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Those Quaint Names

This column can do a great good to posterity and also give information to its readers by giving the reason or the meaning of certain place names in Monterey County. Some are Spanish or Indian and others are named after person. Just who these person were in our one aim in view. Before long all those who know the history of these places will have died and their names will forever be a mystery.

How did Parkfield get its name—Slack's Canyon, Priest Valley, Peachtree, Lockwood, San Carpojo, Bryson Hames Valley, Prunedale, Greenfield or Lowe's Station? Anyone who can enlighten us as to these names, it will be greatly appreciated. Most of these places are in southern Monterey County.

The first list of names to be defined will be those of towns and settlements commencing at the northern end of the county and working south. Aromas (perfume or odor); Vega (plain); Pajaro (bird). This place got its name from Father Crespi who was traveling north from Monterey and came on some Indians who had a large eagle or condor stuffed with straw which measured ten feet from tip to tip of the wings; Moss Landing named after Charles Moss who was captain of a sailing ship and planned having a port for the Salinas Valley; Castroville, started by Juan B. Castro in 1863; Salinas was first used by Portola in 1869 when he came on the series of salt marshes (Salinas) near the mouth of the river so the name was eventually applied to the river and the valley. Previously the river had several names such as El Rio de Monterey, El Rio Eizeario and Santa Delfina.

Spence Switch was named after Daniel Spence who came to California in 1824 buying and selling produce for export. In 1820 he married Adelaide, daughter of Marino Estrada, commander of the Mexican forces and they had one son, David Stewart Spence. Spence was given two large grants of land, Liano de Buena Vista and Buena Esperanza Rancho and it is, on this latter grant, that Spence Switch is located. He died in 1877.

Chualar is named by the Indians word "chual" for pig weed and "chualar" is a large patch of this weed.

Gonzales was started in 1874 by M.E. and Alfred Gonzales.

Camphora — possibly some of the residents around Soledad could enlighten us as to how and where this name came from.

Soledad is named after the Soledad Mission is Spanish.

Metz was named after W.H. Metz, former supervisor and resident when the railroad passed through his property in 1886.

King City was named after C.H. King, who purchased the San Lorenzo ranch in 1886, and his name was given to the town.

Santa Rita. Town on the highway between Salinas and Prunedale. Santa Rita is known as the saint of impossible and is the patron saint of this town which is also known as Sotoville, after its founder, R. M. Soto, a Chilean. When the town was started in 1867 it was known as New Republic but the name was never popular.

Islay Canyon on the Topo ranch also known as Cherry Canyon. Islay is the Indian word for the wild cherry.

Topo ranch between Metz and King City to the east: topo means gopher in Spanish.

Gabilan, The mountains lying east of Salinas, (hawk)

Toro Mountains south of Salinas and also name of land grant between Salinas and Monterey. (bull).

Tucho. Name of land grant at Blanco and also name of early day settlement of outlaws across the river from Blanco. An Indian word for a weed that grows there.

Pillarcitos. Name of canyon and also early day settlement about two miles west of Salinas River bridge. (little pillow).

Laguna Seca. The lake between Monterey and Salinas (dry lake).

Sur. Name of river and all that section south of Monterey. (south).

Tassajara, Hot springs and resort in Santa Lucia range. A corruption of tassjera, meaning a place where dried meat is hung.

Santa Lucia (St. Lucy). The range of mountains from Morro Bay to the Salinas River. Santa Lucia is the patron of the laboring people.

Nacimiento, river and ranch near Jolon. (birth).

Chalone. Name of tribe of Indians and also creek that empties into the Salinas River at Metz. At the mouth of

the Chalone was one of the largest Indian settlements
in Monterey County when the padres came here.