

OUR  
HISTORIC COUNTY  
of  
KERN

A Pamphlet Written and Compiled  
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## FOREWORD

Kern County is approaching her centennial years, and as such it seems important that the many visitors to our area, as well as our own residents, should be fully aware of the county's past.

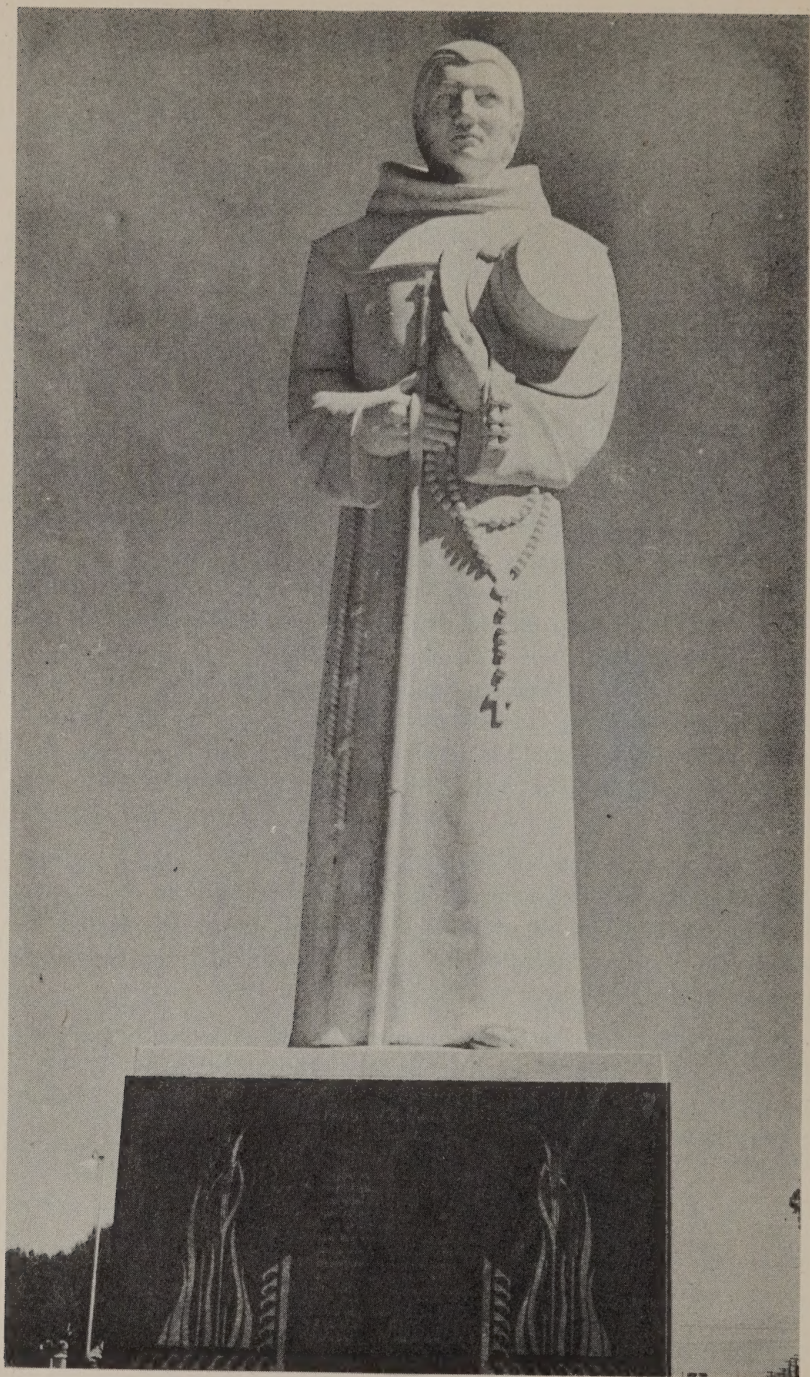
This second edition of HISTORIC COUNTY OF KERN, though slightly revised, continues to offer the county's landmarks their historical reward. Thanks is due the County Board of Supervisors and the Chamber of Commerce for their original assistance. Mr. Frank Latta, Director of the Kern County Museum, gave freely of his knowledge and aided with material and photographs from the county archives. Credit for the illustrated map and landmarks placement justly goes to Miss Helene Bing. Other working members from the Kern County Historical Society included Mrs. Georgia Sanders, Vice-president and an authority in her own right on local color; Dr. P. N. Root, Chairman of Landmarks for the Society, and Mr. Lawrence McClure, schoolman, who provided the layout for the first edition. Their assistance is thoroughly appreciated.

Two items on the landmarks map need clarification. In 1858 a 2800 mile-long mail and passenger-carrying operation from Tipton, Missouri to San Francisco was started by John Butterfield. The dotted line shown on the map indicates the route followed and the five stops used as the six-horse stages crossed Kern County.

The numbers on the map correspond to the ones found beside the title and description of each landmark. The writer hopes that the pamphlet readers will find time to follow this map on some of their Sunday travels.

Glendon J. Rodgers





PADRE FRANCISCO GARCÉS

## PADRE FRANCISCO GARCES (I)

Searching for a shorter route from Sonora, Mexico, to Monterey brought Padre Garces into Kern County history. This event occurred on May 1, 1776, some days before our own Declaration of Independence.

Apparently striking Captain Fages trail of 1772, Garces finally entered San Joaquin Valley enroute from San Gabriel mission via Antelope Valley, the Tehachapis, Tejon Canyon and Cottonwood Creek. In the Tejon area his faithful Indian helpers refused to go farther for fear of war, and so it was that this grey clad father chanced in a lonely fashion to strike upon the broad river known today as the Kern. While stopping to rest at the river's edge he chose to name it the Rio de San Felipe.

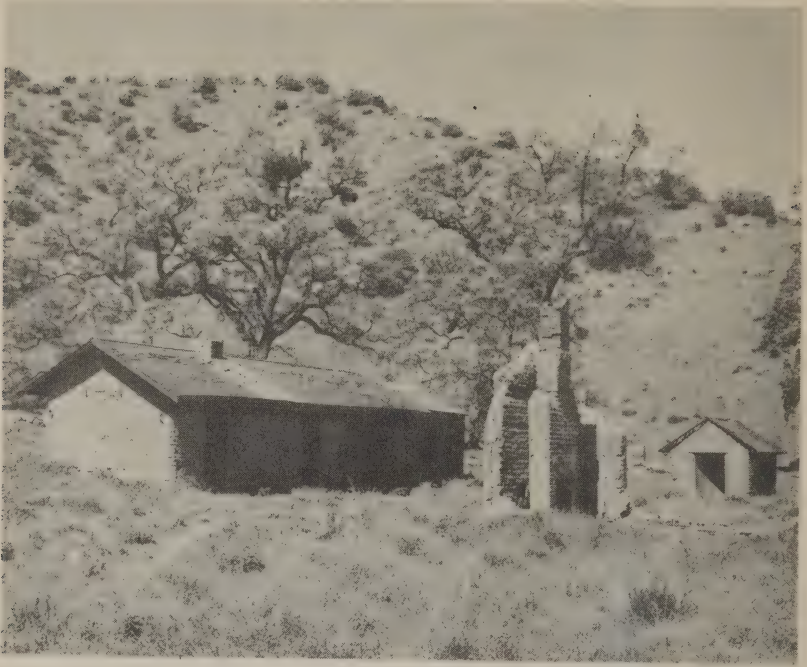
Garces with the aid of nearby Indians crossed the river and continued his wanderings northward into Tulare county in the region of White River. Again turning southward he visited the present site of Bakersfield on May 8, 1776. The good Padre chose to suggest in his diary that the bluffs of the Rio de San Felipe near the present location of the Catholic High School (called Francis Garces High School) might well serve as the site of a mission.

Garces is known by his deeds of exploration, his work and aid among the Indians of the Southwest and for setting the first white man's trail from California to Mexico. Later it was his help and advice that brought the Anza expedition into California.

On the one hundred and sixty-third anniversary of this crossing of Kern River, Bakersfield dedicated the Father Garces statue at its location on the traffic circle where Chester Avenue and Highway 99 meet. The actual marker is to be found on the Olcese Ranch which may be reached by taking the regular highway to Kern River Canyon. A second marker is to be found at the end of the main street in Arvin, in front of St. Thomas Church, indicating one of the final stops of Garces before leaving Kern County.



## FORT TEJON (2)



### FORT TEJON

Fort Tejon, the most far western of all military outposts, home of the second camel corps to be tried in United States, and the only fort built to protect the Indians from the white people was constructed of adobe and wood from the nearby forests. It stands today in ruins, yet still again to rise.

The great fort which once included 23 buildings and a regimental band was established in 1854 in its present location in Arroyo de las Uvas (Grapevine Canyon) as a protection for the Indians. Later it became a stop for the six horse stage coaches of the Butterfield Overland Mail route plying between St. Louis, Missouri, and San Francisco. Soldiers from the fort met and escorted the stages through the pass as a protective measure against bandits.

The fort that had cost the United States government over a half million dollars to build was abandoned on September 11, 1864. Today the residents of Kern County look to their history as the walls of the old military establishment arise once more, and in 1954 we shall commemorate her first hundredth birthday.

## PETER LEBEC OR LEBEQUE (3)

Peter Lebec, a French wanderer and trapper, was killed in October, 1837, by a grizzly bear that he had wounded. His companions buried him beneath the tree where he fell, near the present ruins of Fort Tejon and carved his name in the bark. The bark grew out and filled in the cuts. Years later, this section was removed from the tree, showing the name of Peter Lebec in reverse on the inside. The section of bark is now in the Kern County Free Library at Bakersfield. The tree still stands on the northwest corner of old Fort Tejon parade grounds.



PETER LEBEC TREE



CANADA DE LAS UVAS  
(Grapevine Canyon or Pass)

FAGES MARKER (4)

In 1772 Don Pedro Fages, acting governor of Alta California, while pursuing deserters from the Spanish army passed through the canyon designated as La Canada de las Uvas (Canyon of the Grapes) now called Grapevine Canyon. Fages became the first white man to cross the Tehachapi Mountains via this pass and enter San Joaquin Valley by a southern route. The present marker is located directly in front of the Florafaunium at Lebec.

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The Florafaunium is owned and operated by Mrs. Emery Whilton, wife of the founder and gatherer of this outstanding collection of California birds, animals and plant life. The building and collection are housed by Kern County, and after twelve years (1952) will become the property of the county. Mr. Whilton had spent some forty years in bringing together his materials.

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SAN SEBASTIAN INDIAN RESERVATION (5)

The Sebastian Indian Reservation was selected in 1853 by General Edward F. Beale, Superintendent of Indian Affairs for California and Nevada, as one of a series of California Indian reservations. From 1854 the number of Indians quartered there varied from 500 to 2000. The plan was to make the reservation self sufficient, and this was achieved to a large degree. Beale's policy was that of an honest and humane attempt to aid the Indians. The acquisition of title to the land where the reservation was located, under the Mexican Land Grant of 1842 by General Beale, compelled the transfer of the Indians to other reservations in 1864.



FLORAFANIUM



J. J. LOPEZ AND INDIAN CHIEF

## ROSE STATION (6)

Rose Station or Rancho Canoa (trough) as it was first known, dates back to 1857. Located about four miles north of Grapevine Station and one mile east of Highway 99, it served as a stopping place for travel between Bakersfield and Los Angeles during the 60's and 70's. In 1872 it was purchased by William Rose and J. J. Lopez. When the Butterfield stage was in operation, Rose Station served well as a watering place.



ROSE STATION

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## FAGES-ZALVIDEA CROSSING (7)

In 1806 an expedition left Santa Barbara under the command of Lt. Francisco Ruiz with Zalvidea as diarist. This was an exploratory expedition into the San Joaquin Valley to observe places where the Indians were living. The route followed an easterly direction through the Cuyama Valley, Carrizo Plains, Paleta, and then some 17 airline miles north to Rancheria Buena Vista where the group crossed the Fages trail of 1772. Later the expedition visited the site of present Bakersfield and then moved southward east of present Highway 99 to Kern Lake and San Emidio.





YOKUTS INDIAN CEMETERY (8)

The main village of the Tulamnis, one of some 50 tribes in the Yokuts group, existed along a 4000 foot strip near the outlet to Buena Vista Lake on the edge of Elk Hills. Excavations first began in 1935 with Edwin F. Walker of the Southwest Museum at Los Angeles in charge. Trenching operations soon showed the extensiveness of the site. The cemetery proved to be an exciting find for at least 104 burials were found in a space 40 by 50 feet. Information as to methods of burial, types of basketry, and fabrics made from milkweed twisted into threads all gave evidence of new ethnological material. Other items included dice made of wild walnut shells and beads made from clam, abalone and other marine life. Chalcedony arrow points were found. Probably the most comprehensive collection of trade beads yet discovered (more than 25 kinds dating from 1542 to 1860) was unearthed in this great Tulamni site.



COLONEL THOMAS BAKER

## COLONEL THOMAS BAKER (9)

From far off Zaneville, Ohio, to a little known area of the Kern River in Southern San Joaquin Valley came Colonel Thomas Baker (1810-1872), engineer. The Baker family had previously stopped in Benecia, Stockton and Visalia. In 1855 Colonel Baker entered politics as an assemblyman from Tulare County. Later he served as Senator where he attracted attention by his speeches and apparent secessionist views. In 1862 Baker, as a result of the Montgomery Patent, was able to purchase a large swampy region of about 30,000 acres later enlarged to 87,120 acres in Kern and Fresno counties.

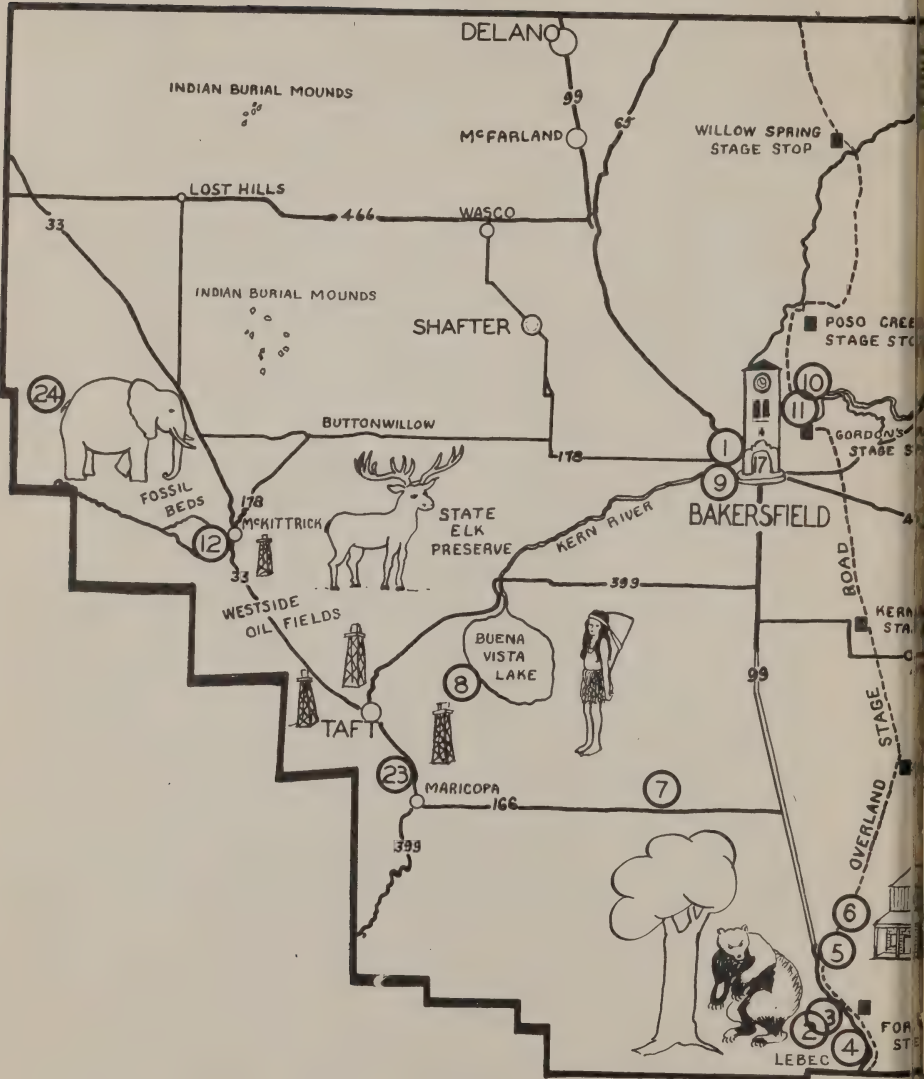
1863 saw Baker bring his family to live at Kern Island in a house purchased from Christian Bohna, located at the intersection of present 19th and M streets. Mrs. Baker, being an enterprising and observant woman, opened a school in her house and took time to teach the children of the community their 3 R's without pay. Two years later a regular teacher was hired.

Just east of the present court house, Colonel Baker fenced off ten acres which he planted to alfalfa, said to be the first in Kern County. From this he fed the horses of any who might stop. His place soon became a regular stop on the Los Angeles-Visalia road. The saying "stop at Colonel Baker's Field" became a byword from constant usage. It was a real haven on this long trip and never were hungry or weary men turned away.

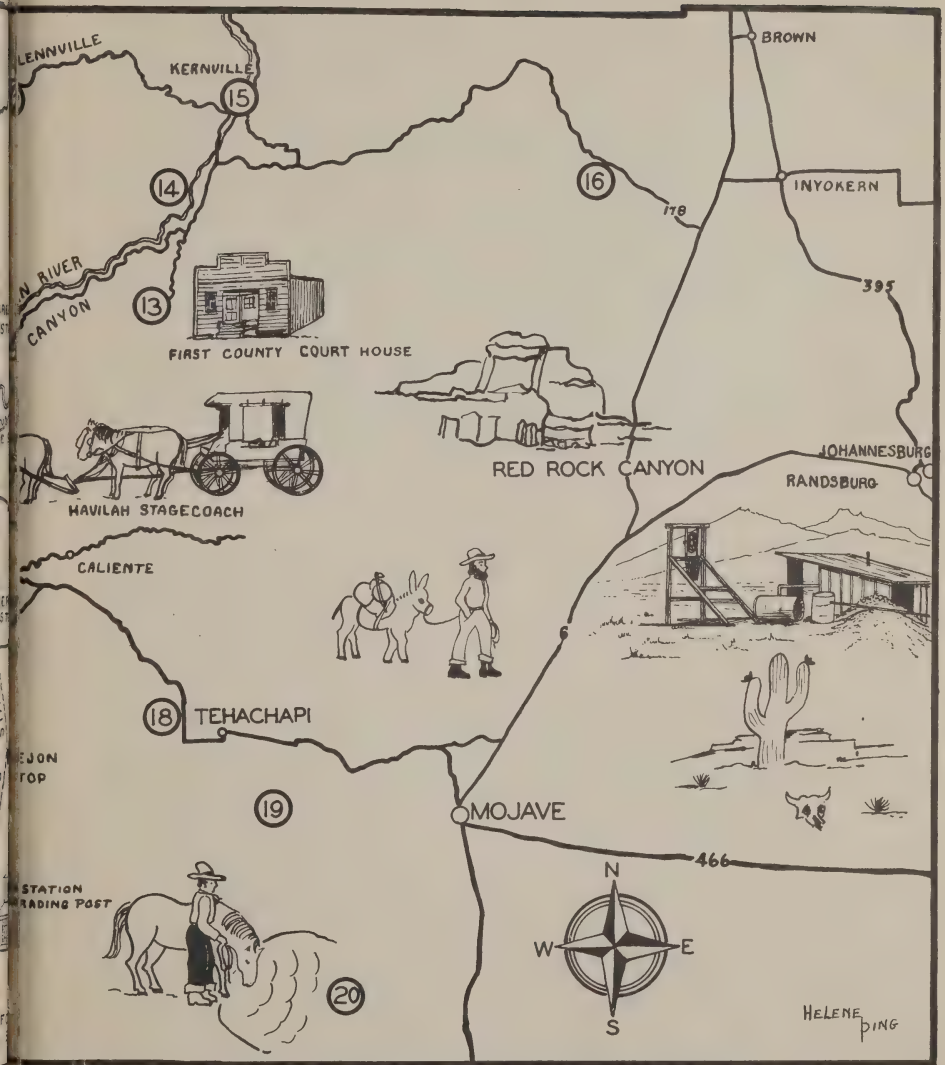
In 1866 Colonel Baker started a survey of the proposed site of the city of Bakersfield. He proposed streets  $82\frac{1}{2}$  feet wide and avenues of even greater width, 115 feet. This foresight has made little widening of any street necessary even today. Baker retained only 80 acres of his homestead. The rest he gave to the city. He died of pneumonia November 24, 1872.



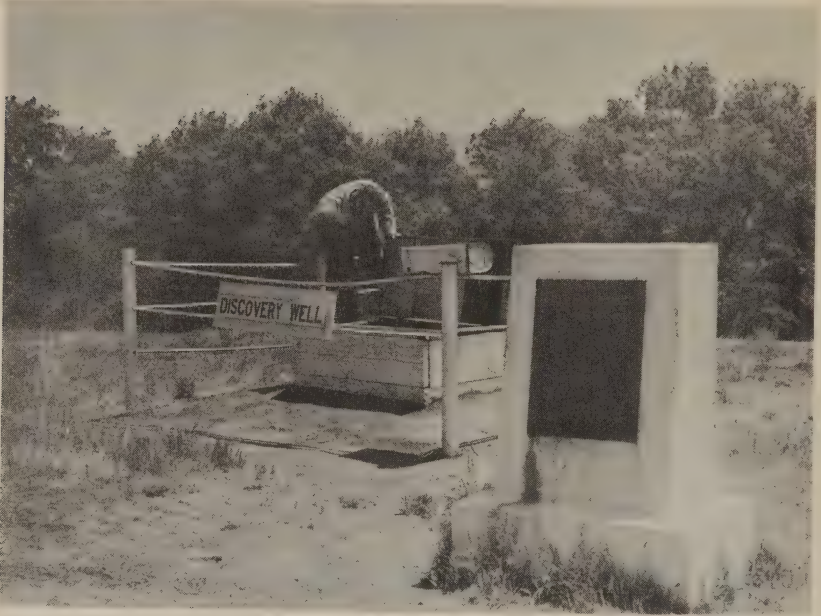
# Map of Landmarks



# in Kern County



## DISCOVERY WELL—KERN RIVER FIELD (10)



### DISCOVERY WELL

Tom Means, long a believer in the existence of oil in the area along the Kern River, finally purchased two and one half acres for \$100 from a Mr. Norris. Eleven years later Bud Elwood leased some land from Means about five miles northeast of Bakersfield and began digging a well with pick, shovel and the aid of a windlass. Oil was very apparent at 70 feet, although the well never produced over two barrels a day. The oil from this well was used to drill the first paying commercial well which was completed by Milton McWhorter only a few feet away from the discovery well. This second well came in on July 26, 1899 and proved to many, who said it could not be true, that Kern County had a new source of wealth.

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### GORDON'S FERRY (11)

Gordon's Ferry was an overhead cable type ferry operated during the 1850's by Major Gordon. This was not a very successful ferry because of the unpredictable Kern River which was either shallow enough to wade across or too swift for a ferry boat. An adobe station house was located on the south bank of Kern River just a few yards to the east of the present marker. This station was on the Butterfield Overland Mail route from 1850 to 1860. There seems to be no definite record though that the ferry was ever used by the stage people.



## WEST SIDE OILFIELDS (12)

The West Side Oilfields extends from the San Emidio Ranch in the southwestern corner of the county and moves northwest through the Sunset, Midway, McKittrick, Temblor, Lost Hills and Devil's Den districts. The history of this area goes back to about 1864 when it was known that several thousand barrels of oil were shipped to San Francisco from an area about 18 miles southeast of Buena Vista Lake. Of course evidence of oil had long existed previously, but this was the first recorded commercial effort.

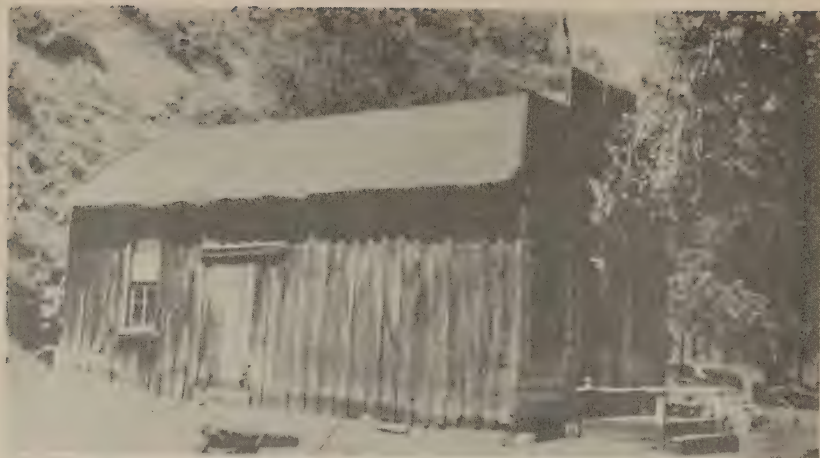
In 1872 a transfer of 640 acres in township 30, comprising the heart of the McKittrick area, was made to the Buena Vista Petroleum Company by J. O. Lovejoy. Thus 30 years before the great boom of 1899 oil was known in many of the present fields. A crude refinery, built by some Italians in the 70's in McKittrick, was not too successful. The Columbian Oil Company, organized in part by local talent, drilled on the Del Monte property without real success. In 1899 activity followed in the Sunset area. A refinery was built for making asphalt which was hauled to Bakersfield by teams of 16 and 24 horses.

Eighteen ninety-eight saw real exploration of the west side by such people as McWhorter, Doheny and others. The building of feeder line railroads by 1902 aided most of the major fields in solving their transportation problems. 1909 saw the flowing wells of Midway valley and gas wells of the Buena Vista foothills. The Lakeview Gusher made headlines in 1910, and that same year 24,680,000 barrels of oil were taken from west side territory.

The oil boom of 1910, even bringing miners from the Nevada camps into the picture, brought Taft into existence, and Bakersfield had its greatest building boom so far. Many gushers like Mays, Consolidated, Midway, Maricopa 36, Sage and others furthered speculator interest. One gusher even threw out a fair portion of a vertebrae of some prehistoric monster.

Through the following years the oil industry has moved forward, and west side fields annually yield some 45,000,000 barrels or nearly half the total county production.

It is fitting to mention here the tar pits located near McKittrick, long of historical and paleontological interest and second only in importance to the La Brea pits at Los Angeles. Through their development scientists will further our knowledge of Kern County in its earliest period.



FIRST COUNTY COURT HOUSE



PRESENT COUNTY COURT HOUSE

## HAVILAH (13)

One of the prospecting parties of Whiskey Flat, about the last week of June or early in July, 1864, went down the Kern River and up Clear Creek where they found the color of gold at Havilah, the third famous mining camp in Kern County. It is recorded that Benjamin T. Mitchell, Alexander Reid, George McKay, and Dr. C. La Borde (the French doctor) composed the discovering party, but to a man called Harpinding goes the honor of giving the new camp its name. He was one of the few early miners who seemed to have carried a Bible in his kits or his memory served him well with recollections of boyhood days in a more pious land. He turned to the second chapter of Genesis, and found in the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth verses: "A river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it parted and became four heads. The name of the first is Pison; that is it which compasseth the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. And the gold of that land is good - - - ." So that is how Havilah was named.

Two years later, April 2, 1866, a county was organized from parts of Tulare and Los Angeles counties. It was named Kern with Havilah designated as the county seat. In January, 1873, a petition signed by one third of the registered voters of the county forced the problem of moving the county seat to a vote. The major objection to a move to Bakersfield was not that Havilah should be the permanent seat but that Bakersfield was unsuited because of its low and swampy character. The hope was for a new and more permanent town on higher ground next to the coming railroad. Havilah would serve well until this came about. The final election returns favored the move to Bakersfield by 22 votes. In January, 1873, the county seat was moved to Bakersfield.



## EARLY MINING CENTERS

### KEYSVILLE (14)



From 1853 until 1870 Keysville was the center of both placer and quartz gold mining. On the knoll just below the townsite may still be seen the outlines of an earthwork fort built to protect some 200 people from possible Indian attack that never came. The original mine named for Richard Keys, discoverer, is still active.



### KERNVILLE (15)

In 1860 Lovely Rogers left Keysville to track down a straying mule. In a gulch about eight miles north he found his mule. Picking up a rock to throw at the ungrateful animal, he found it to be so heavy it turned out to be gold bearing quartz. The location of this ledge was near that of the later famous Big Blue mine. This was the start of Quartzburg. Whiskey Flat or Kernville as it is now known, was located a mile down the river. It received its first name because settlers of Quartzburg would not permit a bar to be added. Whiskey Flat met that requirement.

## WALKER'S PASS (16)



Walker's Pass was first used by Captain Joseph Ruddeford Walker in 1834 while leading an exploring party eastward out of California. In 1843 he returned to California by the same route while leading the Chiles emigrant group, the first wagon train to come from the east. A part of Fremont's second expedition in 1845 entered San Joaquin Valley by this route. It was on this trip that Edward M. Kern mapped the Kern river area, later to be named for him by Fremont.

After 1860 freighting to the Owens River Valley followed this pass. Some freight from San Francisco came via Gilroy, Pacheco Pass, Visalia, White River and Glennville over the Sheep trail to Keysville and then through Walker's pass to the Serro Gordo mines in Owens Valley.



BEALE MEMORIAL TOWER



## BEALE MEMORIAL TOWER (17)

On April 2, 1904, Mrs. Truxton Beale pulled a lever that set a giant 1000 pound bell to ringing and as its resonant voice carried over the city, Bakersfield officially became the owner of the Beale Memorial Tower. Today the tower stands as one of the city's most famous landmarks.

This 64 foot tower designed by Clinton Day of San Francisco and built by S. J. Smart of Bakersfield, was conceived by Truxton Beale in memory of his mother, Mary Edward Beale. The bell has a striker that weighs 500 pounds. Its weights have a drop of 45 feet. The clock in the tower has four illuminated dials, each five feet in diameter. The clock with its nineteen wheels needs to be wound only once each eight days.

Present at the dedication ceremony were the following people: Mr. and Mrs. Truxton Beale; Captain and Mrs. McKittrick; Mr. and Mrs. L. M. Dinkelspiel; City trustee Ronald McKittrick; Judge B. Brundage; William Tevis, W. W. Wright, J. D. W. Gwynne, S. Ed Bailey, Alfred Harrell, F. H. McConnell, J. R. Dorsey and Morgan Haus.

The Beale family is long known in the history of Kern County. General Edward Beale, husband of Mary Edward Beale whom he married in 1849 on his fourth journey to the east, and father of Truxton Beale held many important government posts. He had been surveyor general of California and Nevada as well as Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the same two states. These were only two of his many tasks.

At the end of the Civil War he retired to the huge Tejon Ranch which he had acquired under a Mexican grant. He has been well described as a scholar, a gentleman, and Indian fighter, for his life saw fulfillment of them all.

## EARLY SCHOOL



## OLD TOWN (18)

In the early 1860's Old Tehachapi or "Old Town" as it was commonly known, was a thriving and active little place of 300 inhabitants. It drew its sustenance from the miners who washed gold from China Hill. Owners of cattle ranches who helped mould the history of Kern County lived in surrounding valleys and gathered for business and pleasure in Old Town. Among these illustrious families were the Brites, Cummings, Fickerts, Cuddebacks, and others.

This town is sometimes called the cradle of Kern teachers for there R. L. Stockton and Alfred Harrell, both county superintendents of schools, did their first teaching. The old school house is still standing—possibly the one erected for the children of these early settlers.

## OAK CREEK PASS (19)

Oak Creek Pass was one of the six east-west passes running through the Tehachapi Mountains examined by Lt. Williams under orders of the War Department. Father Garces had previously used this pass in 1776 to return to the Mojave after exploring the San Joaquin Valley as did John C. Fremont in 1844-45. Until the building of the railroad through the Tehachapi Pass in 1876, Oak Creek Pass was the best route used through the Tehachapis.

## WILLOW SPRINGS (20)

Willow Springs was a stage station on the Los Angeles-Havilah stage lines, 1864-72. From here light traffic went through Oak Creek Pass via Tehachapi Valley to Havilah and Kernville. Because of its excellence as a watering place most all of the desert traffic made this stop.

## DESERT AREA

Mention should be made of the historical development of the Mojave desert area in eastern Kern County. A borax rush as early as 1873 brought Muroc Lake and Saltdale into the news.

The search for gold began with the efforts of Goler in 1865 in the southeastern part of the county. Gold mining reached great prominence with the opening of the Rand District in 1895. The luck of F. M. Mooers and his partners, Burcham and Singleton, brought in the world famous Yellow Aster Mine (1897), producer of over \$16,000,000. Such names as Merced, Napoleon, Orphan Girl and others were history-making mines. Randsburg (1895), Johannesburg (1897), and Rosamond (1888) appeared on the maps as new towns.

Mojave (1876) owes its growth largely to its railroad terminal activities as well as being a center for the great desert mining operations. A silver strike and a tungsten discovery (1904), developed to meet the needs of World War I, have also highlighted the desert's development.

Here too should be noted the Manly-Jayhawker wagon train. Its members sought to reach California by crossing Death Valley which incidentally they christened. After passing through Indian Wells Valley, Red Rock Canyon, Mojave Desert and Willow Springs, they finally completed their journey by reaching Newhall in Los Angeles County.



## UNOFFICIAL LANDMARKS

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### WOODY HOMESTEAD (21)

The original Woody homestead was built of split logs in Rag Gulch at the foot of Blue Mountain in 1862, by Dr. Sparrel W. Woody. The present house is the third to be built on this same site near the town of Woody.

### ADOBE HUT—GLENNVILLE (22)

Built as a trading post by an old trader and trapper named Thomas Fitzgerald probably as early as 1849 makes this hut undoubtedly the oldest in Kern County. Fitzgerald visited the site of Bakersfield in 1840 to trap beaver and hunt elk.

### LAKEVIEW GUSHER (23)

Coming in with a roar that could be heard for miles and a column of oil 300 feet high the Lakeview Gusher, located in the Maricopa district, started flowing in 1910 from a depth of 2500 feet. It averaged 42,000 barrels a day for the next two years, and even reached 70,000 on a single day. When it stopped flowing in March, 1912, between nine and ten million barrels had been produced.

### CARNEROS ROCKS (24)

In western Kern County along the edge of the Coast range foothills may be found these huge formations. The former site of an Indian village, Carneros Rocks (slaughter pen) served both as a watering place on the old Los Angeles trail and a trap for slaughtering antelope. The latter was a custom started by the Indians and followed as a practice by the Spanish and American pioneers.

### BAKERSFIELD SITES

The present Santa Fe passenger station is located on the remains of a large Indian mound once 14 feet higher than it is now. It is suggested that this was the principle Indian village in this district. Later the first two-story plastered house was built on this mound then known as Reeder Hill.

Once the Kern River coursed its way past the location of the present Kern River Flour Mill. At this point the Indians had constructed a bridge across the river which was used by Father Garces to cross on his return trip from the White River area. A similar bridge was found there by Fremont.



## RED ROCK CANYON

Red Rock Canyon, in eastern Kern County, has long been known as a place of extreme beauty. Here weather seems to carry on a special job as new formations are carved from the great sandstone cliffs. Once Chinese and white men carried on extensive placer mining in the nearby canyons. Today scientists come to excavate and study the bones of the mammoth and the dinosaur. The magnificence of the area lends itself frequently as a "movie locale".

## "PASSING DATES"

- 1772 Pedro Fages, first white man to enter the San Joaquin Valley from the south.
- 1776 Father Garces, first white man to cross Kern River near present-day Bakersfield. (pg. 5)
- 1806-1824 Period of Spanish Expeditions in search of fugitive Indians and possible mission sites.
- 1827 Jedediah S. Smith expedition trapped for beaver on the Kern River. First Americans to visit the Kern County area.
- 1830 Ewing Young expedition plus Kit Carson trapped on the Kern, then called Rio Bravo by the Mexicans.
- 1834 Joseph Walker expedition discovered a pass through the Sierras. (pg. 21)
- 1845 Fremont expedition with Edward M. Kern as topographer mapped Kern River. Fremont named the river for Kern.
- 1853 Gold rush in Kernville area began. Nugget weighing 42 ounces discovered.
- 1854 Fort Tejon established. (pg. 6)
- 1859 First settlers arrived on Kern Island (Bakersfield area).
- 1863-73 Havilah, first County Seat.
- 1866 April 2, Kern County officially created from areas of Tulare and Los Angeles counties. The Courier, first newspaper to be published in the county, appeared at Havilah.
- 1869 Bakersfield now in existence with three buildings on present site.
- 1872 First commercial oil development started by John Hamilton and others in old Buena Vista District.
- 1874 Bakersfield replaced Havilah as the county seat by a margin of 22 votes. (pg. 13)
- 1895 Yellow Aster Mine discovered by Mooers, Burcham and Singleton.
- 1899 Oil discovered near Bakersfield. (pg. 16)
- 1905 Tungsten development started in Randsburg area.
- 1910 Gusher year—great oilfields of west side add to county's wealth. (pg. 17)
- 1919 Silver discovered on Mojave desert.
- 1933 Golden Queen mine on Soledad Mountain near Mojave discovered by George Holmes and sold for over \$3,000,000.

