

# Coronet

March, 1951: p. 51

The -**SAN FERNANDO**  
Valley of Surprises



**T**HERE ARE SEVERAL valleys in California. But to more than 4,000,000 Californians, there is only one valley: *The Valley*, the San Fernando Valley.

Its partisans are not without justification. In area, it is about 24 miles long and up to 10 miles wide. Chicago would fit into it snugly. It could take six Manhattans and never feel them.

Towns string along The Valley's length like pearls on a necklace—long, thin towns, hugging the highways. All are in the corporate limits of Los Angeles except San Fernando, site of the mission established by padres in 1797, and Burbank, home of one of the world's largest movie studios. Each has its community shops, its civic pride, and its honorary mayor, chosen from among the entertainment folk.

Garden-spot householders include Lionel Barrymore, Lucille Ball, Bob Hope, Judy Canova, Horace Heidt, Dinah Shore, Jim Jeffries, old-time heavyweight champion of the world, and Lassie.

They are among the notables. There are tens of thousands of others—estimated by the Los Angeles City Planning Commission as nearly 360,000 in 1948, up from the census figure of 78,572 in 1930—and they're increasing every day.

In productivity, The Valley is amazingly fertile. It spawns garden truck, melons, fruit, nuts, flowers—almost any vegetative thing to caress the palate and excite the eyes and nostrils.

Its grass is munched by champion beef and milk cattle. Thoroughbred horses roam its greenlands. Cockers, collies, scotties, and schnauzers are a thriving business. Its chickens and their eggs garnish breakfast and

## SAN FERNANDO

Sunday-dinner tables. Rabbits for food and fur are one of its major industries.

But statistics aren't what make The Valley dear to the hearts of those who are fortunate enough to live there.

It's the stars, leaning down to kiss the hills; the mountains, shouldering the sky. It's the merry-go-rounds piping their obbligato to the rumble of traffic along the boulevards; the pony carts fringing the highways; as men and women saunter to work; the mannerly Great Dane champion, guarding the parked car at the store on Ventura Boulevard while its mistress shops in shorts; the dizzy, ubiquitous mixture of Fifth Avenue and Main Street.

It's the charm of The Valley—its majesty and its cloudless skies, its sun and its air, its capering squirrels, its four-lane pavements, its avenues of dining rooms, and its collarless comfort.

**T**HE FIRST WHITE MEN ever to lay eyes on The Valley were 63 Spaniards. Seeking an inland route from Mexico to Monterey Bay, they stumbled into The Valley on August 5, 1769. California's first gold was discovered there. Mexicans fought an *opera bouffe* war on its hills. Gen. John Charles Fremont trudged its slopes and annexed it to the U. S. even before Mexico ceded California in 1848.

Tillers of the soil fingered the fertile loam—rich deposits left by a lost lake of the long ago—and characterized the San Fernando as America's Valley of the Nile. Others, even more lyrical, called it a second Garden of Eden.

Even as the pioneering padres of the 18th century had done, the Hollywood hierarchy looked upon The Valley and found it good. Their homes hang on its hills like pictures on a wall. In The Valley, they can escape care, acquire horses, cows, even pigs, and still be within easy driving distance of the Hollywood film studios.

There are sound reasons for the ever-increasing population of The Valley. For one thing, San Fernando is the most convenient *Lebensraum* to Sunset Boulevard and downtown Los Angeles. It will be even nearer Spring Street when the

[OldMagazineArticles.com](http://OldMagazineArticles.com)

## SAN BERNANDO

Hollywood Freeway is completed.

For another thing, the life is splendidly casual, even for California. In the restaurants that nuzzle the concrete of Ventura Boulevard, one may find a glamour starlet in imported gabardine, chatting earnestly with a chicken farmer in jeans. Spurs and spangles crowd each other on a Saturday in Reseda, Van Nuys, Chatsworth, and Canoga Park, when cowhands ride to town to do their shopping. Horses nudge hot-rods on the highways as the ranchers trot in from their haciendas.

Industry has had much to do with the expanding population. Forty years ago, nearly 60,000 acres of The Valley sprouted wheat. Today these same acres bear Warner Brothers' vast 120-acre studio; the Walt Disney, Universal-International and Republic lots; Lockheed's aircraft factory. Chevrolet and Fisher Body occupy a big plant at Van Nuys.

"We build a city a month out here," William Paul Whitsett said recently. He made the remark affectionately, paternally—for he is part of The Valley, and The Valley is part of him.

Van Nuys, the approximate geographical center and administrative hub of The Valley, is Whitsett's baby. It was a dust bowl when he surveyed it for the first time. But he visualized it as green pastures and made it so—for two reasons: to fabricate a fortune and to regain the health he had lost as a coal-mine operator in Indiana.

"I was looking for a place to repair my lungs," he said. "Also," he added with a chuckle, "I was trying to keep one step ahead of the sheriff."

With a group of associates, Whitsett bought 47,000 acres of land. Part of this, including the present site of Van Nuys, he cut up and sold as building lots. He built a home for himself—a sort of mansion that radiates modernity even today as Van Nuys adjusts its contours to the look of tomorrow. He divided and subdivided and re-subdivided his holdings.

Pick another resident at random, ask the same questions, and you'll get practically the same answers. Here, for instance, is a divorcee in her middle thirties—a mother, a career girl—who came to The Val-

## SAN FERNANDO

ley by way of Cleveland, London, and New York.

Her home is at Sherman Oaks, a three-minute walk from Ventura Boulevard. She occupies what Southern California is full of—a guest house. It has a living room, bedroom, dinette, kitchen, and bathroom—all on the smallish side but cozy and comfortable. There is a patio adequate to serve dinner for four. A converted stable provides accommodations for her teen-age son when he comes home from military school in Hollywood. She pays \$75 a month for the guest house, furnished.

Her home, typical of many, is like a forest hideaway. Up from the boulevard, you go through a gate into another world. Pansies border the walk and zinnias are near-by. A breeze whispers through a great oak shading the house. Birds chirp on the branches.

An attractive woman, whose business is advertising in Hollywood, she says: "Here I can collapse and relax. It's away from everything and still I'm only 15 minutes from Hollywood Boulevard. I get a good feeling, no matter how hard the day, when the gate closes behind me."

Nature and man joined to make The Valley a cradle of abundant life. The soil was there, but not enough moisture. The padres, the first agriculturists and the first merchants, discovered the good and the bad, and tapped near-by streams. Their vineyards grew heavy with the grape, and they made wine and sold it for an oxhide a barrel.

Los Angeles solved the problem of The Valley's thirst in 1913 when its engineers went 238 miles to the High Sierras and dammed the mountain snows. Two years later, the parched communities of The Valley became annexed to the city, relinquishing their independence for water.

The Valley took a stiff snort and has been showing the benefits ever since. It explodes crops like popcorn. Farmers get five or six cuttings of alfalfa a year.

Today, however, carpenters and riveters are vying with the harvesters. Industry is edging aside agriculture. In the late 1840s, the land changed hands for 12 cents an acre. Around 1900, it commanded \$5 to

## SAN FERNANDO

\$150. The average value was \$3,250 in 1925. Not long ago, the Citizens National Trust & Savings Bank of Los Angeles bought 100 front feet in Van Nuys for a branch building. The price was \$100,000.

**THE VALLEY** is a pleasant place to be, come summer or winter. The beach and the blue Pacific are a leisurely half-hour away. Snow-capped crests and skiing are a fast hour away. And at bedtime you'll pull a blanket over your bones, however warm the day.

It's healthy, too. There's little rain, and the dryness makes it an asylum for persons afflicted with respiratory ailments.

Back in the 1860s, during a tour of The Valley, Ben C. Truman, confidential agent for President Andrew Johnson, wrote to the *New York Times*: "Anything that the heart of man desires can be produced on the generous soil. In a few years San Fernando will be adorned with hundreds of groves and orchards."

Today, almost 100 years later, The Valley is still in its infancy. The figures prove it. Every month, more than 2,000 building permits are issued. They were valued last year at \$116,000,000.

Why? Because The Valley is something like what James M. Barrie said of womanly charm: "Oh, it's—it's a sort of bloom on a woman. If you have it, you don't need to have anything else; if you don't have it, it doesn't much matter what else you have . . ."

The San Fernando Valley has the bloom, definitely.

