

Centennial Moments

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Early beginnings at Loma Linda*

Loma Linda was just another barren part of the Greater San Bernardino Valley. The area was first settled by Native Americans and named "Guanchama," or, "plenty to eat." It is presumed that when these early inhabitants first arrived they must have arrived in the spring time when things were green and luxuriant.

The valley was given further attention when a Spanish road was developed between Sonora, in Mexico, and Monterey, California. The need for a supply station at some intermediate point between the Sierras in the north and the San Gabriel Mission led to an expedition to the valley. Legend has it that these San Franciscans came to the valley on May 20, 1810. According to the Roman Catholic Calendar of Saints, that day was the feast day of San Bernardino of Sienna, and they named the valley in his honor. Mission work was begun among the Indians, but what little progress was made was disrupted because of the 1812 earthquake. The hot springs of the valley also became more active during this time. Indian superstitions and fears were aroused. They believed some powerful spirit angered by the new Christian faith caused the quakes. To appease the spirits they massacred most of the Christians and destroyed the buildings. In 1820 a new mission and chapel was built. Cattle were set to grazing in the valley, a sawmill was built at "Forest Home" to make lumber for the mission. Mission authorities established the Asistencia (its present location is off of Barton Road) as an outreach effort to be in better contact with the Indians of the San Bernardino Mountains and the Desert, and to afford better protection for the mission's live stock that grazed on the grasses of the San Bernardino Valley. The San Gabriel Mission prospered until 1833 when Mexico passed the "Act of Secularization" which took from the padres all control of their land.

After 1833 land grants and the establishment of large ranchos divided the land. By the 1840s Mexican and Spanish colonization dominated the area. These rich landowners were known for being social, generous, and hospitable. This balance was broken in 1847 when a Mormon regiment under Captain Jefferson Hunt was mustered out of service following the war between Mexico and the United States. Captain Hunt and a group of Mormons came into the valley, purchased cattle and horses, and settled down. Mormon influence swelled until 1857 when Brigham Young recalled many of these pioneers back to Utah. "Gentiles" mostly from Texas and Missouri rushed to buy the cheap land where an emigrant wagon and team could be exchanged for a home or a ranch. Indians on occasion



attacked the settlers and thus an early fort was built.

Settlers continued to arrive through the 1860s and 1870s. In the early 1880s a wave of city building swept the entire country from the Mexican border in the south to the Tehachapi mountains in the north. "In these boom cities, hotels and health resorts rose up in a night, like mushrooms."

Loma Linda's existence as a resort began when H. E. Hills sold 260 acres of land which included his home on the "mound" on December 25, 1886. It was purchased for \$31,500 by a Riverside syndi-

cate composed of P. D. Cover, W. P. Lett, P. Kingston, G. O. Newman, Wm. R. Russell, and others. The newly formed company erected a hotel at a cost of \$30,000, which was to be an "elegant place for tourists." The new hotel was finished about the end of 1887. A large city of more than 200 acres was plotted, and houses and stores and shops were erected. It was named "Mound City." By February 18, 1888, the Mound City stage was carrying "loads" of passengers to the city daily. Round trip fare and lunch cost \$1.00. The investors hoped to sell lots for a good profit around the hill. The April 1888 dedication brought out the following comment from the editor of the Redlands Citrograph, "Mound City may yet be famous the world over as a health resort."

With competitive influence and intermittent drought, the area around Mound City continued for a number of years. When it faced a severe financial depression, like many other early resort cities across America, it withered away. The buildings were removed until the hotel and one farmhouse remained. The health-oriented boomtown had quickly gone bust. In the late 1890s a group of business people and physicians from Los Angeles purchased the Mound City Tourist Hotel with its campus of 76 acres for only \$15,000. They remodeled the tourist hotel and built five cottages and a large recreation hall on the summit of the hill and improved the grounds. All told they spent \$150,000 on this project. They advertised widely but failed to meet their projections for guests. Finally they were forced to admit that their venture was a failure. The property was placed on the market early in 1904.

This is the first of a new series on the history of Loma Linda as part of the centennial celebration of Loma Linda University, Loma Linda University Medical Center, and the School of Nursing.

**Adapted from a lecture by Merlin D. Burt.*