

# I.

# Early History

**D**OWN THE OLD Mission Road near the grassy slopes of San Bruno Mountain, the City of Daly City and the village of Colma stand as gateways to the famed San Francisco Peninsula.

Nature has blessed the land they occupy with temperatures that rarely reach 70° and seldom drop lower than 40°. As a result, flowers bloom in December as well as in May and vegetables grow throughout the year. This is a land that is often covered by thick, white fog that forms over the Pacific Ocean, then sweeps inland and crosses the northern peninsula, leaving a belt of cool air between the sunshine of San Francisco's Mission District and the heat of the southern part of the peninsula. This rather strange weather caused Elbert Hubbard to write that the secret of the beauty and vitality of San Mateo County lies in the variation experienced in its everyday temperature. Here he found what he called the cool breeze mated with the warm sunshine.<sup>1</sup>

The weather picture is illustrated by the high and low temperatures recorded in Daly City in 1968 by the U.S. Weather Bureau:

	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
HIGH	59	66	66	67	65	67	67	71	72	68	66	56
LOW	39	48	45	44	48	51	52	55	54	49	50	41

The histories of Daly City and Colma begin with the same date, October 9, 1776, when the Mission San Francisco de Asis (Dolores) was dedicated. With solemn oaths both priests and soldiers resolved to secure the land nearby for the king of Spain and the natives for God. During the services the priests claimed the land southward for sixteen miles as a place to raise crops and to forage herds of cattle and sheep.

Within two years after the dedication, the priests from the Mission and the soldiers from the Presidio had marked out a winding trail that connected San Francisco to the rest of California. At the place where the road reached the top of Mission Hill the priests noted a gap between San Bruno Mountain and the Coastside Hills and named it La Portezuela.<sup>2</sup> It has since been known by other names, notably Daly's Hill, the Top of the Hill, and the Center of Daly City.

After passing through La Portezuela, travelers on the Mission Road continued southward until they reached the bottom of the slope. There the road divided with the left fork leading to a station on San Mateo Creek and the right fork

becoming Old San Pedro Road and proceeding to a garden area along the coast side of the peninsula.

During Spanish times the grassy slopes near the Mission Road, and the land between the San Bruno Mountain and the Pacific Ocean, remained in a state of nature. Wild cattle roamed through the acres of brush. Bears wandered up from the Pedro Valley along the coast feeding upon the smaller animals such as cottontails, woodrats, chipmunks and squirrels that lived in the tangled undergrowth.

Meanwhile, momentous changes were stirring in other parts of the world that were to have a profound effect upon this part, as well as all sections of California. On the opposite side of the continent the English colonies had united to throw off the rule of a European prince. Once they had achieved independence many of the residents of the new United States moved westward to tame the wilderness, moving ever closer to California, with the San Francisco Peninsula as one of their goals.

Before the Americans reached the Pacific coast, however, the Spanish colony of Mexico gained freedom from its motherland and became a republic, with California as its northernmost province and with Mexican grandees as its governors.

Moving rapidly, the governors reduced the Spanish missions to mere parish churches and granted the acres owned by the priests to Mexican nobles to hold as princely ranchos. Three of these touched the land now filled with the cities of Daly City and Colma.

Rancho Buri Buri covered 15,000 acres in an area that is presently covered by a part of Colma and portions of the cities of Burlingame, San Bruno, South San Francisco and Millbrae. Its owner, Jose Sanchez, lived in an adobe house and owned eight yokes of oxen to plow his fields and gather his crops. In one area of his land he had a grist mill; in another a rodeo ground where he and his neighbors held an annual event.

Rancho Laguna de la Merced covered one half a square league lying around a lake bearing the same name. For some reason, perhaps because his grant was the smallest in the area, Jose Antonio Galindo, Master of Merced, did little to develop his land before he sold it to Francisco de Haro, son-in-law of the owner of Buri Buri.

It is interesting to note that in 1839 Señor Galindo was arrested for murder by de Haro, who was the alcalde, and sent to San Jose because there was no jail in San Francisco and too few men to guard him.<sup>3</sup>

After the American occupation of California, Rancho Laguna de la Merced passed to American owners, then to the Spring Valley Water Company and eventually was subdivided with portions of it becoming part of the Westlake area of Daly City.

The third rancho to touch the Daly City-Colma area was known as Guadalupe la Visitacion y Rodeo Viejo. Stretching from the Visitation District of

San Francisco southward to the present day City of South San Francisco and eastward from the Bayshore to the Mission Road, this vast estate was the property of Jacob Primer Leese and his lovely wife, Rosalia Vallejo, sister of the famous general, Marano Vallejo.

Within ten years after leaving his birthplace in Ohio, sandy-haired Jacob Leese had established businesses along the trail that led from Santa Fe, New Mexico to Los Angeles and to San Francisco. His building in Yerba Buena Cove, serving him both as a house and a store, was the first dwelling to be built in San Francisco, and his daughter Rosalia was the first child born in that city.<sup>4</sup>

Of Jacob Leese's occupancy of the Rancho Visitacion, Dr. Frank M. Stanger writes:

Leese obtained permission to occupy his grant in 1838 or 1839 and took possession by putting cattle on the place. On the site of the present town of Brisbane he built a mud-and-timber house (1840) and a corral, and enclosed eight or ten acres for cultivation by building a brush fence across a corner, so placed that the slough, the hill and the Bay, together with his fence kept the cattle out of his crops. He built another house and a corral in Visitacion Valley where his majordomo and Indian herders lived. This was his main headquarters for cattle herding. Leese himself lived most of the time in Yerba Buena (San Francisco), visiting the rancho about once a week and staying there at times with his family for the season of matanza (butchering).<sup>5</sup>

In 1841, Leese traded his rancho to Robert Ridley for Calloyomi Rancho in Sonoma, and thus passed out of the history of Northern San Mateo County. Within less than a decade, however, butchers, bakers, and dairymen had moved onto the land.

# Ranchos of San Mateo County

Under the Republic of Mexico

1822-1846

