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Old Time Mills

Yesterday we wrote of La Perouse, the French navigator who visited Monterey in 1786. While here he presented the fathers with an iron hand mill so that corn and wheat could be ground more easily and with seed potatoes from Chile, the first that were known in California.

La Perouse and his officers were received with much hospitality at San Carlos. The Indians had been told that the Frenchmen were very good churchmen, and Father Palou had them all assembled at a reception in honor of the visitors, wrote Guadalupe Vallejo in his Atlantic Monthly article in 1890. His father and grandfather had often recited the details of this event to young Vallejo.

Mrs. James Ord had a drawing of the occasion, made by an officer, when La Perouse was given the reception at the Carmel Mission, but it was stolen from her about the time of the American occupation, like so many other precious relics of Spanish California. Mrs. Ord was the wife of Dr. Ord who came to Monterey as a surgeon with Company F of the Third United States Artillery, under contract and not with the regular army. Mrs. Ord was the widow of Don Manuel Jimeno, nee Angustias de la Guerra y Noriega and the daughter of Don Jose de la Guerra of Santa Barbara. James Ord's brother was General Edward O.C. Ord for whom Fort Ord was named.

Early in the century water power flour mills were built at Santa Cruz, San Luis Obispo, San Jose, and San Gabriel. Horse power mills were in use in many places. Captain George Vancouver, when he visited Monterey and Santa Cruz in 1784, gave to the latter mission a grist mill of a value of 1,000 pesos, according to a recording of Padre Salzar.

In 1796 Governor Borica sent artisans from Monterey to Santa Cruz to erect the mill. Records from Branciforte (Santa Cruz) contain a request by the priests to the authorities across the river to help transport mill stones from San Juan Bautista. When the Santa Cruz Mission passed out of the hands of the Franciscans, Jose Antonio Bolcoff, a Russian, obtained possession of the mills, so Leon Rowland writes in his "Annals of Santa Cruz."

About the time that the Americans began to arrive in numbers the Spanish people were just commencing to project larger mill enterprises and irrigation ditches for their own needs. The difficulties with land titles put an end to most of these plans, and some of them were afterward carried out by Americans when the ranches were broken up.

One of the greatest of the early irrigation projects was that of Don Ygnacio Vallejo, who spent much labor and money in supplying San Luis Obispo Mission with water. This was begun in 1776 and completed the following year. That early Californian also planned to carry the water of the Carmel River to Monterey, recorded Guadalupe Vallejo, the grandson of Ygnacio, in his "Ranch and Mission Days in Alta California." He also said in this article, written for publication in 1890, that the Southern Pacific Railroad Company had carried out this project.

"My father, Don J.J. Vallejo, about fifty years ago, (1840) made a stone aqueduct and several irrigation and mill ditches from the Alameda Creek, on which he built an adobe flourmill whose mill stones had been brought from Spain," wrote Vallejo.

Family life among the old Spanish pioneers was an affair of dignity and ceremony, but it did not lack in affection, declared Vallejo. Children were brought up to respect their elders. It was a privilege for any older person to correct young people by words, or even by whipping them, and it was never told that anyone thus chastised made a complaint. Each one of the old families taught their children the history of the family, and reverence toward religion. A few books some in manuscript, were treasured in the household, but children were not allowed to read novels until they were grown. They saw little of other children, except their near relatives, but they had many enjoyments unknown to children of today, and they grew up with remarkable strength and healthfulness, thought Vallejo.