

The History of El Cajon VALLEY OF OPPORTUNITY



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Periodicals
Stationery &

Knox Hotel & Livery

Crescent Wheels, J.H. Dodson, Bicycles

John Obrist,
Restaurant
El Cajon Bakery &

George McIntosh

Alec Judson, Egg Rancher

Uri Hill & Co.,
Bostonia

OLDEST
Stacey Dairy

Hotel del Corona, Mrs. Knowles, prop.

PIONEER BUSINESSES

Hall & Kessler Co., Saw Sharpening

Culbertson Bros., Bicycles

Cordelia Wine Co.

OLDEST
G. Paul, Grower

C.W. Potter, Grower

El Cajon Hotel, J.D. Rush, Prop.

Dr. Mathewson, Bostonia Physician
SPRING

A. Ballantyne, Rancher

J.F. Harbison, Bee Keeper

E. Fletcher

OLDEST
A.G. Harbaugh, Rancher

J.P.R. Hall, Rancher

Chas. Balthaser, Restaurateur

W.D. Hall Company

Isaac Lankershim, Rancher

H.A. Seidel,
& Jeweler
Watchmaker

L.S. Rosenberger, Storekeeper

John Obrist,
Restaurant
El Cajon Bakery &

E.B. Wright's Harness Shop

The History of El Cajon **VALLEY OF OPPORTUNITY**



COMMISSIONED BY THE CITY OF EL CAJON

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Knox Hotel





Commemorative Quilt, designed and crafted by Lynn N. Patoff.



EL CAJON, nestled comfortably in its broad valley and set back from the ocean to the west and the mountains to the east, is a microcosm of American society. The city reflects the sometimes overwhelming changes that transformed America from an agrarian to an industrial society. Settled as a farming and ranching community more than one hundred years ago, the valley quickly became a showcase for Nineteenth Century farming and ranching techniques. As the Twentieth Century dawned, pioneer families joined a new wave of settlers in making the most of new ideas in transportation, agriculture, and industry. After World War II, another wave of people came to the valley, this time bringing stimulating new ideas about industry, business, and government. Today, the city is the leading industrial and retail center of San Diego's East County. But, for all of today's urban amenities and services, the people of the valley retain the pioneering spirit that turned a land once fit only to graze mission livestock into a bustling, progressive city. And, as in the last century, its citizens remain dedicated to the idea of progress through old-fashioned perseverance and hard work.

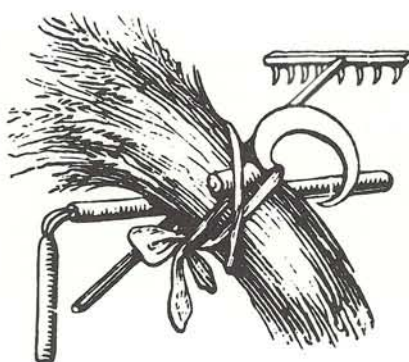




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PREHISTORY

Untold millennia ago, seven islands dotted the coastal waters of what is now Alpine. Three of those islands we now call Point Loma, Coronado, and North Island. The others – Helix, Cowles, San Miguel, and Black – are the mountain sentinels ringing our valley.

But, before man arrived to name things, the Pacific Slope upon which we now reside lay uneasily beneath a churning sea. For hundreds of thousands of years the area was beset by repeated upheavals, alternately thrusting the slope upward, then allowing it to subside beneath the seething surface of the sea. In this rising and falling, enormous land formations began taking shape; among them, the mountains and foothills around El Cajon Valley. The only gap in the ring of mountains was an opening at its northwestern end through which the San Diego River still flows in its course from higher, eastern mountains to the ocean. It was once believed that the bed of the San Diego River – at the bottom of Mission Gorge – was carved by the water spilling from the valley. But, with no evidence of a stream system within the valley capable of removing such an enormous amount of water, or of Eocene deposits along the north, east, and south walls of the valley, scientists cannot say exactly what happened.

When the upheavals at last subsided, the southern slope had been thrust up above the ocean, exposing the prominences we now call Helix, Cowles, Black, and San Miguel. Within their encircling embrace was a squarish basin roughly five miles long and three to four miles wide. Although five hundred feet above sea level, the valley retained water in the form of a non-marine lagoon.

Today, the geological formations marking the valley's north, south, and east walls are chiefly deeply weathered granitic rocks interspersed with local outcroppings of unweathered, spheroidal boulders.

In sharp contrast, the origin of the valley's western wall is quite another story. Rather than granite, this

distinctly different formation consists of nearly horizontal layers of Eocene age sedimentary deposits – mostly well-rounded cobbles, gravel, and sandstone.

Why do three of the valley's walls differ from the fourth? And why are there no traces of the western wall's sedimentary formations elsewhere in the valley? No one knows for certain. However, geologists have reason to believe that most of the west wall's slope area north of Interstate 8 is underlain by material deposited by ancient slides.

For the most part, the flat valley floor is of hard, granitic rock, punctuated here and there by rocky hill-ocks and outcroppings. In some areas, a 50-foot layer of decomposed rock rests on top of the granite bed-rock. Atop that is a thicker layer of clay, covered by a thin veneer of alluvial soil. Geologists speculate that the clay was deposited during the Eocene epoch some forty million years ago when the valley was a broad lagoon. Today's rich topsoil is a gift of eons of rainfall that washed decomposing rock down from the surrounding hills.

Over the ages, the combination of sunshine and intermittent rainfall contributed essential nutrients to the soil. Plants began to grow and fossils found in the region tell us that saber tooth tigers, bison, mammoths, and even camels flourished here long before man came to the valley.

No one knows for certain when man first arrived on the West Coast, but early peoples were already here when the Paleo-Indians arrived from the north. Called San Dieguito by anthropologists, these newcomers lived side by side with the people already here. From the natural transition that occurred between the two cultures came the La Jollans, a people signaling the beginnings of what cultural anthropologists term Southern California's Milling Stone Horizon.

Toward the last of that civilization – some 2,000 years ago – a group living in the San Diego region was speaking a Yuman language.

"Materially uncomplicated" is a phrase sometimes used to describe local Southern California Indians, but that is not meant to imply that they were simple. In truth, they were interacting sensibly with their environment. Plants long considered to be "natural" vegetation were, in actuality, planted by the Indians in a method known as "interplanting." They were carefully cultivating land areas and burning regularly to rid land of undesirable plants. This encouraged growth of tender new plants, some of which were used to make baskets.

Kumeyaay baskets were as beautiful as they were functional. Similarly, their pottery was beautiful and practical. In like manner, these Indians fashioned flake stone tools, trail shrines, rock paintings, manos and metates, mortars and pestles, rabbit blankets, carrying bags, rattles, flutes, cradleboards, pendants, ceramics, beads, and cobble choppers.

In addition to being skilled in crafts, the Kumeyaay were adept at telling intricate stories and singing complex song cycles. They enjoyed a comfortable relationship with nature as well – a balance of practical, spiritual, and scientific. Their use of medicinal herbs, observation of the equinoxes and solstices, and even their games – highly competitive and carried out by teams over miles of ground – showed a sharp awareness of themselves and the world in which they lived.

Southern California Indians have also been called nomads, but that is another false charge. Nomadic peoples have no home, but wander constantly from one place to another.

Kumeyaay ancestors had at least two permanent sites they regarded as homes, and returned to them regularly. Between encampments families traveled in groups, using well-marked, territorially prescribed trails through forests, canyons, mountains, and deserts.

Little remains to mark Kumeyaay dominion over Southern Californian coastal and mountain lands.

Only a few artifacts survive. The Kumeyaay, a people closely attuned to their environment, stood little chance of withstanding the overwhelming impact of the white man's culture.

Arrival of the Spanish in the Eighteenth century marked the beginning of a slow, inexorable decline of Indian society. Despite the intervention of the padres, the Indians were valued only as laborers by soldiers and settlers. Thus, when the mission and rancho eras ended, many Indians found themselves abandoned by those who had used them. Denied land, having accepted the white man's ways, and being exposed to the white man's diseases, the Kumeyaay found themselves stripped of their native heritage.

By 1900, about 1,500 Indians remained in San Diego County. Within the next sixty years, their numbers began to increase because they were protected on local reservations. Their descendants recall the ancient ways of their forefathers and are proud of that heritage.





EXPLORERS, PRIESTS & RANCHOWNERS 1542-1865

In 1542, Spanish navigator Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo explored the Pacific coastline, seeking either the mythical "Straits of Anian," believed to be the way to the Indies, or the fictional island of California – home of a tribe of Amazons fictionalized by a fanciful Spanish writer. Instead, Cabrillo discovered San Diego's fine natural harbor. Naming it San Miguel, he claimed it and all that the eye could see in the name of the King of Spain. Sixty years were to pass before a Spanish cartographer, Sebastian Vizcaino, renamed the bay San Diego de Alcala. For the next 167 years, the harbor was forgotten.

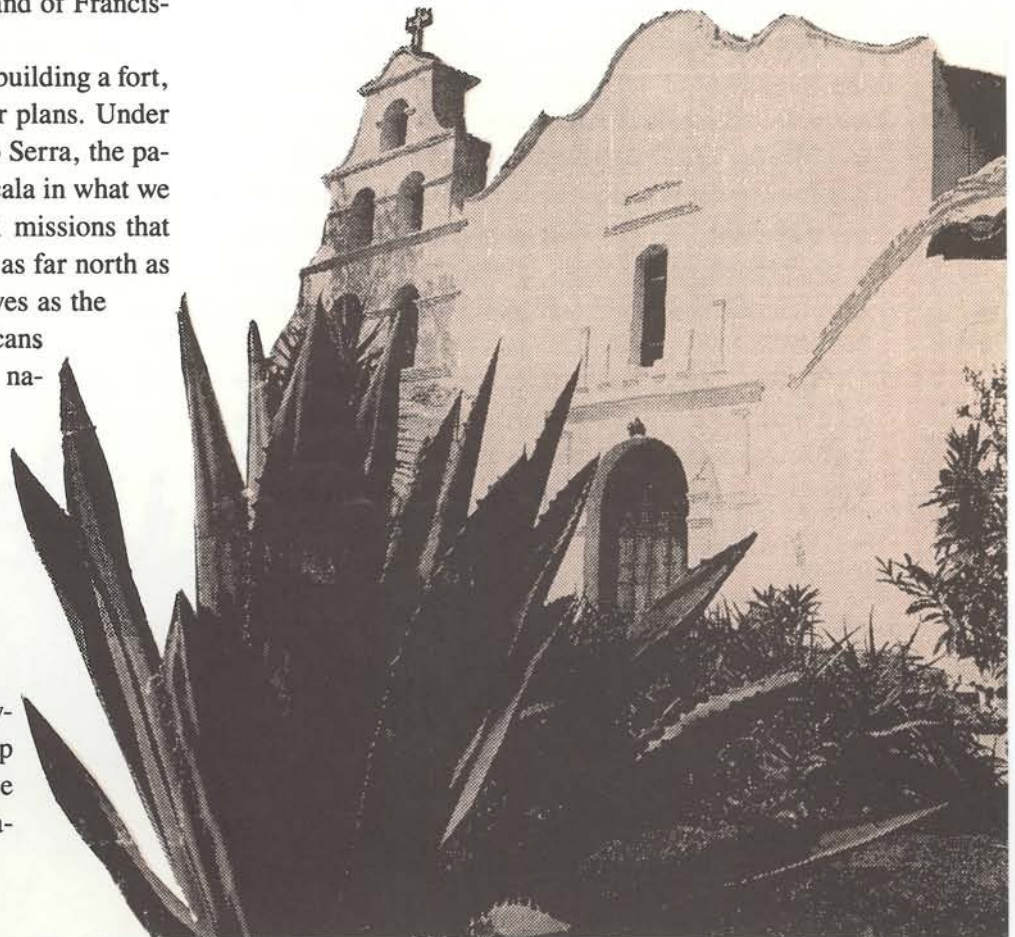
Only when the Spaniards, busy with wars, learned that others – the Russians in Northern California and American colonists in the East – were exhibiting interest in Pacific coastlands did they send a small company of soldiers overland from Mexico to secure their claim to the land. With them came a band of Franciscan missionaries.

The soldiers immediately set about building a fort, the Presidio. The Franciscans had other plans. Under the leadership of Friar Francis Junipero Serra, the padres built the Mission San Diego de Alcala in what we now call Mission Valley, the first of 21 missions that within the next few years would stretch as far north as the Sonoma Valley. Regarding themselves as the protectors of the Indians, the Franciscans planned to return mission lands to the natives as soon as they were considered civilized enough to cultivate it properly. Converting as many to Christianity as possible, the Franciscans began teaching area Indians to plow, plant, and harvest.

Fifteen miles eastward up the San Diego River (five Spanish leagues from the Presidio), the padres discovered a valley. Identified on an early map as El Cajon because of its box-like shape, its name was changed by the pa-

dres to Santa Monica. They first used it as grazing land for their livestock, but soon planted the luxuriant valley to beans, corn, and grapes. On its eastern side, they found a glen and used it to run pigs. Its name, logically enough, became Canada de Los Coches (Glen of the Hogs).

By the late 1780s, mission records show 116 "souls" living in the valley. How many of those were Indians, and how many were soldiers or padres, is not known. However, someone was tending a vineyard covering at least 20 acres. In addition, approximately 35 acres had been planted with two and one-quarter fanegas of seed corn and two fanegas of beans. (A fanega equals approximately 1½ bushels). With today's equipment, fifty-five cultivated acres seem meager, but in those days plowing was accomplished with a steel-shod stick and a mule.



Crops flourished in the rich soil, so much so that the governor distributed food to the local gentile (wild) Indians who worked with the mission's baptized Indians. Certainly, this generosity came from the best of intentions, but the decision to feed the Indians marked the beginning of their end. Less and less did Mission Indians go on their seasonal round to hunt and collect food. Instead, they began to depend upon the white man's wheat, barley, corn, and beans. Within a generation, their traditional methods of survival were forgotten. Another marked change came when the Indians discovered that, in accepting the white man's ways, they were expected to abide by his laws. Among other unfathomable restrictions, this meant accepting a European concept of private ownership of land – something quite beyond the Indians' comprehension. As they saw it, the land had always belonged to them.

Another European innovation was dawn-to-dusk farming. Accustomed to their own methods of managing their environment, the Indians did not understand the need for ten and twelve hours a day in the fields. But, they learned. Following the direction of the mission fathers, they continued subduing the valley's wild tangle of grasses, partitioning it into sections, and planting and tending crops – further transforming both their and the valley's natural state.

Then, in 1821, Mexico declared itself independent of Spain and claimed the provinces of California and Texas. It was the end of the mission way of life.

Actually, the Spanish government had been granting huge parcels of lands to favored individuals as early as 1773. The Franciscans, anxious to keep the land for the Indians, determined to limit these grants. They were able to restrict privately owned ranchos to a mere 20 until 1821, but were powerless once the Mexican government took over. Large parcels were immediately granted to influential members of the Mexican society.

In San Diego, the third largest land grant in the area was made to Dona Maria Antonia Estudillo de Pedrorrena. A daughter of powerful Mexicans living in Old Town, she accepted the parcel called Rancho El

Cajon, a grant so large that it encompassed all of what is most of the El Cajon Valley and Flinn Springs. Totalling eleven square leagues (about 48,800 acres), its boundaries were irregular, running from the flanks of Mt. Helix on the south, west to the old Padre Dam, north to include the San Diego River to what would become San Vicente Dam, and east to the tree-studded area now known as El Monte Park.

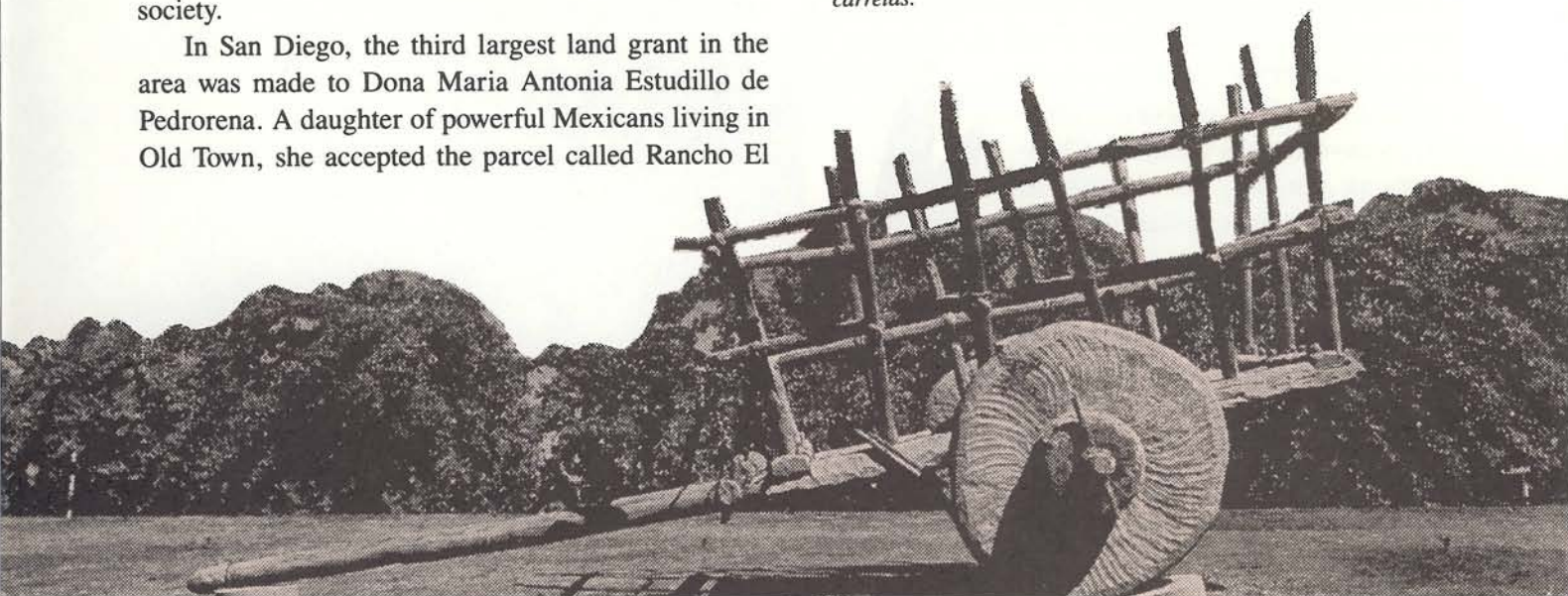
The Pedrorenas used this vast acreage to raise large herds of cattle whose hides were destined for distant shoemakers. The vineyards and croplands so patiently planted and tended by the mission fathers and Indians were forgotten, and the valley fell into neglect and disarray.

Richard Henry Dana, author of *Two Years Before The Mast*, was engaged in the coastal trade 30 years before, chiefly collecting hides for the Boston shoe market. He chronicled the time he spent in Old Town, curing the hides at the bay shore – a particularly malodorous and unpleasant business.

On the eastern edge of the valley, the old pig run, Canada de Los Coches, a 28-acre enclave within Rancho El Cajon, was granted to Apolinaria Lorenzana. Rancho Los Coches was overseen by an American blacksmith, Jesse Julian Ames, and his Spanish wife, Dona Perfecta Espinosa de Ames, though they lived in Old Town.

Don Julian, as he was called, was highly regarded in Old San Diego. Formerly an otter hunter in Rosario, Mexico, Ames and his bride left Mexico when relations between the United States and Mexico grew hostile. He joined the American volunteers and was commended for his services. When the war ended, Ames settled in Old Town and became a black-

Until Julian Ames built the first spoked-wheel wagon, everyone used crude wagons called carretas.



smith, a city councilman, and an innovative leader in the community. In fact, it was he who had built the first spoked-wheel wagon in Southern California. Everyone else was using carretas: clumsy carts with wooden axles and crude wheels fashioned from the cross-sections of large trees.

Ames' wagon was a forerunner of the wagons brought to San Diego in 1847 by the Mormon Battalion. The Mormons opened a new wagon road from Santa Fe through mountains, desert, and hostile Apache territory. It had been a grueling chore; they had dug a line of wells to supply future travelers, and hand-chipped their way through canyons too narrow to allow wagons to pass, labors appreciated later by the floods of adventurers, settlers, missionaries, and gold-seekers making their way to California.

Ames also built the first all-wood, two-story house in Old Town. But, with the end of the Mexican War in 1848, the U.S. Cavalry stationed in San Diego left, seriously diminishing Ames' blacksmithing business. Even after California became a state in 1850, Ames could not find enough business to support his large family; most newcomers to the state stopped in San Diego only long enough to replenish their needs, then headed for the gold camps to the north. So, at age 56, Don Juliano loaded his wife and eight children into his famous wagon and moved inland to the abandoned Rancho Los Coches.

The Ames family was not entirely alone in the valley; there were plenty of Indians, and the Sanes family had come from Arizona by covered wagon a few years earlier to set up housekeeping.

After first constructing a temporary house of branches, brush, and reeds (much loved by his children), Ames built a permanent house of adobe. He was helped in this construction by area Indians. Around the house, they planted a double row of cactus that, within a few years, became a formidable fence. They also built a large lean-to kitchen, a barn, a workshop, and a grist mill.

During the next few years, his family hosted military couriers from Fort Yuma carrying civilian and Army mail from the East Coast and to points throughout the West. Later on, riders carrying the Overland mail on pack mules made regular stops at Ames' ranch. This line was referred to as the "Jackass Mail" – a derogatory term coined by a San Francisco newspaper editor dead set against allowing the southern part of the state access to modern transportation or mail services. The Jackass Mail line was later awarded



Stagecoaches provided slow and uncomfortable travel for passengers, even after springs were added to eliminate some of the jouncing.

to the Butterfield line, whose riders, too, halted at the Ames ranch.

During the years that Don Juliano and his family lived in Los Coches, much happened in the world that would eventually affect those living in Southern California. Would-be miners and immigrants were coming West. Using the quickest route then available, they boarded ships in Europe and on the East Coast to sail around the South American continent and up the North American coastline to San Francisco. Some individuals, hoping to save time, disembarked at Panama and hand-carried their luggage across the jungles of the Isthmus to the Pacific shoreline where, often ill with malaria, they caught another ship north. Not until 1914 was the Panama Canal completed, which shortened the trip from the East Coast by weeks.

But, in 1861, Ames was busy planting grapes, peaches, figs, apricots, olives, and other fruits. He was also raising sheep and some cattle. Then came word that war had broken out between North and South. It mattered little to Ames, or other Southern California residents. The rest of California was a hotbed of politics – indeed, the provision in California's constitution prohibiting slavery was the reason that California had been denied statehood for so long. The compromise reached by rewording the State constitution finally allowed statehood. (Many see that political conflict as instrumental in postponing the Civil War for a decade). But, when war finally came, the only noticeable change for Southern Californians was the closing of the southern wagon route.

Not that the road's closing slowed visitors to the Ames ranch; his grist mill was used by ranchers from as far away as Los Angeles County. When a new couple, the Flynns, moved in nearby, the two families became very close. So close that, later, the Flynn's son would marry Julian and Perfecta's daughter, Mary.

Reaching Ames' ranch was not easy for drivers or travelers. In Butterfield's most active year of coach service, the line employed 65 men and owned 50 coaches and 400 mules. The average rate of travel over the 1,476-mile route from New Orleans to San Diego averaged about 40 miles a day. At most, only 40 complete trips were ever made over the entire route before service ended.

From New Orleans, travelers took a mail steamer to Indianola, Texas – a wearying trip of 540 miles. The next leg of the journey was a dusty 140 miles aboard a mail coach to San Antonio. There, they caught the San Antonio & San Diego Mail Line stage which, for passengers and drivers alike, was a grueling test of courage and endurance. The route took them over mountains and through deserts for a total of 1,476 miles. For at least part of the way, travelers were obliged to walk. And, after all that, the first decent station they found was at Vallecitos. They went from Vallecitos to the Ames ranch, then on to San Diego.

In 1866, Perfecta Ames was pregnant with her eleventh child. She went into labor in the middle of the worst rainstorm anyone could remember. Realizing that she needed a doctor, Don Julianio hitched up his wagon and started for Old Town, intending to use the road alongside the San Diego River. But the road was awash, and so was Mission Valley. Fighting fast-moving flood waters, he finally made it into Old Town and collected the doctor, then headed back along the higher, but longer, road back through Spring Valley.

Even that road was nearly impassable. Mud built up on the wheels, slowing the wagon until, finally, it

bogged down completely. In a desperate effort to free the wagon, Julian bent to lift a rear wheel while the doctor stuffed weeds and grass under it to provide traction. Straining against the dead weight of the mired wagon, Julian heaved with all his might. It required more strength than he had to give, and he toppled over ... dead. The doctor, in unfamiliar country in the middle of a downpour, did the only reasonable thing – unhitching the horses, he sent them out into the storm, hoping they would head for home.

It was the children who heard the horses first. Thankful that their father and the doctor had finally arrived, they rushed outside. When they found only the horses, the family knew something was terribly wrong. The shock was so great that Perfecta's labor halted. At daybreak, the older boys rode out to find the doctor waiting beside the body of their father. Lifting Julian into the wagon, they took him home to Perfecta. Then the entire family, with Don Julianio still in the wagon, started out for Old Town.

The waters through Mission Valley were still ram-paging, and the battle to reach town was stalled when they were forced to stop at Mission San Diego de Alcalá. Dona Perfecta, determined that her husband would be buried with the full blessings of the church, waited in the wagon at the Mission, while her sons forded the swollen river and went into town for help. They returned with friends on horseback and helped float the wagon through the deep waters until they reached Old Town, where they buried Don Julianio.

Perfecta Ames did not return to the ranch until after the baby was born. Within hours of her return, hundreds of Indians swarmed up the hill toward the ranch. Although the Ames had always been close to the Indians, the staggering numbers of them frightened her. Would they be hostile, now that Julian was gone?

Perfecta's fears proved groundless. Men, women, and children were there to pay their respects to a man they had worked with and loved. Giving him an Indian funeral that lasted three full days, they demonstrated their love and respect for Don Julianio and the Ames family.

