

COVINA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*The legend of the Charter Oak was written by William Hoogendyk (1873-1938) during the 1930's. Mr. Hoogendyk was Manager of the Charter Oak Citrus Association Packing House.*

CHARTER OAK, CALIFORNIA

Its Industries and History

within the eastern part of the San Gabriel Valley, where the valley is bound on the north by the Sierra Madre mountains, and on the south by Puddingstone Canyon and Hollenbeck Hills, where the railroads from the northern and southern borders of the valley come together to cross the divide, to separate again in the valley of the East; there on the sunny slopes of the panhandle of the valley, we find the Charter Oak District.

Early travelers who followed the old Santa Fe Trail to California, after crossing the mountains, came to a fork in the road, one branching south to the San Diego Mission, the other leading west, following the south side of the Sierra Madre range to the San Gabriel Mission. The trading place at the forks of the Santa Fe Trail is now known as San Bernardino. The road between San Bernardino and the San Gabriel Mission and Los Angeles, was known as the San Bernardino road. Midway on this road and in the eastern end of the San Gabriel valley, were water holes or ponds, known by the Spanish and Mexican settlers as Cienegas. These Cienegas were fed by winter rains and artesian wells, and were a great boon to the Spanish and Mexican travelers on their overland route to Mexico.

It was during the war between Mexico and the United States that Charter Oak received its name. American troopers were constantly harassed by the Mexicans. One Mexican official especially was a thorn in their side. This was Don Antonio, who realizing that his desperado activities were at an end, resolved to leave California forever, and return to Mexico, especially so because a price had been set on his head. Entrusted with official documents and valuables for delivery in old Mexico, he left Los Angeles on a rainy day with a cavalcade, traveling by way of the San Bernardino road. They expected to camp for the night at the San Dimas Cienegas, but having tarried too long at the San Gabriel Mission they camped with some friendly Indians under the beautiful Oaks of the upper San Gabriel valley some twenty-five miles from Los Angeles, in what is now known as the Charter Oak community. In the meanwhile, a Spaniard at the Mission saddled his horse and carried the news of Don Antonio's escape, to the American troops. Eager to capture him, the Americans started in pursuit and came upon the party under the Oaks. Fearing an attack from unfriendly Indians, Don Antonio and his party pitched their camp some distance north of the San Bernardino road; they buried their documents and valuables near a large oak tree, for should they be surprised, the tree, by reason of its size, would serve as a mark to enable the recovery of the treasure. Fires were built, clothing dried and the evening meal taken. With the coming of twilight was heard the clatter of horses hoofs of the Americans in pursuit. Shot after shot was fired and the entire cavalcade was scattered, leaving their belongings behind. Don Antonio escaped by climbing the large oak tree; next day sorties were made by the American troops and Don Antonio was nearly captured, an Indian successfully hiding him under a blanket spread over cactus plants. Nothing could be learned from the Indians in the vicinity and, giving up the chase, the troopers returned once more to the place of the battle and upon leaving the officer remarked, "This is indeed the 'replica of the old Charter Oak'". Don Antonio returned to Los Angeles two days after his departure, alone and in rags, with his feet bleeding, and no one has ever found the documents and valuables which were secreted near the Charter Oak. In the bark of this tree was cut, and can be seen today, the sign of the cross to commemorate the deed. Many years, have passed since the historic Oak, which held the beneficial charter, had been blown down on the shores of Connecticut. But the historic tree of the upper San Gabriel Valley still stands. It is surrounded by thousands of orange trees. Charter Oak has shipped thousands of cars of oranges, the juice of which is healing and life extending. The month of May is orange blossom time at Charter Oak, and a thousand bouquets send forth their vagrant perfume. Charter Oak is a region where climatic conditions are nearly ideal for health and pleasure. The glistening dark green foliage contrasts with the golden fruit and with the bloom of flowers and the songs of birds, to add to the enchantment of green hills and snow-clad mountains; it is the new Hesperides on the Pacific Shores.