, the 1916 flood, had almost no direct effect on the citrus industry. Sections of the main water distribution system were washed out, depriving many orchards of irrigation water; however, the flood came at a time when the evapotranspiration rate was minimal and few of the orchards were jeopardized.⁶ Indirectly, the flood affected the industry by damaging the NCSO Railway to a point judged to be beyond economical repair, bringing to an end the rail transportation system to which Frank Kimball had devoted so much time, energy, and financial resources. Also damaged extensively, but not beyond repair, was the packing shed on the Bonita Ranch of the Sweetwater Fruit Company. Packing continued after the flood but the packed fruit was delivered to National City by wagon or truck, as was fruit from other growers in the valley. Another damaging flood in 1927 ended packing operations in Bonita and from then until 1957 all fruit was hauled to National City for packing.⁷

The advent of World War II saw the citrus industry at peak production and the exodus of young men from the area created labor problems from which the industry never recovered. The problem did not end with the armistice in 1945. Mr. Carl Boltz, active lemon orchardist from 1907 until 1948, summarized problems when he said;

There was quite a bit of competition but it was more than that. It was that we found our land more valuable for development. . . . And beyond that, it was extremely difficult to get good help. There was so much industry in the area that young men were not willing to work on the land. The old time pruners had died or moved on, and what labor there was available cost so much that it was uneconomical. It became more profitable to subdivide the land for development.⁸

Added to the problems discussed by Mr. Boltz was the fact that the lemon industry began to feel expansion pressure from Chula Vista, a city whose population more than tripled between 1940 and 1950, from 5,138 persons to 16,505 persons.⁹ The year 1947 was to be the last in which the major landowners in the valley considered the lemon to be the prime source of income.

The Dairy Industry

There are no county agricultural records available which list the individual dairies operating in the Sweetwater Valley during the study

period; however, Mr. Fred Higgins of Sunnyside was in the trucking business from 1920 through 1950 and held contracts with valley dairy operators to deliver milk produced by their dairies to a wholesaler in San Diego and he was able to list from memory twenty-one separate dairies between the years of 1912 and 1950. According to Mr. Higgins, a majority were small operations where twenty to thirty cows were milked, and they were, in most instances, operated in conjunction with lemon orchards, providing a ready source of fertilizer. A notable exception was the Samuel Williams dairy in the eastern end of the valley where several hundred cows were milked on a ranch of approximately 3,000 acres in size. In addition to having ample land for pasture, the owner was able to grow his own feed, and for several years, beginning in 1917, approximately 500 acres were devoted to growing lima beans.¹⁰ In 1945 the Williams Ranch was sold to Union Oil Company of California.¹¹ Dairying was discontinued at that time and the land has lain idle through the end of the study period.

Two additional noteworthy dairies were those operated by William Dolan from 1910 to 1930, and the Levi Kincaid dairy, 1912 to 1931, both on quarter section 31, Rancho de la Nacion Map No. 166, between the present sites of Sweetwater Manor and Bonita Woods subdivisions. Another large dairy operation was the Burris Ranch which began operations in 1922 on two tracts totalling more than 500 acres. The Burris dairy discontinued operations in 1945.¹²

The dairy industry thrived through the end of World War II. However, of those in operation in 1945, only two have survived into the 1970's, the Eaton Dairy at the intersection of Bonita Road and Otay Lakes Road, and the Rollin Dairy at the east end of the valley.

The Eaton Dairy, milking approximately 175 cows, was purchased by Mr. Eaton in 1944 from Mr. F.M. Brown who had operated a dairy on the site continuously since 1915.¹³ The Rollin Dairy, where approximately 300 cows are milked, started operations in 1945.¹⁴ Both herds are purebred Holstein cattle maintained in the dry-lot principle, with all feed imported from outside the valley.

Miscellaneous Agriculture

Mixed vegetable farming has been practiced in the valley since the days of the earliest settlers, but the oldest residents do not recall

any lands being continuously used for any length of time for that form of agriculture. Prior to the 1916 flood there were Chinese gardeners who utilized portions of the floodplain for vegetable gardens, disposing of their produce by peddling it from door to door in Chula Vista and National City.¹⁵ Relatively large-scale vegetable farming was conducted on the floodplain as recently as 1962 when the site of the present Bonita Golf Course, and approximately fifty acres adjacent to the Sunnyside Bridge, were planted in tomatoes and peppers.¹⁶ A small area east of the Sunnyside Bridge was being utilized for vegetable growing in the early 1970's.

In approximately 1915, poultry farming was introduced to the valley on the Windsor Ranch on the north side of the valley opposite Bonita, where diversified farming was practiced (Figure 11). The poultry operation was experimental and was discontinued after a few years. Two commercial-scale operations were the Bram Poultry Farm on Bonita Mesa during the 1920's and the Nubson Poultry Farm near the Sweetwater Dam from 1950 until about 1959.¹⁷

Floods

The drought which had existed around the turn of the century was broken in the 1904-05 rainfall year, and in nine of the succeeding thirteen years the rainfall exceeded annual averages. More than fifteen inches of rain fell at the Sweetwater Dam in 1914-15 and again in 1915-16, culminating in a flood that literally swept the floodplain clean (Figure 12).¹⁸ In a letter to the Sweetwater Company, consulting engineer Harry N. Savage wrote:

The eight inches of rain which fell at the Sweetwater Dam between January 14th and January 28th, with a corresponding but unusually greater precipitation in the upper elevations of the basin, has been unprecedented in the county so far as disclosed by the records or recollections of the oldest inhabitants, for both maximum peak discharge and total runoff.¹⁹

The dam had been increased in height from 90 to 110 feet in 1911 but the capacity of the reservoir was exceeded in January 1916 to the point where water poured over the parapet at a depth of approximately 40 inches. The dam held under the weight of the water but both the north and south abutments eroded away, the north abutment to a depth of 40 feet and the south abutment to a depth of 35 feet (Figure 13). Below the dam approximately

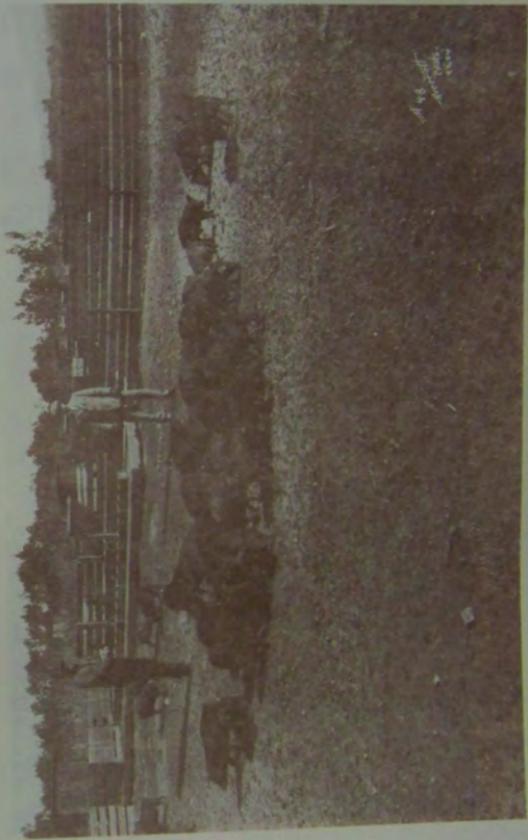


Fig. 11. Mixed farming, Windsor Ranch, Bonita, California 1911.



147
April
1965
4:55

Fig. 11-2 Mixed farming, Winobar Ranch, Bonita, California, 1965



148
April
1965
5:00

Fig. 11-3 Mixed farming, Winobar Ranch, Bonita, California, 1965



Fig. 11-4 Mixed Farming Windsor Ranch, Bonita, California, 1916

4,000 feet of water distribution pipes were washed away and all highway and railway bridges were washed out. The roadbed of the NCAO Railway was almost totally destroyed. An estimated twenty-one deaths resulted from the flood, all believed to have been Chinese who were living near their gardens on the floodplain. Mr. Savage submitted an estimate of \$110,000.00 to repair the dam and \$35,000.00 to repair and restore the water pipes (Figure 14).²⁰

A minor flood occurred in 1921 when the reservoir overflowed for a short period of time, and again in 1927, as mentioned above. A record rainfall of 26.51 inches was recorded at the Sweetwater Dam in 1940-41 but runoff from the watershed in the two previous years had been below average, allowing the reservoir to contain the heavy flow in the river with a minimum overflow period at the dam.²¹

In 1927 the California Water and Telephone Company acquired the Sweetwater Water Company and in 1945 the new company completed a new dam on the Sweetwater, the Loveland Dam, approximately eighteen miles east of Sweetwater Dam. Loveland Dam impounds 25,400 acre feet of water, and coupled with the 27,700 acre feet capacity of the Sweetwater Reservoir makes possible the impoundment of 53,100 acre feet of runoff water from the watershed, thereby lessening the danger of future flooding.²² There have been no major floods in the valley since 1916, although the possibility of severe flooding cannot be ruled out.

Silting from floods as well as from normal runoff has never been a problem in the Sweetwater Reservoir. Except for approximately five acre feet of silt in the vicinity of the intake tower immediately behind the dam the amount accumulated in the reservoir is considered to be negligible and general measurements are not taken, nor are records kept.²³

The Status of the Valley in 1947

The quiet years came to a close in 1947 when the lemon growers found their pursuit to be no longer profitable. The two adjacent cities were growing explosively and the Sweetwater Valley became a natural avenue of expansion for the more affluent citizens who could afford to purchase acreage and establish their own country estates. As the breakup of the citrus orchards began, the valley became populated by non-farmers for the first time in its modern history; however these new arrivals brought with them the determination to "keep the valley rural," a challenge that would



Fig. 12 Flood scene, Sweetwater Valley, January 1916



Fig. 13 Discharge in north abutment of Sweetwater Dam, January 1916

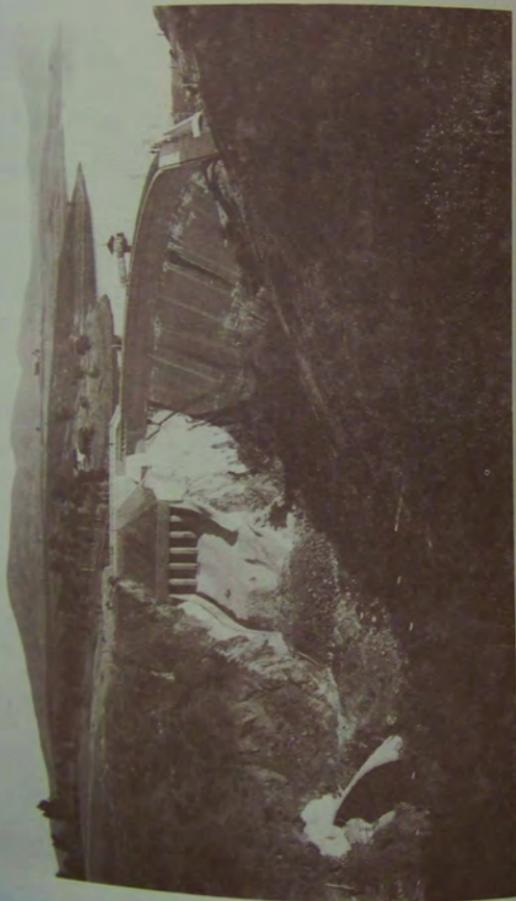


Fig. 14 Sweetwater Dam after repairs, January 1978

prove to be beyond their capabilities.

¹Anson Favel, former resident of the Sweetwater Valley, San Diego, personal interview, April 24, 1971.

²The Water Story of the Sweetwater District (San Diego, Ca.: California Water and Telephone Co., 1955), p. 9.

³Subdivision Map Files, San Diego County Recorder.

⁴Carl Boltz, retired orchardist, personal interview, March 22, 1972. Chula Vista, California.

⁵Ibid.

⁶C. Fred Higgins, valley resident, Sunnyside, California, personal interview, March 22, 1972.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Carl Boltz, personal interview, March 22, 1972.

⁹Bruce Warren, Planning Director, City of Chula Vista, personal interview, October 10, 1971.

¹⁰C. Fred Higgins, personal interview, March 22, 1972.

¹¹Subdivision Map Files.

¹²C. Fred Higgins, personal interview, March 22, 1972.

¹³Tom Eaton, valley dairy operator, personal interview, July 7, 1972.

¹⁴Otton Rollin, Jr., valley dairy operator, personal interview, July 7, 1972.

¹⁵Lowell Howe, retired municipal court judge, Chula Vista, personal interview, April 1, 1972.

¹⁶Ray Koenig, owner of the Bonita Golf Course, personal interview, April 2, 1972.

¹⁷C. Fred Higgins, personal interview, March 22, 1972.

¹⁸The Water Story of the Sweetwater District, p. 8.

¹⁹Letter from H.N. Savage to the Sweetwater Water Company, February 18, 1916. Copy on file in City Library, San Diego.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Alfred Poulter, retired water company executive, Chula Vista, California, personal interview, January 10, 1973.

²²The Water Story of the Sweetwater District, p. 8.

²³Jerry Haas, Vice President of California-American Water Company, personal interview, April 26, 1973.

CHAPTER VII

URBANIZATION--1948-1972

During the last decade the economy of this area has been steadily changing. The shift is away from agriculture and toward urban development, a shift which became pronounced about 1940 when pre-World War II emergency needs stimulated industrial expansion in San Diego County, bringing thousands of newcomers into the area. About that time homes began replacing orchards and fields, and huge subdivisions spread out over what was once agricultural land. The cities of Chula Vista and National City have been growing so fast in the last few years that the amount of water used for domestic and industrial purposes now exceeds that used for irrigation. In 1922 eighty-three percent of all water delivered by the Sweetwater System was used for irrigation. In 1940 the percentage was fifty-five and in 1954 it is down to forty. Today the cities are using more water than the ranches, which indicates the trend of development.¹

Except for changes generated by changing levels of technology, the valley was little different in 1948 from those conditions which had existed at the turn of the century (Figure 15). The population had increased and new homes had been added during the forty-seven year period; however, the homes were custom built on small orchard tracts, generally ten acres or more in size, detracting little from the rural atmosphere.² Although Bonita Road had been paved from First Avenue in Chula Vista to Bonita in 1922, and the remainder of Bonita Road and all of Sweetwater Road in the early 1930's, accessibility was actually poorer in 1948 than in 1900 due to the NCAO Railway having been destroyed in the 1916 flood and not replaced. Nonetheless, the urbanization process commenced in the Sweetwater Valley in 1948 when the first citrus orchards were subdivided into residential building lots. Progress was not rapid in the early years of the period but the tempo increased in the decade of the sixties when sewer facilities were extended through the valley, making possible zoning regulations that would permit lot sizes smaller than one-half acre. The practice of landowners of annexing parcels of land to the neighboring cities had not begun, and the entire valley was under the jurisdiction of the San Diego County government.

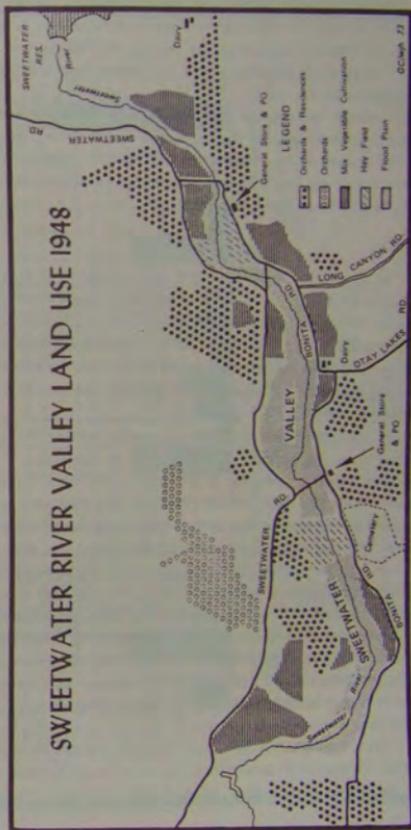


Fig. 15 Sweetwater River Valley, Land Use 1948

The urbanization process was not unopposed in the valley, even when development consisted of small subdivisions with relatively large lot sizes. A group of influential citizens banded together in 1949 to form the Sweetwater Valley Civic Association for the stated purpose of maintaining a rural atmosphere in the valley. Initial group leadership was comprised of both "first family" members and newcomers, but the general membership was dominated by residents who had been attracted to the valley subsequent to World War II because of its relative isolation. The group is still functioning at the end of the study period after having faced numerous challenges during its twenty-three years of existence.³

Subdivisions

On January 22, 1948, Richard M. and Alfreda B. Allen filed Bonita Acres Subdivision Map No. 2453 with the San Diego County Recorder, marking the beginning of the breakup of the Bonita Ranch, the original holding of the Sweetwater Fruit Company. By the end of the year two additional maps had been filed subdividing approximately two-thirds of the west orchard of the Company. The remaining one-third was subdivided in January 1955 when Bonita Mesa Unit No. 3 subdivision Map No. 3177 was filed.

By the end of 1949 ten subdivision maps had been filed on valley lands establishing 181 building sites, ranging in size from 5 sites in the Laughrey Subdivision in Sunnyside to 47 sites in the Lomacitas Subdivision. No maps were filed from 1950 through 1954. In 1955 four maps were filed, including the aforementioned Bonita Mesa Map, establishing 116 building sites, and between 1956 and 1964 an additional 357 building sites were established when sixteen maps were filed with the Recorder.⁴ The boundaries of the subdivisions discussed here conformed almost precisely with boundaries of agricultural lands of past years, particularly lands which had been used by the citrus industry (Figures 16 and 17). Individually these subdivisions did not detract greatly from the rural environment since they were spaced both temporally and geographically throughout the valley. Too, homesites generally conformed to the natural terrain and most were a minimum of one-half acre in size, with many exceeding one acre.

Prior to 1963, the San Diego County Public Health Department was the controlling agency in determining lot sizes in valley development since no sewer facilities existed prior to that year.⁵ In 1963 a Metropolitan

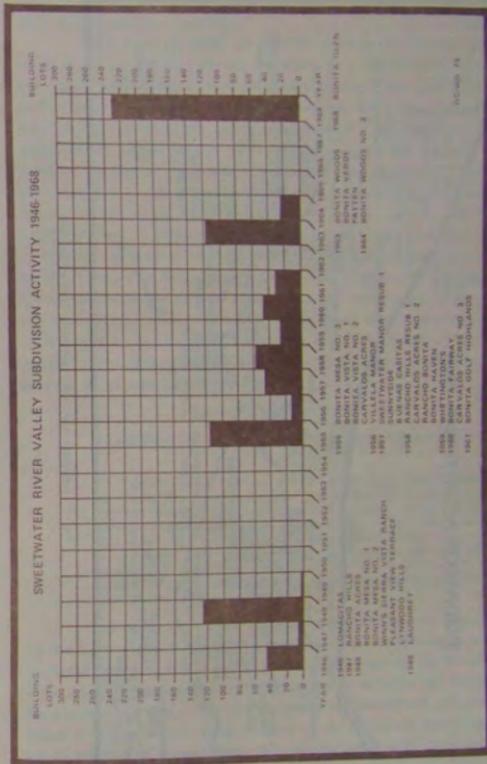


Fig. 18 Sweetwater River Valley subdivision activity 1948-1968

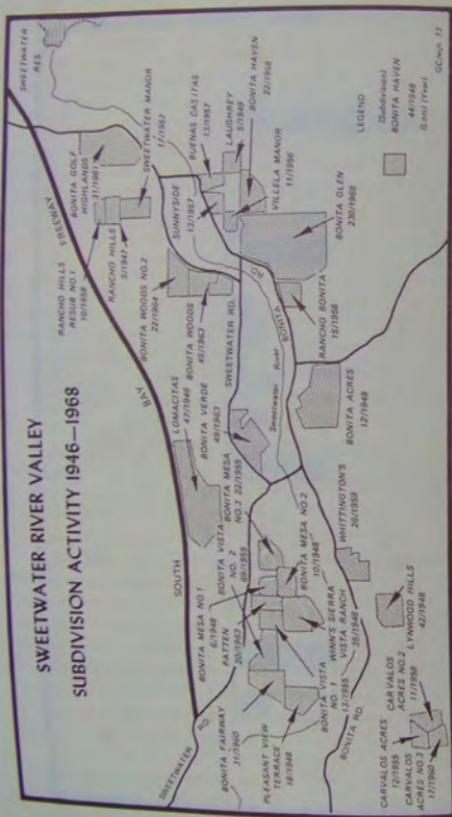


Fig. 17. Sweetwater River Valley subdivision activity 1946-1968

Sewer District trunk line was completed, making possible for the first time large-scale subdivision activity.⁶

On October 16, 1868, the McMillan Construction Company filed the first of six subdivision maps for the Bonita Glen Subdivision, located at the intersection of Bonita Road and Central Avenue. When completed approximately two years later the development contained 230 single family, detached, dwelling units on 90.87 net acres, an average of 3 units per acre. The site chosen was in Quarter Section 32, Rancho de la Nacion Map 166, with construction starting on the floodplain at the 95 foot contour and running up the south wall to approximately the 200 foot contour. The landscape was totally denuded at the beginning of construction and the "cut-and-fill" method was used to prepare building sites on the slope. Building lots were, in general, rectangular in shape with the longest dimension at a right angle to the street, placing each home in close proximity with its neighbor. Nine different home models were used, and they were randomly scattered throughout the development.⁷ As a consequence of the Bonita Glen subdivision the valley now had its first relatively large tract home project, highly visible and giving the impression of a higher density than that which actually exists because of lot configurations.

Commercialization

On September 22, 1963, the San Diego Union carried the following article:

Bonita is on the move. The picturesque rural community in the South Bay area, known for its residential appeal because of its residential appeal because of its rustic beauty, wooded acreage and the quiet country atmosphere of its surroundings, is now caught up in the rush of a development surge.

Current and proposed projects are adding and will add hundreds of homes and apartments. Before it tapers off, the prospects are this growth will attract accompanying commercial development of similar scope.⁸

The prediction of the Union was quickly borne out. The records of the Bonita Post Office show that commercial establishments being served increased from five at the end of 1962 to forty-eight by the end of 1970, a far cry from the two "country" stores located in Bonita and Sunnyside at the beginning of 1948.⁹ Most of the commercial development occurred in the village of Bonita on land formerly owned by the Sweetwater Fruit Company and in the form of a rural community shopping center with "Town and Country"

motif, with some linear development occurring to the west along Bonita Road between Bonita and the Chula Vista corporate limits.

In the western part of the study area the Bonita Golf Course was annexed to National City in 1969 and was immediately rezoned to accommodate a major commercial shopping center; however, use as a golf course has continued pending development.

In general, the amount of land zoned for commercial use has been closely controlled by the San Diego County Planning Department and few undeveloped commercial parcels exist; however, by increasing the density on some undeveloped parcels it would be possible to increase the number of individual establishments in the valley.

Civic Action Groups

As mentioned earlier, a group of concerned citizens banded together in 1949 to form the Sweetwater Valley Civic Association (SVCA). The initial motivation for the citizen action came when the California Division of Highways proposed to acquire right-of-way and construct State Highway 54 through the valley, following the present alignment of Bonita Road. It was the generally accepted belief among residents that increased accessibility in the form of a highway would lead to increased land development pressures, and, led by an attorney who lived in the valley, the SVCA was formed. A feasibility study was conducted and the results submitted to the San Diego County Board of Supervisors. This led to the cancellation of plans for the highway.¹⁰

The SVCA remained active in valley affairs after the highway problem was solved, maintaining an awareness of all development plans as subdivision maps were filed. The group was instrumental in the modification of a number of developments, usually succeeding in obtaining lower densities than those requested by developers, plus achieving outright cancellation of plans for two mobile home parks. Internal conflict was not uncommon, especially since some SVCA members owned large parcels of land in the valley and were thereby directly involved in some of the controversial projects. The SVCA survived those early turbulent years, however, its members bound by the common bond of concern for "their valley." By 1960 the membership numbered almost 500 citizens.¹¹

Although this writer was not able to make a determination as to cause, it appears that the strength of the SVCA, and the extent of its participation

in county government, led to the creation of a condition that would facilitate rapid urbanization, and ultimately overwhelm the organization, and that was the problem of annexations of valley lands by neighboring cities. When landowners were unable to obtain desired zoning from the county government because of SVCA pressure, they would turn to either Chula Vista or National City where rezoning would be established as a condition of annexation. Once the cities had completed annexation the owner could develop his land in accordance with the rezoning agreement. As a means of circumventing SVCA influence, National City annexed 18.74 acres of valley lands in 1959, and in 1960 Chula Vista annexed two parcels totalling 98.20 acres.¹²

The SVCA responded immediately to the new threat and the minutes of the association meeting on July 26, 1960, read in part, "Moved, seconded and passed that directors have a study made of the feasibility of incorporating the valley."¹³ The concern, and determination, of the SVCA members are reflected in the following entries in the meeting of September 27, 1960:

President urged members to report to their local directors any information coming to their attention regarding the rezoning of any property near them. . . . Member Nixdorf reported on the subcommittee meeting with Mr. Miles in Chula Vista City Council Chambers. Purpose of meeting was to defer the annexation of the valley land until the residents of the valley had had an opportunity to study the problem and express their desires. Nixdorf reported that he had received no encouragement from the Miles group and as a result the directors, acting on the advice of their attorney, had taken legal steps in the form of a petition signed by over twenty-five valley residents showing their intention to incorporate the valley to defer annexations. . . . Member Meyers proposed a motion to authorize the Board of Directors to initiate a study to provide the valley residents with the necessary information to establish the course to be taken regarding incorporation, annexation, or status quo, and the cost to be paid, through subscriptions in the valley.¹⁴

The motion to authorize the study was passed, and the Public Affairs Research Institute of San Diego State College was commissioned to conduct an incorporation feasibility study. The Institute submitted its report to the SVCA on November 22, 1960, under a letter of transmittal which read in part: ". . . The laws of the State of California will permit incorporation of the Bonita-Sunnyside area; the facts presented in this report indicate the extent of feasibility of incorporation."¹⁵

The SVCA found the contents of the report favorable to the extent that petitions were circulated in the spring of 1961 to call for an election

on the subject of incorporation. An opposition group consisting of owners of vacant parcels of land was formed and that group also circulated petitions calling for the denial of an election. The opposition group filed petitions with the Clerk of San Diego County bearing what was ostensibly the signatures of owners of 51 per cent of the property in the valley, a sufficient number to cause the Board of Supervisors to deny an election. Two members of the SVCA filed a successful lawsuit challenging the authenticity of a portion of the opposition signatures; however, the presiding judge, while ruling in favor of the SVCA, found that no statute existed to require the Board of Supervisors to reverse its decision and allow an election, and the first move to incorporate the valley ended at that point.¹⁶

Still determined to exercise some control over the development of the valley, the SVCA turned to a new direction and on September 27, 1961 the president reported to the Association:

Our prime objective is to look ahead, to explore the possibilities of annexation to Chula Vista, San Diego, or National City in order to obviate the necessity for fighting spot annexations, zone changes, disrupting developers, etc. With the defeat of the move for incorporation anything can happen.¹⁷

Minutes of meetings for the remainder of 1961 and most of 1962 bear reports of meetings with officials of Chula Vista and the City of San Diego with negative results. San Diego officials indicated that there was no interest in that city toward annexing the valley and recommended that the SVCA direct its efforts toward trying to annex to Chula Vista. At one point the Planning Department of Chula Vista prepared proposed zoning ordinances to apply to valley lands in the event annexation occurred but the matter dropped due to lack of interest in the valley. No effort was ever made to annex to National City.¹⁸

On November 13, 1962, the SVCA president reported to the membership on the status of the valley. Included was a statement that the number of residential dwellings had reached 1,150, an increase of 400 from the same period in 1952. He also reported that there were four development projects planned or in progress, including a 100-apartment complex planned for Bonita. He stated that two annexations of valley lands by Chula Vista were pending, one of a small area in the southwest portion, and a 97-acre parcel that would encompass the community shopping center in Bonita. Upon completion of the report the members voted to ask the San Diego County Board of Supervisors to

prepare a master plan governing the development of the Sweetwater Valley.¹⁹ In April 1964 the president reported that the county planning staff had completed such a master plan.²⁰

Subdivision activity was at a standstill between 1964 and 1968, possibly because of competition from a 500-plus acre subdivision adjacent to Southwestern College approximately three miles southeast of Bonita, but commercial development continued. The SVCA monitored the commercial growth and was instrumental in establishing regulations requiring architectural designs compatible with the rural atmosphere.²¹

The SVCA has survived a number of crises in its twenty-plus years of existence when philosophical differences, or personal involvement in land development, caused the membership to split into factions; however, the greatest challenge faced by the group was generated on September 30, 1970, when the Mayor of Chula Vista sent a letter to all valley residents stating the desires of Chula Vista to annex the entire rural portion of the valley. This writer attended a number of SVCA meetings when the proposed annexation was the only agenda item and it appeared that a breach was developing in the membership which could prove to be irreversible. Attendance at the meetings was low and a number of the members had resigned, including some of the original group who founded the organization in 1949. Remaining group leadership consisted mainly of long-time members who were veterans of the "wars of preservation" and who had seen a steady erosion of the rural atmosphere for more than two decades. These leaders generally favored annexation as a means to achieve renewed control over development in the valley through direct participation in the planning process, and though the SVCA initially voted to maintain a neutral position in the annexation move, it ultimately took a positive stand in favor of annexation.

In December 1970 an organization of valley residents, most of whom were also members of the SVCA, was formed to promote annexation, adopting the title "Sweetwater Valley Annexation Committee." The committee filed an application with the Local Agency Formation Commission to annex the valley to Chula Vista. On March 1, 1971, the LAFCO unanimously voted to approve the application, setting the stage for a heated conflict that would last for nearly eight months and create bitterness that may never be eliminated from the valley.

Opposition to annexation quickly formed, and, as in the case of

resistance to the incorporation effort a decade earlier, the strongest objections were voiced by persons who owned undeveloped parcels of land, and those persons were joined in 1970 by members of the real estate sales profession. The objections were based on the fear that zoning regulations imposed by Chula Vista would be more stringent than those of San Diego County. From the standpoint of numbers, greatest opposition came from residents of subdivisions where homes were on one-half to one acre lots with county zoning designators E-1A and E-1 which permitted owners to construct corrals and keep horses on the property. In spite of assurances from Chula Vista city officials these residents expressed fears that they would ultimately lose the right to keep horses on their property.

The opposition officially organized their group under the title of "Valley Planning Association" (VPA), with membership coming in part from dissident former members of the SVCA, and leadership coming from the ranks of realtors and potential land developers. According to the Chula Vista Star-News:

The purpose of the Valley Planning Association is to obtain information concerning the incorporation of an area located in, around, and adjacent to the Sweetwater-Bonita Fire District community concerning the advantages and disadvantages of incorporation, and to collect and expend whatever sums may be necessary and appropriate to accomplish the purposes described herein.²²

The stated goal of the VPA was changed to include investigations of the implications in annexing to Chula Vista or maintaining the status quo. A fundraising drive was conducted in the valley by the VPA and a consulting firm, Darley-Gobar Associates of San Diego was employed in mid-November 1970 to conduct a study and make a report of the findings no later than January 15, 1971.²³

During the summer of 1971 the proponents of annexation circulated petitions and succeeded in obtaining the necessary signatures of 25 per cent of registered voters to place annexation on a ballot. The petitions were filed with the city of Chula Vista, the signatures validated, and a special election was scheduled for October 26, 1971. During the same period members of the VPA circulated petitions to obtain the signatures of owners of more than 50 per cent of the property in the valley, based on assessed valuation, in an effort to block the special election. Their efforts failed, however, when petitions filed with the city of Chula Vista were found to contain signatures of those

Owning only 49.48 per cent of the property. The VPA then filed a lawsuit in the Superior Court, claiming that the City of Chula Vista improperly disallowed the value of certain parcels in determining the total assessed value of property owned by signators. A court hearing was postponed until after the election, and October 26, the residents of the Sweetwater Valley voted overwhelmingly against annexation, 1,379 votes to 737 votes, with 71 per cent of the registered voters casting their ballots.²⁴ For the second time in a decade the SVCA had failed in its bid to remove the Sweetwater Valley from the jurisdiction of the San Diego government.

The implications of the refusal of the residents to annex to Chula Vista became apparent the day following the election when the mayor of that city said:

The valley residents have said that we don't want your services and we don't want your planning. Historically Chula Vista has turned down requested annexations that don't conform to the character of the valley. But now we will have to look at these from a standpoint of whether they would be good development strictly for Chula Vista and how they pertain to our zoning and city development.²⁵

Within three months the piece-meal annexations by Chula Vista and National City, which had been suspended while the major annexation was being considered, were resumed; however, of greater significance were the subdivisions approved by the county government immediately following the election. By the end of 1972 a total of 1,215 residential dwellings were either under construction or had been approved for construction, a number sufficient to increase the valley population by more than 50 per cent.

Piece-Meal Annexations

As mentioned earlier, the first annexations of valley lands occurred in 1959 and 1960 when National City and Chula Vista annexed floodplain parcels in the vicinity of Highland Avenue. These annexations brought the corporate limits of the cities together on the floodplain, and in each case, the lands were zoned for commercial and/or industrial use. Piece-meal annexations continued throughout the remainder of the study period and by 1970 Chula Vista had annexed 20 separate parcels totalling 733.88 acres, and National City had annexed 552.76 acres in 23 parcels, a total of 1,286.64 acres. The largest single annexations on the part of either city involved golf courses--in 1966 Chula Vista purchased Rohr Park from the Rohr Aircraft Employees Association

and annexed the park, along with a golf course. In 1969 and 1970, the owner of the Bonita Golf Course applied for and was granted the right to annex to National City.²⁶

Flood Control

A controversial project affecting residents of the valley in the early 1970's involved the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers plans to construct a flood control channel from Bonita Mesa Road westerly to San Diego Bay. Approved by the United States Congress in August under Public Law 90-483, the channel is part of a major project which includes construction of California State Highway 54, a divided highway with the west bound lanes on the north side of the channel and the east bound lanes on the south side of the channel, both using materials excavated from the channel for a roadbed. Major interchanges would be constructed at both Interstate 805 and Interstate 5. The channel itself would be trapezoidal in cross-section with an earth bottom and rock revetted slopes.

The Sweetwater Valley Civic Association involved itself in the project when the Bonita Golf Course was annexed to National City and rezoned for use as a regional shopping center, a doubtful use if the flood control channel were not constructed. The SVCA initiated action to affect cancellation of that portion of the channel between Bonita Mesa Road and Interstate 805 on the basis that the proposed shopping center would be the only development requiring flood protection, and that the golf course could better serve public needs if left as open space. At a meeting of September 14, 1972, held in National City, the district Engineer of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers announced that the channel would be terminated at Interstate 805, with the Bonita Golf Course to be used as a natural ponding area. At the end of the study period no definitive action had been taken on the channel between I-805 and San Diego Bay.

Public Safety

The growth in fire protection services available to valley residents has kept pace with the urbanization process, beginning with an all-volunteer service in 1949 and developing into a fully-equipped service with a staff of ten professionally trained fire fighters employed on a full-time basis in the early 1970's.

Prior to 1949 fire protection services were provided by the California State Division of Forestry from a station located on East "J" Street in what is now a part of Chula Vista. With subdivisions making their appearance on the landscape the residents realized the need for a more readily available service. A local volunteer fire department was formed and in February 1950 incorporation papers were signed creating the Upper Sweetwater Valley Volunteer Fire Department. The initial equipment consisted of two fruit sprayer trucks, one each from the Sweetwater Fruit Company and the Williams Ranch. Each truck was equipped with a 500 gallon tank and a spray nozzle, and one was to be available at all times for emergency use. The first fire station was in space provided by the Sweetwater Fruit Company in the packing shed, the Old Red Barn. In the summer of 1950 the fire department staged a horse show, using funds realized from the show to purchase a surplus fire truck from the Division of Forestry, plus a siren for use in calling volunteers when a fire alarm was sounded. In 1951 the Sweetwater Fruit Company donated one-half acre of land, the present site of the fire station, to the volunteer fire department. Through fund raising drives and the donation of both labor and materials by valley residents, a new station was completed and dedicated on November 4, 1951. By 1953 demands on the department were such that residents formed the Bonita-Sunnyside Fire Protection District through the election process, thereby establishing a special taxing district through which taxes would be levied to cover the necessary costs of adequate fire protection. Except for a salaried Fire Chief, personnel continued to be drawn from volunteers until 1959 when the first paid fire fighter was employed. Throughout the early 1960's the number of volunteers dwindled and by 1968 there were only three names on the volunteer list. In 1969 the department became staffed entirely by paid fire fighters.²⁷

Police protection for those areas of the valley not annexed to Chula Vista or National City is provided by the San Diego County Sheriff's Department, with the California Highway Patrol responsible for traffic control and highway safety.

Schools

At the end of the study period there were three modern elementary schools in the valley, the Sunnyside School, built in 1959 to replace the original facility which had stood since about 1900, the Ellen B. Allen School,

built in 1947, and the Valley Vista School which was completed in 1969. The Bonita Sunnyside Schools had been a part of the Chula Vista Union School District since 1921 when they were annexed to that district. In 1950 the Chula Vista Union School was dissolved in order that the Chula Vista City School District might be formed, an act that automatically dropped the Bonita and Sunnyside Schools from the district. They were immediately reannexed and have been a part of the Chula Vista City School District ever since.²⁸

The valley lies entirely within the boundaries of the Sweetwater Union High School District for secondary education purposes, and students attend schools in either Chula Vista or National City, depending on the location of their homes in the valley.

Utilities

Water service to the valley is provided by the California-American Water Company, successors to the California Water and Telephone Company (see Chapter VI); telephone services are provided by Pacific Telephone, and gas and electricity by the San Diego Gas and Electric Company.

¹The Water Story of the Sweetwater District (San Diego, Ca.: California Water and Telephone Co., 1955), p. 4.

²Dewey Wright, Chula Vista Lumber Company employee, 1920 to 1950, Chula Vista, California, personal interview, April 1, 1972.

³S.G. Gassaway, long-time resident of the Sweetwater Valley, Bonita, California, personal interview, April 6, 1972.

⁴Subdivision Map Files, San Diego County Recorder.

⁵H. Rupp, San Diego County Public Health Department, San Diego, personal interview, April 3, 1972.

⁶William Magill, Chula Vista Public Works Department, Chula Vista, California, personal interview, November 10, 1971.

⁷Lloyd Hill, McMillan Construction Company, National City, California, personal interview, January 17, 1971.

⁸San Diego Union, September 22, 1963.

⁹Postmaster, Bonita Post Office, personal interview, March 28, 1971.

¹⁰S.G. Gassaway, personal interview, April 6, 1972.

¹¹Mrs. William Spies, Sweetwater Valley resident since 1949, Bonita, California, personal interview, March 28, 1972.

¹²Planning Department records of the cities of Chula Vista and National City, California.

¹³Sweetwater Valley Civic Association, Minutes, meeting of July 26, 1960.

¹⁴Sweetwater Valley Civic Association, Minutes, September 27, 1960.

¹⁵Public Affairs Research Institute, "Bonita-Sunnyside Incorporation Feasibility Study" (unpublished report, San Diego State College, November 1960).

¹⁶Mrs. William Spies, personal interview, March 28, 1971.

¹⁷SVCA, Minutes, September 27, 1961.

¹⁸SVCA, Minutes, 1961-62.

¹⁹SVCA, Minutes, November 13, 1962.

²⁰SVCA, Minutes, April 28, 1964.

²¹S.G. Gassaway, personal interview, April 6, 1972.

²²Gordon Campbell, Chairman, Valley Planning Association, personal interview, November 30, 1970.

²⁴Chula Vista Star-News, October 28, 1971.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Records of Planning Departments, Cities of Chula Vista and National City.

²⁷Bonita-Sunnyside Fire Protection District, Fire Protection Manual, 1969.

²⁸Personal letter from Mr. Joseph W. Odenthal, Assistant Superintendent, Chula Vista City School District, September 22, 1971.

CHAPTER VIII

THE COMMUNITY--1973

The Valley is known as a middle to upper income enclave. This is supported by the property values in the area. Although income data for the valley are not available, median income has been simulated from the market value of the area's housing. It is estimated that Bonita's current median household income is in excess of \$14,000. The median income calculated from Sales Management Survey of Buying Power--1970, for San Diego County and Chula Vista is \$7,489 and \$8,301 respectively. Sales Management income estimates are the most reliable income data for most areas, but usually have been found to over-estimate their income levels. This adds further credence to the high income level of the Sweetwater Valley.¹

The Sweetwater Valley community in 1973 is essentially a bedroom community, populated by middle and upper income groups living in low density single family dwellings on relatively large lots, in newer subdivisions on smaller lots, or in high-rent apartment complexes. The dwellings, are for the most part, of recent construction and of good quality with a high level of maintenance. A minor number of obsolete and substandard dwelling units exist in the Glen Abbey section in the west and in the Sunnyside section in the east. The only multiple family dwelling units located in the community are within the corporate limits of Chula Vista. Two operating dairies remain, and some mixed vegetable farming is done on scattered small plots. One small, independent sand and gravel operation exists in the river bed opposite Sunnyside, and all other employment within the community is in service industries serving the indigenous population (Figure 18).

Social life is equestrian oriented, and paddocks and corrals dot the landscape. Estimates of the number of horses present range from 2,000 to 2,500, including those on one large and ten small commercial horse ranches. Except for one trail circling the 140-acre Chula Vista Municipal Golf Course, there are no official riding trails; however, vacant lands are heavily utilized by riders, with no apparent objections by landowners. Horse shows are staged in the valley throughout the year, the most notable being the annual

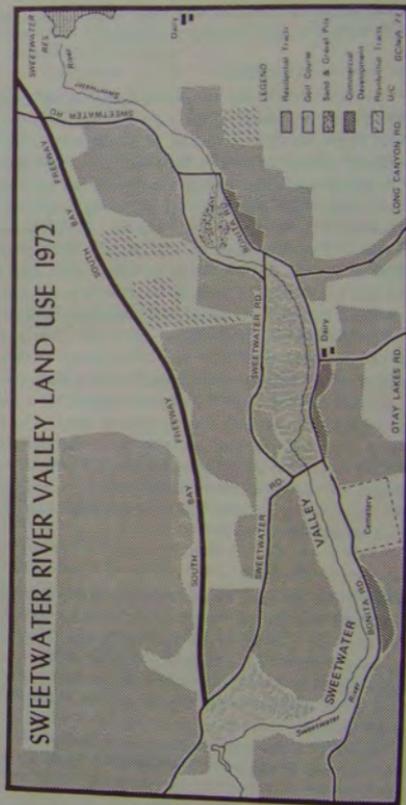


Fig. 18 Sweetwater River Valley Land Use 1972

show of the Silvergate Riding Club, the oldest and largest riding club in San Diego County, held at Bradley's Bonita Valley Farm.²

Census Data

A precise population figure for the Sweetwater Valley is difficult to obtain since census tracts which include statistics for the valley extend beyond the limits of the valley. Further, while the valley lies mostly within the Sweetwater Subregional Area of San Diego County, portions are also included in the National City, Southeast San Diego, and Chula Vista subregional areas, rendering it impossible for the county to provide anything more than a reasonably accurate estimate.³ A figure of approximately 7,000 persons at the beginning of 1971 can be assumed, based on two unrelated surveys conducted in the fall of 1970, one by the Public Works Department, City of Chula Vista, and a second by students enrolled in an Urban Sociology course at Southwestern College. The Public Works Department survey, designed to support a possible annexation proceeding, listed a population of 6,990 persons living in 1,973 dwelling units.⁴ The student survey, which eliminated a portion of the valley from its coverage, listed a population of 6,080 persons in 1,600 dwelling units.⁵ Additional support for a population of approximately 7,000 can be obtained from information supplied by the Postmaster, Bonita, in March 1971 which indicated that postal deliveries were being made to 1,723 residential dwellings in the valley.⁶ When multiplied by a factor of 3.8, the household size of the general area as reported in the 1960 census report, a population of 6,547 could be postulated for the residences receiving mail deliveries.⁷

The People

The high income structure of the Sweetwater Valley population would tend to indicate that employed residents are at the professional and managerial levels. Property values have traditionally been higher than those in surrounding areas, restricting purchase to persons at higher income levels. A personal investigation by the writer in 1971 disclosed that residential dwellings in the valley commanded prices 5 to 12 per cent higher than homes of equal size and quality on comparable lots in adjacent cities, and the difference is assumed to be the price the buyer is willing and can afford to pay for what he considers to be a rural environment. A number of descendants

of early settlers have remained in the valley, living on estates carved from citrus orchards of former years.

A stratification of the society has occurred over the past two decades producing three distinct levels in the population. One level consists of members, or descendants, of "first families" who are no longer active in civic affairs, exerting little or no influence over matters affecting the valley. A second level is made up of those residents who came to the valley in the early years following World War II and purchased homes in the estate category, many surrounded with mature citrus trees which are holdovers from the orchard that occupied the site. This group inherited a part of the atmosphere of bygone days when the valley was truly rural, and it was this group that provided the leadership for the Sweetwater Valley Civic Association during the years when the SVCA exercised a measure of control over developmental policies in the valley. The third level includes those residents who are relatively "late-comers" living in subdivisions where lot sizes will not permit the stabling of horses, or who live in apartments in Bonita Village. This latter group, while constituting a majority in the residential community, has shown little interest in participating in civic affairs.

Land Use

In September 1960, the California Division of Highways acquired most of the valley land between Edgemere and Bonita Mesa Road for use as right-of-way for the proposed Interstate Freeway 905. Except for the Bonita Golf Course which was constructed in 1962 on land remaining in private ownership, the remainder of the land in that area has been vacant and unused.⁸ To the east, opposite Bonita and on the floodplain, the Chula Vista Municipal Golf Course was constructed in the early 1960's on land that had been used irregularly for pasture and for growing hay. The Bonita Verde Subdivision was developed on the northwest corner of the golf course in the mid-1960's, and a large apartment was built on the floodplain on the south side of the golf course. A second apartment complex adjoining the first was under construction, also on the floodplain, at the beginning of 1973. In the late 1960's the Bonita Glen Subdivision was built partially on the floodplain in the area of Bonita Road and Central Avenue on land with no history of extensive use in the memories of the oldest inhabitants. The Bonita Glen development marked the easternmost extension of floodplain development for

commercial or residential use.

In late 1970 the San Diego County Board of Supervisors approved an ordinance which would have significant impact on land use in the valley. The ordinance, No. 3583, established a Flood Plain Overlay Zone and a Flood Control Overlay Zone, and the former is quoted in part:

No building designed or used for human habitation or as a place of work or by the public shall be constructed, erected, placed, or maintained in a floodway; provided, however, this restriction shall not preclude the Director of Building Inspection from authorizing the construction, erection, or placement and maintenance of a temporary building within the floodway during the period from the beginning of May to the end of October.⁹

Following passage of the ordinance, all Floodplain lands in the Sweetwater Valley under the jurisdiction of the county government were assigned a zoning designator of A-1(B), placing them in the agricultural category with a maximum of one residential dwelling per eight acres. Neither Chula Vista nor National City has enacted restrictive zoning ordinances governing Floodplain development.

Another decision on the part of the County Board of Supervisors affecting the valley came on December 19, 1970, when that body contracted with the firm of Planners Southwest Incorporated to prepare a study and report to guide possible acquisition and development of the Sweetwater River Floodplain between the reservoir and San Diego Bay for regional park purposes. The stated objectives of the study were:

1. Identify recreational and open space potentials within the environmental setting.
2. Project broad recreational demands for various types of facilities and activities.
3. Assess the relationships between the park and future development of adjoining areas as well as the region as a whole.
4. Establish constraints imposed by freeway and highway systems, drainage and flood control proposals, utility systems, development factors and current planning programs.
5. Investigate alternative methods of creating and preserving the park through acquisitions, easements, and various trade-offs.
6. Determine proposed park boundaries based on alternative development concepts and factors related to use, circulation, relationships to adjacent lands and support systems, and cost effectiveness.
7. Result in a schematic use plan and report indicating proposed boundaries, acquisition and development priorities, suggested facilities, design concepts and implementation measures which could serve as a basis for planning policies for the potential park and the Sweetwater Planning area.¹⁰

The area designated for study encompassed approximate 1,950 acres, all within the Floodplain boundaries.

The regional park proposal immediately became controversial in the valley community, with the Sweetwater Valley Civic Association endorsing the proposal and the Valley Planning Association representing the opposition. The SVCA based its endorsement on the premise that the park would not only provide much-needed recreational facilities, but that it would insure that the floodplain would be kept permanently free from development. The VPA objections were based primarily on the belief that landowners would be deprived of the right to develop their lands to the highest and best use, and further, that a regional park would attract large crowds of people to the valley thereby lowering the quality of the environment.

After several public hearings, the County Board of Supervisors gave approval in principle to the regional park at an official meeting held at Southwestern College in May 1971.¹¹ In December 1971 the Board of Supervisors designated county funds in the amount of \$389,500.00 for the purchase of the first land to be included in the new park.¹² Additional lands had been acquired by the end of the study period, and the park boundaries had been extended to include lands surrounding Sweetwater Reservoir. No estimate was available as to when the park would be completed and ready for public use.

On the valley terraces the once-productive citrus orchards have been entirely replaced by residential developments. When these developments occurred in the 1950's and 1960's they were interspersed with large expanses of open space, land which the orchardists had found difficult to cultivate and/or irrigate. Those undeveloped parcels contributed greatly to the rural character of the valley; however, most of the open space had been committed to development and the land denuded preparatory to new-home construction by the beginning of 1973.

¹Darley/Gobar Associates, Inc., Community Planning Study, the Sweetwater Valley (unpublished paper prepared for the Valley Planning Association, 1971), p. 11.

²Robert Bradley, owner of Bradley's Bonita Valley Farm, personal interview, December 23, 1971.

³Dennis Manyak, San Diego County Planning Department, personal interview, February 9, 1971.

4. William Magill, Chula Vista Public Works Department, personal interview, November 19, 1971.
5. W.J. Switzer, Geography Department, Southwestern College, personal interview, December 11, 1971.
6. Postmaster, Bonita, California, personal interview, March 28, 1971.
7. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, U.S. Census of Population and Housing: 1960, Final Report PHC (1)-136.
8. Ray Koenig, owner of the Bonita Golf Course, personal interview, April 12, 1972.
9. San Diego County Ordinance No. 3583, approved by the Board of Supervisors, September 16, 1970.
10. Planners/Southwest, Inc., Development Plan Study and Report, Sweetwater Regional Park (unpublished report prepared for County of San Diego, 1971), pp. 2-3.
11. Chula Vista Star-News, May 23, 1971.
12. Ibid., December 23, 1971.

CHAPTER IX

SUMMARY

In its more than a century of American ownership the Sweetwater Valley evolved from vacant land on the Rancho de la Nacion, populated only by wild Spanish cattle which were remnants of presidio herds, to a thriving community of approximately 7,000 people. Enroute to its present status the valley could boast the first complete water storage and distribution system in San Diego County when the Sweetwater Dam was completed in 1888, and was the only coastal valley to have rail transportation service. The residents were subjected to weather catastrophes in the form of floods and freezing temperatures but were nonetheless able to develop a highly profitable citrus industry.

Available population statistics show that the growth of the valley remained virtually static for nearly half a century, changing only after World War II had brought major growth problems to the entire San Diego area. Early post war development did little to affect the rural atmosphere of the valley because of the large-lot requirements established by the San Diego County Health Department, and because subdivisions were spaced by both distance and time. The completion of a Metropolitan Sewer District trunk line through the valley in 1963 made possible a higher density development.

A cultural feature which has remained relatively unchanged since the beginning of the twentieth century is the system of roads traversing the valley. In 1900 they were barely adequate to meet the needs of travellers, and in 1973 the same statement applies. A few minor realignments have been made over the years, and pavement added, but the Sweetwater Road on the north side and Bonita Road on the south side have remained two-lane roads winding gently through the valley. They are actually fewer modes of access now than existed prior to 1916 when the NC&O Railway was destroyed by flood waters. A freeway, Interstate 805, when completed in about 1975, will cross from north to south between Bonita Mesa Road and Edgemere Avenue. If the

present rate of growth continues the freeway will have little impact since the valley will have been fully urbanized before the freeway is completed.

In the broad sense there has been only one major land use change in the Sweetwater Valley--from citrus culture to residential development. The dairy industry, the only other agricultural endeavor to make a significant impact on the economy, occupied parcels of land generally unsuitable for citrus culture because of soil conditions or irrigation requirements, and although at one time there were more than a dozen dairies in operation, the tenure of many was so short the industry appeared to be almost transient in nature, and only two remained at the end of the study period. Nor did the mixed vegetable farming ever make heavy demands on the valley from the standpoint of acreage utilized. The citrus industry literally dominated the landscape from the period of earliest development until the period of urbanization began after World War II.

As the last orchards disappeared from the valley, so did the cohesion of the common bond of "living in an orchard estate" disappear. Life styles totally new to the valley emerged when subdivision requirements were relaxed to permit reduced lot sizes, and when multiple family dwelling units were constructed along Bonita Road. The occupants of these tract homes and apartments felt no kinship with the past and, because of their mobility, seemed to take little interest in the future, as evidenced by their not becoming involved in the activities of the civic organizations.

A recurrent theme throughout the study has been the perception of the valley by its residents, and residents of adjacent cities, as a serene, natural resource oriented area. The serenity once enjoyed by the residents has been irretrievably lost, however, as expansion pressure from surrounding urban areas have caused valley lands to develop at an ever-increasing tempo. The Sweetwater Valley Civic Association, once the guardian of the rural atmosphere, has found itself nearly powerless in the face of new attitudes brought to the valley by residents of relatively high-density subdivisions. A majority of these new residents joined with land developers to defeat an annexation effort which would have left some control over development in valley hands, but ignored, or were not concerned by, the fact that the same developers are accelerating urbanization of the valley. As more and more land is denuded and graded for building sites, it becomes increasingly necessary to exercise one's imagination to see the valley as a rural enclave.

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ABSTRACT

ABSTRACT

This is a study of the historical geography of the lower Sweetwater River Valley, located in southwestern San Diego County, California, and now a part of the San Diego Metropolitan area. The study period begins in 1868 when the first steps in the development of the valley commenced, and continues through the end of 1972. There are three distinct periods covered by the study: (1) the years of development prior to 1900, (2) the quiet years between 1900 and 1947, and (3) the period of rapid urbanization following World War II, ending the traditional rural atmosphere of the valley.

Under the early promotional efforts of the Kimball brothers the Sweetwater Valley underwent rapid transformation in the late years of the nineteenth century, becoming the only coastal valley to ever be served by daily rail transportation, and the first coastal valley to have its own water storage and distribution system when the Sweetwater Dam was completed in 1888. Commercial scale agriculture developed before the end of the century, with lemon production dominating the economy. The land boom in Southern California in the 1880's had little effect on the valley, ending prior to the completion of the water system and railroad.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the valley had reached a plateau in development, and the population remained virtually static through the end of World War II. Lemon culture was improved as new varieties were added, and a dairy industry developed on a limited scale. In the years following World War II both the citrus and dairy industries declined drastically, the former because of labor shortages and high costs of operation, and the latter because of economies of scale.

Beginning in 1948 the valley citrus orchards have subdivided into relatively large building, one or more acres in size which created an equestrian-oriented way of life. The extension of sewer services into the valley in 1963 made possible subdivisions consisting of much smaller building lot sizes, leading to strong, but unsuccessful, resistance by the early residents to the high-density development.

The importance in the study of a microregion such as a rural coastal valley is that it helps to point out the process of residential development and the inadequacies of long range planning. The Sweetwater Valley represents a missed opportunity to make the most effective use of a high quality natural environment.

Research methods involved extensive use of local libraries, and records of county and city governments. Great reliance was placed on personal interviews with long-time residents of the valley, many of whom are descendents of original settlers and therefore able to provide previously undocumented material relative to early development and land use.

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DEDICATION

With heartfelt gratitude, the Chula Vista Historical Society thanks Eugene Victor Coleman for his permission to have our Society publish his thesis.

This book is dedicated to him for his hours of research to make this thesis the most outstanding book of the Sweetwater Valley and a special dedication to the people who love the valley.

JOHN ROJAS JR
President
CHULA VISTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

October 1985

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