

September 30, 1957

## Early Kern County

Kern County is one of America's wealthiest counties, according to the claims of the Kern County Historical Society. Blessed not only with good mineral and agricultural resources, Kern County is also rich in her romantic past. Here pre-historic and historic times have left their marks on the contemporary scene.

The modern era began with the arrival of the Spanish, Don Pedro Fages being the first known white man to gaze upon the tremendous expanse of the future country. In 1772, he entered the San Joaquin Valley from the south through Grapevine Canyon. Gazing out over this broad expanse, he gave the valley its first name "Buena Vista," meaning "good view." He was soon followed by Garces Zalvidea, Moraga and other Spanish explorers.

The sudden appearance of "mountain man" Jedediah Strong Smith in 1827 in the valley, heralded the imminent American invasion. Within a few years the hills and valleys were to become familiar ground to the hardy trappers from the east, as well as to the advance agents and surveyors of the U. S. government. Chief among the latter was the noted explorer, John C Fremont. One of his associates was the topographer, Edward M. Kern, after whom Kern River and Kern County were named.

Acquired by the United States from Mexico, California became rapidly populated during the famous gold rush. Then, shortly after its admission as a state in 1850, gold was discovered on the upper Kern River. The rush of miners to the new diggings led to the rise of the towns of Keyville, Quartzburg, Whiskey Flat, and Havilah, the last becoming the first county seat in 1866.

Fort Tejon was established in 1854 by the U. S. Army for the suppression, of rustling and the protection of Indians on the nearby Sebastian Reservation. As regimental headquarters for the 1st Dragoons, the Fort became, an important military, political, and social center during the early days of statehood. For a few years, it was the home of a detachment of the colorful Camel Corps. In 1864 the Fort was finally abandoned.

Kern County is seeking to perpetuate the memory of this distinctive heritage through the California historical landmarks program, under the state park commission.

In addition to the Lakeview Gusher No. 1, the county has already marked Oak Creek Pass, seven miles southeast of Tehachapi, as the ancient pass through which Garces reached the San Joaquin Valley in 1776. Another marker

has risen at Keyville, a gold mining center from 1853 to 1870. The first town in Kern County, it was named for Richard Keys, a pioneer miner. Walker's Pass is No 99. It is a major pass through Sierra Nevada, discovered by Joseph Reddeford Walker in 1834.

Eight miles south of Bodfish, gold was discovered in 1864. This location, known as Havilah, received No. 100, because it was also the county seat from 1866 to 1873. Fort Tejon is No. 129. Willow Springs, also marked, is an ancient Indian watering place and was visited by Garces in 1776, the Fremont party in 1864, and by Death Valley '49ers.

Kernville, No. 132 in the state's list, was the site of famous old Whiskey Flat gold mining camp in the 1860's. Sebastian Indian Reservation was established by E. F. Beal in 1853 for protection of the California Indians, so it was chosen to be marked. Gordon's Ferry on Kern River, at the foot of China Grade, marked 137, is where Major Gordon operated a ferry in the 1850's.

Within the City of Bakersfield there are several markers: Arvin Garces statue, a padre who passed that way in 1776; Col. Thomas Baker statue, first county surveyor and man after whom the city was named. Other markings are at top of Grapevine Pass; Fages-Zalvidea Crossing, Rose Station, which was used for a time by the Indian Village which was excavated in 1933-34 by the Smithsonian Institution, Indian Wells, Desert Springs, Posey Station, Sinks of Tejon, Kern River Slouch and Mountain House, all Butterfield Stage stations. Buttonwillow Tree, and ancient Indian camp site, early cattle rodeo grounds, Miller and Lux headquarters, (town was named after the tree) also received a marker.

The oldest known residence in Kern County was recognized and marked as the Glennville Adobe The Tehachapi loop lays claim for recognition as one of the world's outstanding engineering feats. It was completed in 1876.

Among the oil industry sites marked are the Kern River discovery well, (1899); Lakeview Gusher (1910); Buena Vista Refinery, (1865-1867) and Milway Gusher (1909). McKittrick Brea Pit was the scene of ancient natural animal trap of 15 to 50 thousand years ago. Excavated bones are in Kern County Museum in Bakersfield.