

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

October 18, 1954

California's Sugar

The subject of sugar has become increasingly fascinating after our recent visit to the huge, very efficiently operated Spreckels Sugar Factory at Spreckels in Monterey County, with the members of the Monterey County Historical Society.

Before we continue this story we wish to compliment the owners, the management, the guides and all the other persons at the factory who assisted in so many ways to make the tour the complete and satisfying experience which it proved to be.

The more than 50 persons who attended were divided into group of ten under the direction of well-informed guides. We were most fortunate in having as our guide Jack Goodrick, a resident of Spreckels, now retired after many years as an employee of the factory, but who is frequently called back to service when an experienced sugar man is needed to tell the story of the sugar beet as it is planted and raised in the Salinas Valley and used in the Spreckels Sugar Factory. Mr. Goodrick is the brother of Joseph L. Goodrick of Carmel Valley. His mother was Rufine Cantu, a sister of Lolita Cantu who became the wife of Ezequiel Soberanes, Jr. and owned the adobe home in Monterey now known as Casa Soberanes on Pacific street.

To continue with our story of the history of sugar we must relate that in 1485, sugar was sold in England for \$2.75 per pound. A dollar was then worth about as much as \$20 dollars is today. Thus one pound of sugar was worth over \$50 of our present day money. Sugar imported from Mexico or Peru cost General Vallejo about \$2 per pound. During the Gold Rush it often brought 85 cents a pound in the grocery stores of mining camps. Today sugar costs about 15 cents a pound.

We were told by our guide that there is almost no waste in sugar factories. The used liquids and minerals are turned back into the land. The tops and pulp are valuable as stock fodder. The last molasses is made into alcohol or mixed with the pulp. At intervals during the tour the members of the group were invited to taste the sugar at its various stages of manufacture from brown, to powdered, to cubes and crystals. It all looked so clean and good and tasted that way too.

Outstanding among sugar manufacturers were the aforementioned Dyer and Spreckels, and the Oxnard brothers. Henry, James, and Robert Oxnard, who studied the beet sugar factories in Europe so that they could bring new and improved methods to Southern California. They built a factory in a cow pasture at the west end of San Bernardino County where the town of Chino now stands. Later they built a sugar plant in a Ventura County grain field, where the thriving town of Oxnard is today.

Seven California towns owe their early existence to the beet sugar industry. These are Spreckels, Dyer, Chino, Oxnard, Hamilton City, Los Alamitos, and Betteravia.

In the middle 1930's a new factory was started at Clarksburg and the Spreckels Co. built another one near Woodland.

The California beet sugar industry has had a varied history. There have been many failures. Farmers have had labor problems, their crops have suffered from disease and drought, and the sugar content of their beets has not always been high. Competition with cane sugar has also added to the industry's handicaps. In spite of these handicaps, a number of beet sugar factories have been successful in California.

The industry has grown faster in California than in any other state. The acreage of sugar beets and output in beet sugar have more than doubled in the last 20 years. The production of beet sugar in the two states of Colorado and California amounts to more than 50 percent of the nation's total.

Former factories now not in existence are Chino and Los Alamitos, both erected in the early 1890's; Corcoran, Santa Ana, Anaheim, Huntington Beach and Visalia, built after 1900.

The Spreckels factory near Salinas owns its own wells and uses about 18 million gallons of water a day. They say that at least one half of that water is conserved and goes back into the water level for future use.

We are indebted for the valuable information concerning the sugar beet industry to the information given us by Mr. Goodrick and to an unknown writer in California History Nugget, published by the California State Department of Education in 1937.