

BRIEF HISTORY OF VICENTE DE LA OSSA AND FAMILY

Vicente de la Ossa began the purchase of Rancho del Encino in 1849. He built the adobe ranch house and lived there with his family until his death in 1861. He was a Californio, a product of the Spanish-Mexican culture of the first half of the 1800's in Alta California. He was born January 6, 1808 at the Presidio of San Diego. This day being the Day of Kings, he was baptised Jose Vicente de los Reyes de la Ossa.⁴ Vicente's father Pablo, born in Mexico City, was a "Cabo Distinguido" or corporal at the Presidio. Vicente's mother, Maria Rita Ruiz, died when Vicente was one year old bearing his brother Carlos Antonio. After his wife's death, Pablo returned to Mexico with his two sons where he married once more when Vicente was fourteen. Later, his stepmother remained in Mexico City when Vicente and his father returned to Alta California.⁵

By 1832, Vicente de la Ossa had settled in the pueblo of Los Angeles and was serving as Secretary of the Town Council.⁶ He was twenty-four. In June of that year he married Rita Guillen.

Maria Rita de Jesus Guillen was also born at the Presidio of San Diego, on May 21, 1817. Her maternal grandfather was harbormaster at Loreto in Baja California in the late 1700's. Her father, Miguel Antonio Guillen, was a soldier and guard. Guillen brought his wife Eulalia to the Presidio of San Diego at the beginning of the new century. There Guillen accompanied parties traveling from the Presidio. He was also a mission guard at San Gabriel. Guillen died when his youngest child Rita was two. When she was four, her mother, Eulalia, moved her six children to live permanently at the San Gabriel mission. There, Eulalia acquired more and more responsibility until she became "Keeper of the Keys." This meant that from 1820 to 1832 she acted as a sort of head housekeeper, responsible for the amounts of goods consumed and manufactured at the mission. Under her direction, the Indians carried out the daily activities of feeding and clothing the mission's population of several hundred.

Eulalia's five daughters also took an active part in the daily work.⁷ Skills that they would use as wives and mothers constituted their education. Reading and writing was reserved for upper class males. Rita and her sisters were illiterate. Only their brother Isidoro was taught to read and write.

On June 19, 1832, Rita Guillen married Vicente de la Ossa at the mission church of San Gabriel.⁸ After the celebration Rita's possessions were put into an oxcart and Vicente took his fifteen year-old bride to their home in Los Angeles.

The Los Angeles of the 1830's in which the de la Ossas lived, was a small community of some 2,000 people (a quarter of them California Indians). Men farmed the land, raised livestock, and a few owned shops providing goods and services upon which the district depended.⁹ Although by no means affluent, the Californios had a ready supply of manual laborers and servants in the local Indian population. The purchase and taxation of land would arrive in California with American statehood in 1850. Under the Mexican government, public land was simply granted to local citizens as they petitioned for it. De la Ossa was a tavern owner. He lived on granted lands that contained his family home, his kitchen gardens, orchard, and livestock. Besides tending to his business and home, he played a modest part in the activities of the community when fulfilling his duties on the Town Council-- as Secretary in 1832, Councilman in 1834-35, and Syndic in 1838.

The "Most Illustrious" Town Council of Los Angeles was made up of six Councilmen. The senior member was the town Mayor. Councilmen were elected every year. Their duties were part time, and they met once a week, more or less, depending on need. The Council made up the governing body of the town and surrounding district, and as such had extensive power and prestige--qualities that would have to do in the way of compensation, for Councilmen received no money.¹⁰ The town's only salaried public office was that of Secretary of the Council, for which de la Ossa received 30 pesos a month. The Secretary was appointed by the Council and was considered to have a responsible position. He recorded the minutes of Council meetings, was the Clerk of the Mayor's court, and was responsible for the town archives.¹¹

By 1833, de la Ossa had been reappointed Secretary--but not for long. In February he was ousted from his post.¹² His offences were apparently not of a nature to banish him from other public duties. The next month the Council was sending him to Monterey as a delegate-elect. The year had not begun well,

but by September the couple had cause for celebration. Rita gave birth to their first child, Maria Manuela. (She would live only four months. Their next child, also a girl, was named in her memory.)

In January of 1834, de la Ossa was elected as Councilman and served in this capacity for two years. Most of the Council's duties centered around land petitions, water rights, public order and safety.¹³

From time to time the outside world would encroach on the everyday concerns of Los Angeles. Shortly after de la Ossa was elected to the Council, the rumor of a possible attack by Indians reached the pueblo. The townspeople gathered together their weapons and donated funds for ammunition. With everything in readiness, the town was in the meantime invaded by a group of Sonorans headed by Juan Gallardo. The Mexicans' quarrel was not with the Angelinos, but with General Jose Figueroa, whom they were on their way to oust from command. Nevertheless, they seized the pueblo's small armory and one cannon. De la Ossa and two other Councilmen were appointed to meet with Gallardo. They carried the town's message that the Council "would not interfere with their project and only asked that the inhabitants of this town be left in peace." The request was complied with; the Indian attack did not materialize, and so the town returned to normal.

During this period, merchandise from the outside world was hard to come by, in part because of high tariffs. As a result, ships often unloaded some goods before docking in Monterey, so as to have less goods on which to pay customs. Citizens up and down the coast cooperated in an effort to trade for goods at less exorbitant prices. The Governor was concerned when the shipping agent Abel Stearns had a building constructed near the beach at the harbor of San Pedro. It was feared that contraband would be stored there, and so the building represented a threat to the treasury. The Council's three-man Police Commission, that included de la Ossa, looked into the matter. They defended Stearn's interests (and probably those of the town). They found that the house "was not prejudicial to the public welfare, nor to the interests of any particular individual and hence [the Commission] was of the opinion that in the possession of his house at San Pedro, he should remain undisturbed."

The de la Ossa house was located near the town plaza, between the Avilas and the Tapia families of Jose Antonio and his brother Tiburcio. In 1836, de la Ossa petitioned for and was granted final title to this house lot. That same year he was also granted land at "Villito" on which to plant an orchard.¹⁴

In November he was selected by the Council to oversee the upcoming elections. The town was divided into four blocks or precincts and de la Ossa usually alternated with his next door neighbor, Jose Antonio Tapia to coordinate the election process for the first block. Earlier that year a dispute had arisen between de la Ossa and Tapia. Their adobe houses adjoined, and on Tapia's side, the brea roof of the room connected to de la Ossa's house was caving in. De la Ossa asked the Council to oblige Tapia to repair the roof, or to sell the room to de la Ossa. This disagreement between the families continued for most of the summer, but in the end Tapia was required to either fix the roof or sell the room to someone who would.

In 1838 was recorded the birth of the third de la Ossa child, and first son, Antonio Maria Fulgencio; and shortly after, the death of Vicente's father Pablo, who had been stationed at the San Fernando mission. That January, de la Ossa was installed as Syndic, the remaining public office relating to the Town Council. In this position, he acted as an advisor to the Council and served as City Attorney and Treasurer.

Along with his duties as Syndic, de la Ossa was once again appointed to the Council's Police Commission, along with Ignacio Palomares and Juan Ballestros. Part of their duties were those of serving on the Land Commission. A citizen desiring a certain parcel of land would submit a written request. De la Ossa would search the public record to determine whether there were any previous encumbrances on it. If none, the three men would inspect the property and confirm its boundaries. The paperwork and inspection completed, the land was granted. The owner was then obliged to put the land to use by building a house or raising a certain number of livestock. With the privilege of owning land came the duty of putting it to use.

Because there were no taxes levied on lands or property, the town's funds were meagre. In the case of a common peril, the Council would solicit donations,

or appeal for aid from the Governor. But on a day-to-day basis, funds were brought in from permits and fines on minor infractions of the town's laws. Even the Councilmen could be fined for being absent from Council meetings. Because cash was so scarce, fines were often paid in produce and livestock.

Several new ordinances were added to the municipal code that year of 1838. Anyone either selling or manufacturing liquor without first notifying the Syndic would be fined. To cut down on a growing problem of vagrancy, anyone not employed had three days to look for work. Those who did not do so would be fined two pesos--which could be paid off by working. Also to be fined was "serenading with music promiscuously around the streets without first having obtained permission." A two peso permit was also required for holding a dance in one's home. Residents were required to sweep in front of their houses every Saturday. By 3 p.m. the Councilman in charge of street maintenance that week would walk the town and see that everyone had complied. Those who had not were fined according to their ability to pay. No one was allowed to make adobe bricks inside the town without permission, and then only on their own property. No one was allowed in the streets after 11 p.m. unless he had permission, was on guard duty, or unless it was a holiday. "All sewerage or garbage from the inhabitants, especially that produced by the killing of cattle in front of their houses, should be dumped into the town lots or gulches." Discharging a firearm as well as horseracing were prohibited inside the town limits.

In March of 1838, the townspeople submitted a petition to the Council urging recognition of Governor Juan Alvarado (of Northern California) over Governor Carlos Carrillo (of Southern California). A committee including de la Ossa, Abel Stearns, Jose Sepulveda and former mayor Tiburcio Tapia agreed to recognize Alvarado, as it reflected the concensus of the town. De la Ossa recommended that Alvarado "be asked to visit their city so that with his presence some of the residents inclined to be disorderly may [be] quieted and thereby throwing a veil over past hostilities." The Council voted to contact Alvarado and ask him to visit Los Angeles.

The Indians who lived in the pueblo had their homes on a block of land in the eastern part of town that was regularly encroached upon by Californios

wishing to expand their lands. The Indians complained to the Council that year and a committee of de la Ossa and two Councilmen looked into the matter. They found that Juan Domingo had taken over the Indians' land and that he had "failed to comply with the duties of an honest man." He was fined twelve pesos and the land returned for the time being to the Indians.

In such a small community, everyone shared the same water sources and the same roads. The closer to the center of town, the more water ditches and roads crossed through people's properties. To interfere with the access of these basic needs was a serious matter and occasioned many disputes handled by the Council. That summer de la Ossa built a fence on his property that blocked a main road. His outraged neighbors appealed directly to the Governor.¹⁵ Alvarado referred the matter back to the Town Council. Their committee found that "Don Vicente de la Ossa has built a fence, where it is absolutely necessary that it should be left open, as it is a road, very extensively used by the public, especially by the farmers, who convey all their crops by this route." The Council voted unanimously to have de la Ossa immediately remove the fence.

In 1836, there were five other taverns besides de la Ossa's. By 1838, the pueblo had a total of nine. These taverns often sold merchandise, but their main draw was serving local brandy and wines. One of the new ordinances was proving a hardship for the tavern owners. They were now required to close up shop during the day on holidays, their busiest time. De la Ossa and his colleagues petitioned the Council and were successful in getting the new law overturned.¹⁶

As Syndic, de la Ossa received an 8% commission on town revenues. At the end of the year he had not received his commission, totaling 67.40 pesos for the year. He suggested that part payment could be made in the form of the eight colts recently made part of the municipal fund in payment of a fine. But Mayor Luis Arenas was also owed money. He had paid the Secretary's salary for November. Arenas was awarded the colts. In addition to his 8% commission, de la Ossa was owed 61.60 pesos, "money which he advanced the 16th of September for the purpose of celebrating the anniversary of our Independence, there not being any funds at the time in this municipality."

De la Ossa was once again a private citizen in 1839. He and Rita now had five children. De la Ossa petitioned over the next two years for several pieces of property. His request for "Santa Anita," adjoining the San Gabriel mission, was denied because the land was still under the direction of the mission and used by Indians living and working on the property. Property in Cahuenga was also denied him by the San Fernando mission which claimed its own priority over the land.

In 1842, de la Ossa took out a 400 peso loan in "silver [coin], hides and tallow" with Jose de la Guerra y Noriega of Santa Barbara.¹⁷ The following year, on May 23, 1843, he was granted one league (three square miles) of land northwest of the pueblo named Rancho La Providencia (now part of Burbank). He had registered his cattle brand back in 1834 and he now had the wherewithal to commit himself fulltime to ranching and farming.¹⁸

During the second half of the 1840's, the United States began military and diplomatic inroads into California. De la Ossa's role during this time is not a matter of record, but by 1848 he faced a personal crisis. He was in debt to his friend Ignacio Palomares and was about to lose everything.¹⁹ Although on the brink of financial ruin in '48, the following year he managed a financial coup that could clear his debts and allow him to start anew.

The Catholic church considered its California mission lands held in trust to be granted back one day to the Indians. One of the few tracts of land to in fact officially revert to California Indians was a one league tract southwest of the San Fernando mission. First called Rancho del Encino, the land was granted to three Indians, Roman, Roque and Francisco, in 1845 by Governor Pio Pico.

In 1849 de la Ossa sold his Rancho La Providencia and bought an approximate third of Rancho del Encino.²⁰ He sold La Providencia for 1,500 pesos and paid 100 pesos for the first of several purchases that before long gave him the use

of the entire ranch (although legal title to the whole parcel of 4,460 acres was not final until 1858²¹). De la Ossa had now stepped back from the brink of poverty, realizing a cash profit of 1,400 pesos. Not knowing the amount of his other financial obligations, we cannot know how much was invested into building the existing adobe, its furnishings, or into the ranch itself.

We do know that this new property had what was necessary for de la Ossa to succeed. The land contained its own water supply in the form of cold and warm springs. The southern boundary of the property ended in the Santa Monica Mountains and so the foothills provided the ranch its own supply of wood for fuel. Game was plentiful. Besides being good grazing land for livestock, the soil was suitable for growing any crop that did well in Southern California.

De la Ossa built three corrals, owned horses, oxen, goats, and raised sheep and cattle.²² To provide for his family, de la Ossa built the eight-room main house. A second adobe building, believed to have some fourteen rooms, housed the storage, work rooms and employee quarters. The couple now had eight children--four sons: Antonio aged 11; Fabricio, 9; Vicente, 6; and Pablo aged 4; and four daughters: Manuela aged 16; Susana, 14; Constanca, 7; and Clotilde, born one week before the purchase of the new property.

Although de la Ossa raised cattle, like many of his contemporaries he also considered himself a farmer.²³ He planted fruit trees and a vineyard of 2,500 vines north of the main house. Much of the ranch's income derived from this vineyard. The vines spread out unsupported from the main trunks, forming thick bushes up to four feet high during the growing season.²⁴ Much of the year's crop was sold as fresh fruit. Packed in paper or sawdust lined boxes, grapes from all over the county were delivered to the port of San Pedro, where they were loaded onto steamers and shipped to San Francisco.

The presence of the Encino spring water had influenced the route of the old Camino Real, or Royal Highway back in the 1700's. The public road had run by the springs, which provided travelers with a source of water. Later this

water source allowed for the existence of the ranch, through which still passed the old road. In 1850, not long after the de la Ossas moved to the Encino, California was admitted to the Union. Under the new American government, Rancho del Encino was reconfirmed a part of the township of Los Angeles. The roads leading to and from the county were formally declared public highways, "understood to be the roads existing as they have been long established and used." The first was "the Santa Barbara road--From Los Angeles to Cahuenga, from Cahuenga to Encino, from Encino to Las Virgenes, from Las Virgenes to Triunfo."²⁵

The de la Ossa adobe was constructed a few yards from this public highway. The road led southeast to Los Angeles and divided on the Encino ranch; one road leading northwest through the Santa Susana Mountains, the other led west toward the coast and to Santa Barbara. A less official route led north toward the San Fernando mission. These public roads accounted for a steady stream of travelers passing through the ranch. Like other ranch homes situated near highways, the de la Ossa adobe evolved into a stopover for travelers.

The Gold Rush was in full force and the increase in population opened up demand for livestock driven north to supply food. This accounted for a second group passing through the Encino ranch, as cattlemen drove their herds of cattle and sheep northward. As the market for cattle grew, so did the demands on the Encino springs, prompting de la Ossa to construct a reservoir in an attempt to control the water on his land. He also attempted to charge these cattledrivers for the use of the springwater.²⁶ Over the years his demands were not met. He finally built a fence around his reservoir to force cattlemen to use the water with his knowledge and consent.²⁷

Admittance into the Union also brought an increase in population to Southern California, not solely to the gold fields in the North. With the new settlers came a rapid succession of additions and improvements in the local way of life. One such novelty was the advent of a local newspaper.²⁸ Ranchers spread out over Southern California often used the forum to communicate with each other and to air mutual problems. With a brief notice they would warn poachers

against stealing cattle, trespassers against squatting on their land or cutting their timber. Unlike his neighbors, de la Ossa resorted to lengthy detail as he aired his problems and outlined solutions. This penchant for length culminated in his response to an accusation that amounted to cattle stealing. The detail he used to defend himself affords us one of the few opportunities to hear directly from the man.²⁹

Another improvement introduced by the Americans was an educational system that was no longer reserved for upper class males, as was the custom under the Spanish and Mexican governments. Public schools now admitted all children, and private girls' schools opened. De la Ossa's daughters received a formal education, as well as his sons. They attended private Catholic schools where they received a bilingual education.³⁰ Females received the customary finishing touches, so that the de la Ossa girls also had a knowledge of French, music, drawing, and fencing.³¹

De la Ossa held one more public office, in 1856 and 1859. He served as a Judge of the Plains.³² This position was a holdover from the Mexican period. Several ranchers were elected in the county every year to handle ranching related problems in their area. In this position, de la Ossa oversaw cattle roundups, when grazing cattle were redistributed to their owners. He settled disputes of cattle ownership. He was also authorized to make arrests, taking the suspect into town where a magistrate would settle the matter.

By the end of the decade, de la Ossa surely felt the effects of land taxation, the declining cattle market, and the increasing loss of cattle due to severe droughts beginning in 1858 and continuing for several more years. Many ranchers, more affluent than de la Ossa, found themselves increasingly in debt. Despite these pressures, de la Ossa managed to remain solvent. His taxes were paid up and no liens or debts threatened the ranch. He even had clear title to the Encino, when many a rancher's claim to his land was being questioned by the American courts. Nevertheless, de la Ossa took an action

resorted to many times over by the dwindling number of rancheros: He put the ranch up for sale.³³ Not surprisingly, no one bought the ranch before his death fifteen months later.

Vicente de la Ossa died July 20, 1861 at the age of 53.³⁴ He was survived by his wife Rita, who was pregnant with their 13th child, Florestina. In 1862, Rita sold the Encino to her eldest daughter Manuela and her American husband James Paul Thompson.

Thompson had been Sheriff of Los Angeles County in 1858-1859. Just before buying the Encino, he had contracted for and carried out improvements to the stretch of coastal highway from Los Angeles through Santa Barbara, in preparation for the Coastal Stage route.³⁵ The Thompsons also leased half of the Brea Ranch (now in Hollywood) while they lived at the Encino.³⁶ The Encino ranch changed little during the Thompson years. The couple had two daughters, Adela and Susana, and the family lived in the main house and continued to provide accommodation for travelers. Like many Southern California ranches, the emphasis on cattle was shifting to that of sheep and small grain.³⁷ Manuela died in 1868. The following year Thompson sold the ranch, realizing a modest profit as land values began to climb.

Rita would survive into the new century, spending most of these years in San Gabriel, not far from where she had spent her childhood. By 1870, seven of her children still lived with her. Vicente, now 25, and Constancia who was recently widowed, were the eldest at home. David, Leonora, Maclovia were now teenagers, and the two youngest were Carlos II, and Florestina, 9.³⁸ Once the children were raised, Rita lived with Constancia in San Gabriel until she died December 16, 1908, aged 91.

Historian Donald Cutter, in reviewing the "historical value" of the Encino ranch owners finds that, "Vicente de la Osa, one of the two really important figures in the history of Rancho El Encino, was otherwise undistinguished in

California history."³⁹ De la Ossa appears in Bancroft's History of California and occasionally in local histories recalling the Spanish-Mexican Californios. He does not appear in a leadership role in the events that shaped California history. Instead, he was a business acquaintance, friend, or relative of several men who affected that history. He witnessed, participated in, and was affected by the events of the day; he did not cause them to happen. His biography is not of a man who was unique, but one typical of his day.

The fact that de la Ossa received what little education was available, allowed him to play a more active role as an adult than most of his contemporaries. Just being literate in the colonial outposts of Spain meant that society would offer him more than most. Such was the case with his posts on the Town Council. To be sure, during the 1830's the pueblo of Los Angeles was small and the land sparsely populated, yet those serving on the Council were actively involved in local affairs, as well as those affecting Alta California as a whole.

The bonds of marriage and baptismal sponsorship between the Spanish-Mexican families of California connect in an elaborate network of godparents and cousins. These ties were taken seriously and continued through one's lifetime. They implied responsibilities to one's extended family that included accountability in business dealings, and being guest and host many times during the year. The de la Ossa family was no exception. Some of the more familiar names linked with de la Ossa are: Bandini, Carrillo, de la Guerra y Noriega, Lugo, Pico, Sepulveda, del Valle, Verdugo.⁴⁰

Although Rita was born nine years after Vicente, their own family ties began at birth. Eulalia's skill as midwife accounted in part for her frequent trips between San Diego and San Gabriel before Rita's birth. Eulalia attended the birth of her future son-in-law Vicente, as well as that of his friend Pio Pico.⁴¹

In a town as small as the pueblo of Los Angeles, whose society was so closely knit, those who were not related were brought constantly together by business, politics, celebrations and mourning. The de la Ossas connected in business and friendship with Avila, Dominguez, Stearns, Temple and Vignes.⁴²

As far as de la Ossa's role on the Encino ranch, history tells us that he began his purchase at just the right time. If the California rancheros enjoyed any golden age, it was during the 1850's. While tradition gives credit to the Spanish and Mexican periods as the prosperous days of the California, it was during the first American decade--when de la Ossa owned the Encino--that California ranchers enjoyed an economic freedom they had never before experienced.

Although the new American government meant political power was no longer theirs, Californios were no longer constrained by the myriad restrictions imposed by the old Spanish or Mexican regimes. For several decades they had enjoyed a slow improvement in their way of life due to the hide and tallow trade, but by the late 1840's that market was dwindling. The Gold Rush of the 1850's and the thousands of people it attracted opened up a new market for the ranchers' livestock and produce--and with the new government came payment in cash.

Any assessment of de la Ossa's role during this golden age must therefore examine his opening his home to this new world that passed by his door. Three theories exist in conjunction with his providing passers-by with accommodations: The de la Ossa home was a "stagecoach stop"; before 1859 visitors stopping over became guests in the home; the house was first opened as a business in 1859.

It has been a local tradition to describe the de la Ossa home as a "stagecoach stop" during the 1850's. A stage line traveling the coast road did not open up until 1861, and that was primarily a mail stage.⁴³ However the road itself was well traveled all through the '50's and if local custom is any indication, de la Ossa did provide food and lodging for travelers earlier in the decade. Many ranchers did so whose homes were situated near main highways. They were logical stopping places because they were a source of water. In the June 11 notice of 1853 in the Los Angeles Star, de la Ossa states "there is invariably the best of attention paid to [cattlemen] during their stay at my house." Another factor to support de la Ossa's providing accommodation earlier in the decade is the large quantities of food and drink he purchased that could have accommodated visitors in addition to family and employees.⁴⁴

In the early 1800's, when a stranger was a rarity and any news he might bring welcome, the stranger would become a guest in the rancher's home. But the American period brought a sharp increase in population and the stranger became commonplace. De la Ossa's acquaintance, Horace Bell, cites de la Ossa as an example of local old-world hospitality.⁴⁵ Fellow Californians could expect food and drink and also lodging for free at most ranchos. But at what point in time the total stranger ceased being a guest and became a paying customer is a matter for debate.

In 1859, de la Ossa put a notice in the paper to advertise room and board at the ranch.⁴⁶ Author Robert Cleland cites de la Ossa's action as an example of "how difficult it was for the old Californian to conform to the necessities of the new day."⁴⁷ The notice could have been the result of the widespread pressures of taxation and the declining cattle market that forced him to open his home as a business. But this assumes he had not charged money for these services before.

The image of the lordly rancharo finally reduced to putting a price on his hospitality is tempered by de la Ossa's 1853 notice in which he requested local cattlemen to pay him for the use of his springs. Would the same man be willing to offer rooms, and could he afford to offer food and drink through the previous ten years for free? Might not the same man be willing to offer these services earlier than 1859 if they provided him extra income to cushion the demands of ranch and family? Times were getting tougher, but his '59 advertisement may simply indicate de la Ossa's hope of increasing his business already in progress. The road to Santa Barbara was about to be improved (in part by his son-in-law, Thompson) to accommodate the coastal mail stage which would pass through the Encino.⁴⁸ And a better road would promise more traffic and more business.

This decade of affluence enjoyed by Californians has been the subject of a popular literature that would have us believe that all rancharos were as wealthy and flamboyant as were just a few. In reality, most were like de la Ossa with moderate holdings. Finally, all were vulnerable when this golden age went into decline by the 1860's. Nor was the end of their

way of life due solely to economics. As the years passed, the Californios gradually became foreigners in what had been their own country. The government, language, religion, and values became those of the Yankees. The beginning of the end of their ranching period started before de la Ossa's death in 1861. Ironically, it was due to the presence in the family of the American Thompson that kept the ranch in the family a few more years. The decades of cattle ranching, first for hides and later for beef, were over. New blood and new ideas for using the land would take over from here.

In childhood, Vicente and Rita de la Ossa were part of the life of a Spanish colonial presidio and mission. Their adulthood was spent in a pueblo during the Mexican period and on a rancho during the American period. Their historical value lies in their being typical of their times, and their family biography provides a model for interpreting a way of life soon to disappear after American statehood.

NOTES

- ¹ William J. Wallace. "Los Encinos State Historical Monument: The Archeological Record" Journal of the West, Vol. 1, October 1962, pp. 170-192.

Burnett C. Turner "Architectural Survey and Report, De la Osa Adobe, Los Encinos State Historical Monument" Report of the State of California Division of Beaches and Parks, December 1966.
- ² Donald C. Cutter. "Report on Rancho El Encino for State of California, Division of Beaches and Parks" Preliminary report, p. 1.
- ³ George R. Stammerjohn. "Los Encinos State Historic Park - Resource Management Plan, Department of Parks and Recreation, October 1978.
- ⁴ Existing signatures of Vicente and his father are spelled "Ossa". The spelling "Ossa" originates from the province of Vizcaya, "Osa" from Navarra, Spain. Both "de la Ossa" and "de la Osa" mean from the town of Osa in Navarra. Basque in origin, both spellings are found in Spain today; traceable to the 1600's, coat of arms carries the seven stars of the bear constellation Ursus Minor.

A.A.Garcia-Carrafa. Solar Vasco Navarro Madrid, N.D.
- ⁵ Book I of the Baptismal, Marriage and Death records of the Mission San Diego de Alcalá.
- ⁶ Town Council records of Los Angeles dating before January 1832 have been lost.
- ⁷ "Everything connected with clothing was done under my direction by my daughters. I cut out and arranged the pieces and my five daughters sewed them...I had besides to attend to the soap house which was very large, the wine presses, and the olive grinders for making oil, which I worked myself. I attended to... everything related to the making of saddles and shoes, and everything needed in a harness and shoe shop. I delivered every week the rations for the soldiers of the mission guard...When it was necessary, one of my daughters did what I was unable to do."

Eulalia Perez de Guillen de Marine. "Una Vieja y Sus Recuerdos," Recorded by Thomas Savage in 1877, Archives of the Bancroft Library, Berkeley.
- ⁸ The American trapper, Harrison Rogers describes a wedding at the San Gabriel Mission, Nov. 30, 1826:

"...the bell was rang a little before sunrise, and the morning service performed; then the musick commenced serranading, the soldiers firing etc.; about 7 o'clock tea (chocolate) was served, and about 11 o'clock, dinner and

musick. The ceremony and dinner was held at the priests; they had an elegant dinner, consisting of a number of dishes, boiled and roast meat and fowl, wine and brandy, grapes brought as a dessert after dinner."

Fr. Zephyrin Engelhardt, O.F.M. San Gabriel Mission and the Beginnings of Los Angeles San Gabriel, California, 1927, p. 149.

9 For a breakdown of occupations listed in the Mexican census of 1836 and 1844, see "The Two Pueblos of Los Angeles: Agricultural Village and Embryo Town" by Howard J. Nelson, Historical Society of Southern California Quarterly, Vol. 59, 1977, p. 10.

10 The Town Council's jurisdiction extended, "over an area now comprised in four counties and covering a territory as large as the State of Massachusetts. Its authority was as extensive as its jurisdiction. It granted town lots and recommended to the governor grants of lands from the public domain. In addition to passing ordinances for the government of the pueblo, its members acted as the executive officers to enforce them. It combined within itself the powers of a Board of Health, a Board of Education, a Police Commission, and a Street Department.

The sessions were conducted with great dignity and decorum. The members were required to attend their public functions 'attired in black apparel, so as to add solemnity to the meetings.'"

J.M. Guinn. "Muy Ilustre Ayuntamiento," Annual Publication. Historical Society of Southern California, Vol. 4, 1897, pp. 207-208.

11 "Taking the oath of office was a solemn and impressive affair. The junior Rejidor [Councilman] and the Secretary introduced the member to be sworn. 'When he shall kneel before a crucifix placed on a table or dias, with his right hand on the Holy Bible, then all the members of the Ayuntamiento shall rise and remain standing with bowed heads, while the Secretary reads from the oath prescribed by law; and on the member saying, 'I swear to do, etc.' the President will answer: 'If thou so doest, God will reward thee; if thou doest not, may He call thee to account.'"

ibid., p. 208.

12 "The mayor [Jose Antonio Carrillo], President of the meeting verbally informed against the Secretary of this Council, showing him guilty of indolence and misconduct in his office. The above was investigated and taking into consideration that this was a reiteration of former offenses and consequently degrading to the Corporation, they decided to sever his connection as Secretary of this Council and name one ad-interim until the approval by the Most Excellent Disputation, to whom must be submitted the causes leading to this action.

Minutes of the Los Angeles Town Council, Feb. 7, 1833.

- 13 The information that follows is taken from the English translations of the Los Angeles Town Council Minutes and Lot Petitions, 1834-1842. (City Archives, Records Management Division, Los Angeles, California.)
- 14 In addition to the house on what is now Olvera Street, de la Ossa owned a house located on the west side of what is now Broadway, and 2,500 square feet at what is now Third and Hill Streets. (Los Angeles Star, Jan. 12, 1861; Feb. 5, 1869.)

15 "Most Excellent Political Chief, pro-tem [Alvarado]:
The undersigned in conjunction with the names, that appear in the adjoining list, appear before you, in the form provided by law and say, that in view that Don Vicente de la Ossa has established himself on the land, which for many years has belonged to the public on account of its proximity to the city. This party forgetting and ignoring the law, has taken possession of a piece of property, to satisfy himself not thinking of the injuries occasioned to the community. We now appeal to your superior authority and intelligence, exposing these facts and adding, as you can see in accompanying document, the insults cast upon us by this party, on account of a reprimand him by first Alcalde [Mayor] through his decree brought forth through a petition of ours. In the first place, Mr. La/Ossa, has taken possession of a piece of land through which the main ditch passes and serves to border same, thereby compelling the community to be subject to his orders; before using the water of same, which is contrary to all fundamental and national laws. This reason, we think is sufficient to convince of the gravity of this case, if this party should bring his proposition into effect. In the second place, this city being limited as to length and only composed of two streets, the land in question is absolutely necessary for the traffic of wagons, horses, cattle, etc. Third and last, by this land being taken up, it will naturally close all crossing alleys, and consequently all above transit; will be obliged to pass through the city, to the great danger of children all of which this party pretends to ignore, looking after his own interests solely. We are of the opinion that we have exposed to your Excellency the wrongs this community would be exposed to, if Mr. La/ossa would carry out his idea. . .

Angeles, June 27th 1838

Juan Gallardo

Vicente Sanchez

Tiburcio Tapia"

16 "Most Illustrious Town Council:
We, the undersigned citizens appear before you with all due respect and say that as our small stores are the only means we possess for the support of our families and the maintenance of our credit and as we have been prohibited from selling liquors on holidays until after mass and just before evening prayer, which is the time when we sell the most.

Never before has the circulation of money been so contracted in this city, likewise business depression has never been so great as at the present time, assuring you that in the ordinary week days, scarcely a quart of anything is sold, and in view of the above we supplicate, that you allow us to carry on the liquor business on holidays, from the time that mass is concluded to the hour of ringing of bells to pray for the souls in Purgatory,

as previously established, to see if by this manner we can do a medium business...

City of Los Angeles

Nov. 9th 1838

Vicente de la Ossa

Franco Limon

Juan de Dios Vadillo

Nicola Finik

Bernardino Guirado

Antonio Lopez

Carlos Baric

Jose Antonio Ramirez

Ygnacio Coronel

- 17 De la Guerra collection, Vicente de la Ossa, 3 June 1842, FAC 677 (751)
Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino.
- 18 In the Mexican census of 1844 de la Ossa's occupation is no longer "Tavernero" but "Labrador." This means that he was now a Farmer. (William Mason, Curator, History Division, L.A. County Museum of Natural History.)
- 19 Ignacio Palomares' lawyer went before Judge Stephen Foster and stated, "That the time limit granted by the creditors of Don Vicente de la Osa, insolvent, having expired, these creditors are demanding of my constituent [Palomares], as bondsman for Senor de la Osa, that he pay the amount owed them. My constituent being pressed and about to be attached by Senor Juan Manso, one of the creditors, I see the urgent necessity, notwithstanding the pitiful situation of said Don Vicente de la Osa and his unhappy family, to ask Your Honor to issue a writ of attachment against the property of the aforesaid de la Osa and by legal means to place them at public auction, so that with the proceeds thereof the demands of the creditors may be paid as far as possible..."
Archives of the Prefecture of Los Angeles, 1834-1850, Book I, Part II, p. 711, May 29, 1848 (Administrative Offices, Room 35, Hall of Records, Los Angeles.)
(The Los Angeles County civil and criminal court records of the Mexican period are located at the Seaver Center for Western Research, L.A. County Museum of Natural History. There is no record in these cases of further action taken against de la Osa. This debt may have been cleared in October 1849.)
- 20 On October 13, 1849, the sale of Rancho La Providencia to Alejandro Mellus and Company of Vicente de la Ossa for "the area of which comprises a sitio [land grant] for cattle and horses, for the sum of 1,500 pesos which he has received in silver coin."
Two weeks later, on the 30th of October, the three ExMission Indians, owners of the Encino, Roman, Aqueda and Roque's Indian wife Rita, appeared before Judge Juan Sepulveda to "grant and convey unto Don Vicente de la Osa their respective property right in the Rancho de Encino--Osa divided 100 pesos between the three."
Archives of the Prefecture of Los Angeles, 1834-1850, Book I, Part II, May 29, 1848 (Hall of Records, Los Angeles).
- 21 Decree of District Court of the U.S. for the Southern District, Case No. 392, Feb. 8, 1858, County Archives, Los Angeles.

give me notice to open the doors, paying two cents for each head of cattle and horses, and one cent for each sheep. And all persons who may travel with their oxen and animals necessary for their journey, shall have free access to the water, but they at all times shall give me notice to open the doors to the spring--which doors shall always remain closed, for various reasons that I forbear mentioning.

Los Angeles, June 1, 1858

Vicente de la Osa"

June 5, 1858 issue of L.A. Star,

²⁸ The Los Angeles Star, weekly bilingual newspaper. First issue: May 17, 1851.

²⁹ The notice is seven paragraphs, in the June 11, 1853 issue of the L.A. Star. The first and last paragraphs are quoted here:

"Since the year 1850 I have been in the habit of purchasing cattle of parties, who, on their way to the upper country, pass by my premise. The result of these transactions was always beneficial to both parties, as the cattle drivers thereby found an opportunity to dispose of cattle which sooner or later they would have been obliged to abandon on the road, while I had an opportunity of profiting of the advantage of buying such cattle at a low price. It is no wonder that many Cattle drivers give me the preference in purchasing cattle which they consider unfit for further transportation, as there is invariably the best of attention paid to them during their stay at my house. This very preference has excited jealousy of a certain class of people, who have always been accustomed to find all cattle that were lost or abandoned on the road return to the place whence they were taken, from which they could derive a profit from being able to resell them. On all occasions I have either procured from the parties making such sales, a certificate setting forth the number of cattle, their brands, etc. or called upon witnesses to testify to the sale.

I conclude by requesting those who are not acquainted with me, not to form an unfavorable opinion concerning my character, based on assertions without any foundation, which enemies of mine may circulate behind my back. I can only boast of being an honest and hard working man, whose only desire extends to provide for his numerous family in an honorable manner.

Los Angeles 11th June, 1853

Vicente de la Osa"

³⁰ Card of "Testimony of Diligence and Good Conduct" to Vicente (Jr.) de la Ossa, April 1856, from Santa Clara College in San Jose. (Los Encinos SHP)

³¹ Interview with de la Ossa descendant, Katharine Boultinghouse, 1984. Photograph of de la Ossa and Temple daughters in their fencing costumes (copy at Los Encinos SHP).

³² In H.H. Bancroft's Register of Pioneer Inhabitants of California & Index, de la Ossa is cited as Judge of the Plains in 1856 (p. 762). Election results in the L.A. Star of Feb. 12, 1859 records that he was elected this year as well.

- 33 "Being desirous of changing my residence, I offer for sale my rancho, known as 'El Encino,' containing three miles square, situated 18½ miles from the city of Los Angeles. There is on the rancho an abundance of grass, and timber of all kinds, is watered by springs, both cold and warm, the latter possessing medicinal qualities. There is on the rancho a large vineyard, together with a great variety of fruit trees, all choice selections. The soil is well adapted to the cultivation of small grain. The buildings are commodious and comfortable. Titles confirmed. All persons desirous of securing a good rancho and pleasant home, are invited to give this an examination.
El Encino, April 10, 1860. Vicente de la Ossa"
April 14 and 21, 1860 issues of the L.A. Star.
(The 1860 census lists the value of the ranch at \$5,000.)
- 34 Probate Proceedings, Sept. 23, 1862, Case No. 209. (Records of the Superior Court, County Archives, Los Angeles).
- 35 L.A. Star, July 28, 1860.
- 36 Marion Parks. "In Pursuit of Vanished Days," Historical Society of Southern California Quarterly, Vol. 14, Part II, pp. 182-183.
- 37 Letter from Manuela to her husband James. Manuela's mother is Rita; Antonio, Vicente and Constancia are her brothers and sister. (Copy at Los Encinos SHP):

"Encino Ranch
July 8th/864

Mr. James Thompson

My dearest Husband,

I am very sorry to think that you have not received but one letter from me, although I have received all of yours and answered every one of them: in my last I informed you of our dear little Susana's good health. Adela as well as her, and myself are, and have been perfectly well. With regard to Flieshman and Llricksell, I will send you enclosed a letter which he sent me together with the account of the wool. I have taken at their store just what I was in great need of, which account I will show you. Mother was very glad to hear from you...Antonio started one month after you did, but his horses gave out, and he was obliged to make a stay at Orvesr's Lake, during that time he had nothing to do so he came to see us, and is here now. He calculates to continue his journey in four or five days. Adela loses no time with her studies, she got so that she can read in English and Spanish, and is now writing. I did not want her to write to you until she could do it better, but she thought that it would please you very much to see her writing, and she composed a little note and begged me to send it to you. Her aunt did not want to correct it, so that you might see her improvement in her first attempt. All of Mother's children are doing well. Constancia's health is better at times, but very delicate. Everything is well taken care of at the Brea. Vicente went over the other day to help to put up the hay, And he says it is only 8 or 7 tons...

Oh! how I long for the month of September to come, for I find no pleasure but at your side. The children think of nothing else but of their Pa. They sing and pray to God for their Pa's safe return. All of the family wish to be kindly remembered to you and the boys.

Your most affectionate wife

Manuela de Thompson

- 38 U.S. census of 1870.
- 39 Donald C. Cutter. "Report on Rancho El Encino for State of California, Division of Beaches and Parks" California Historical Society Quarterly, Vol. 43, No.2, June 1961, p. 208.
- 40 Baptismal and Marriage records of Missions San Diego, San Gabriel, San Fernando, and the Plaza Church, Los Angeles. A sampling includes:
- . Maria Antonia Carrillo, wife of Jose de la Guerra y Noriega, godmother to Vicente de la Ossa, 1808.
 - . Jose Antonio Carrillo, godfather to Rita Guillen, 1817.
 - . Vicente de la Ossa, witness at marriage of Bernardo Sepulveda and Rafaela Verdugo, 1844.
 - . Pio Pico and Catalina Verdugo, godparents to Maria Manuela de la Ossa, 1833.
 - . Andres Pico, godfather to the second Manuela, 1834.
 - . Merced Lugo, godmother to Antonio de la Ossa, 1838.
 - . Ygnacio and Isabel Verales del Valle, godparents to Maclovia de la Ossa, 1856.
 - . Sara Lugo married to David de la Ossa.
- 41 Marie Northrop. "Searching for the Birth Date of Eulalia Perez de Guillen de Marine," The Historical Society of Southern California Quarterly, Vol. 40, 1958, p. 182.
- 42 Minutes of the Town Council of Los Angeles, 1832-1844. Interviews with de la Ossa descendants Katharine Boultinghouse and Alexander Murray, 1984.
- 43 "We learn at the post office, that from Monday next, the mail stage will run tri-weekly between San Francisco and this city, by the coast route via Santa Barbara, &c. leaving Los Angeles on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays."
L.A. Star, April 20, 1861.
- 44 Account book entries of de la Ossa purchases with L.A. merchant Mathew Keller 1857-1859 (Los Encinos SHP)
Account book entries of de la Ossa purchases with L.A. merchant Francis Mellus, 1857-1860 (Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino)

- 45 In pursuit of Indians in 1853, a party of local citizens arrived at the Encino:
 "...in the middle of the afternoon, we drew up in martial array before the hospitable castle of the lordly Don Vicente de la Osa, the baronial proprietor of the Rancho del Encino, who cordially invited us to dismount, stake our jaded mustangs and refresh the inner man, an invitation we joyfully acceded to... Mustangs staked, there commenced a doleful and disappointed shaking of canteens, which the jovial old Don Vicente observing, said, 'Que le hace? aqui hay bastante.' (What's the matter; there is plenty here.) And in the twinkling of an eye a demijohn was duly mustered in as a welcome reinforcement... At the end of the two hours..there had been the fourth repetition of beef, tortillas and coffee. Then we held a council of war, of which Don Vicente became the principal spokesman."
- Major Horace Bell. Reminiscences of a Ranger Santa Barbara: Wallace Hebbard, 1927, pp. 117-118.
- 46 "I have established at my Rancho known by the name of The Encino, situated at the distance of twenty-one miles from the city, on the road to Santa Barbara, a place for the purpose of affording accommodation to the people travelling on this road.
 They will find, at all times, food for themselves and for the horses, beds at night, &c. I hope those wishing to call at our place will not forget to bring with them what is necessary to defray their expenses.
 Los Angeles, March 18th, 1859 Vicente de la Osa"
 March 19, 1859 issue of L.A. Star.
- 47 Robert G. Cleland. The Cattle on a Thousand Hills San Marino: Ward Ritchie Press, 1941, p. 156.
- 48 L.A. Star articles, Nov. 6, 1858; May 14, 1859.
- 49 Amelie Kneass. "Furnishing an Early California Home," Pacific Building, Monterey State Historical Monument, June 1961.
 Pamela McGuire. "A suggested Furnishing Plan for the Avila Adobe," Interpretive Planning Unit, Department of Parks and Recreation, May 30, 1975.
- 50 Richard Henry Dana, Jr. Two Years Before the Mast Philadelphia: The Macmillan Company, 1911., p. 88-89.
 William Heath Davis. Seventy-Five Years in California San Francisco: John Howell, 1929., p. 60.
 Don Jose de Carmen Lugo. "Life of a Rancher," Historical Society of Southern California, Vol. 29, 1947, pp. 217-218.
 Alfred Robinson. Life in California During a Residence of Several Years in that Territory Santa Barbara: Peregrine Publishers, 1970, pp. 26-27.

Sir George Simpson. Voyages to California Ports, 1841-1842 San Francisco: Privately Printed, 1930, p. 119.

Charles Wilkes, U.S.N. United States Exploring Expedition During the Years 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842 Vol. 5, Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1845, pp. 200-201.

- 51 Archives of the Prefecture of Los Angeles 1840-1850, Book II, Part I, pp. 131-139 (Hall of Records, Los Angeles).
- 52 Ralph Herbert Cross. The Early Inns of California 1844-1869 San Francisco: Cross & Brandt, 1954, p. 62.
- 53 In 1853, the American judge Benjamin Hayes observed of Los Angeles, "There are three large dry-goods stores and ten smaller ones, all sell groceries, hardware, etc. keep a general assortment. Half a dozen other sell groceries exclusively...almost anything you want, for housekeeping or wearing apparel, for ladies or gentlemen, can be bought here. For furniture you could send to San Francisco, or better go in person. You can buy everything in San Francisco that you can in New York and nearly as cheap!"
Benjamin Hayes. Pioneer Notes from the Diaries of Judge Benjamin Hayes, 1849-1875, (Privately printed, Los Angeles, 1929) p. 90 (letter).
- 54 L.A. Star, November 20, 1854.
- 55 L.A. Star, February 19, 1853.
- 56 L.A. Star, May 13, 1854.
- 57 L.A. Star, April 2, 1853.
- 58 Don Vicente de la Ossa in account with Mathew Keller, Dec. 1857 - July 1859, (Los Encinos SHP).
Account Book of Don Vicente de la Osa, Nov. 1857 - Aug. 1860, Francis Mellus Collection (Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino).
- 59 L.A. Star, August 7, 1858.
- 60 This takes into account inventories taken during summer months when braziers could be stored; the inventories of storerooms; the use of words other than "brasero."
- 61 L.A. Star, May 1, 1852.

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