

**A
HISTORY
OF
THE
CARRISA
PLAINS**

**Compiled by Ted R. Fisher and students of
the Carrisa Plains School**

May 1959

[On file at the San Luis Obispo County Historical Society]

Carrisa Plains a History

Foreword. Mildred Fisher	3.
Introduction. Terry Rude	4.
I. Organizations	
1. The School. Ann Cooper	4.
2. The Farm Bureau. Linda Cavanaugh	6.
3. The Saddleite Riding Club. Pat Bowman	6.
II. Industry	
4. Crops. Greg Beck	7.
5. Cattle. Sandra Lewis	8.
6. Sheep. Sandra Livingston	8.
7. Mining. Marilyn Cooper	8.
III. Services	
8. The Mail. Sandra Livingston	9.
9. Telephone by radio. Greg Beck	9.
10. The Stores. Juanita Garcia	10.
11. County Roads. Ronnie Hysell	10.
12. State Roads. Bill Dennison	10.
13. Fire Prevention. Steve Beck	11.
14. Oil Fields. Ann Cooper	11.
15. Power and electricity. Marilyn Cooper	12.
IV. Points of Interest	
16. Outlaws. Sandra Livingston	12.
17. The San Andreas Fault. Juanita Garcia	12.
18. The old Mill. Marilyn Cooper	13.
19. The Sand Hill Cranes. Linda Cavanagh	13.
20. Droughts. Steve Beck	14.
21. Early Settlers. Terry Rude	14.
22. Soda Lake. Ronnie Hysell	15.
23. Indians. Marilyn Cooper	15.
24. The Painted Rock. Terry Rude	16.

Students	Lower Room
Grant Hysell	First
Albert Lewis	"
Mareia Livingston	"
Brenda Beck	Second
Leon Garcia	"
Randy Kuhnle	"
Susan Lewis	"
Tony Hysell	Third
Ben Lewis	"
Roxanna Lewis	"
Eleanor Hysell	Fourth
Gorga Lewis	"
Custodian	Lottie King
Board of Trustees Kenneth Beck, Ray Cavanagh, Ron Lewis Recorded April 9. 1959	
Upper Room Teacher	Ted R. Fisher
County Field Staff	Helen Bausch Helen Cruikshanks Juanita Tolle
Board of Trustees – Atascadero Union:	

A Foreword
By Mildred F. Fisher

Those that might benefit from this history are indebted to many. Many people have helped us by lending slides, relating history to us, securing books for research, and by giving their time and encouragement. To all of these people, thank you very much.

We all knew that civilization and education is not something that is inborn or imperishable. It must be acquired anew by every generation. Any serious interruption in its financing or transmission may bring it to an end. Education could be defined as the technique of transmitting civilization.

We are then of the firm belief that we should gather up our heritage, which includes our history, and offer it to our children of each generation.

With this thought in mind, that our posterity should fully understand their heritage and history, we the students, teachers, and parents of the Carrisa Plains Elementary School dedicate this history. CARRISA PLAINS – AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY. The following script may or may not be used in connection with 35 mm 2x3 slides, which have been prepared with it.

Carrisa Plains – An Illustrated History

Introduction

Along the eastern border of San Luis Obispo County lies a high flat plain; it is flanked by the Caliente Range on the southwest and the tree barren Temblor Range on the northeast. From eight to twelve miles wide and approximately sixty miles long, it slopes slightly to the southwest from an altitude of about two thousand feet. This five hundred thousand acre plain and the surrounding foothills is called the Carrisa Plains and Carrisa School District. It is about this plain these pictures and words would describe.

Sparsely populated with near two hundred men, women and children, it is unique in many ways. Those that are engaged in cattle and wheat ranching by far predominate.

The Plains have been described in many ways. The Los Angeles Times once said, "Its people live in a fiction like setting of rolling hills, flat high plains, and silent meadows – a region of incomparable natural beauty. With each turn in the road a different panorama of softly enthroned hills, oak trees, and quietly grazing sheep, unfolds."

This picturesque plain received its name CARRISA from a long grass reed once abundant on the plain. It was from this grass the Indians obtained sugar which they traded to the Spanish. The Chumash Indians once roamed this region and used it for their hunting grounds.

Luxuriant growths of this and other grasses furnished food for many wild deer and antelope. However, the deer and antelope gave way to sheep and still later to long-horned cattle. It wasn't long after this that wheat appeared and then some barley, when government restrictions on wheat were enacted.

The average rainfall drops down from that received on the coast fifty miles away. The light rainfall of from eight to twelve inches yearly makes fallow wheat ranching necessary.

The winter days are generally pleasant with a bright sun. The nights are very cool with sometimes a hard freeze. Snow melts quickly after falling. The summer days are warm; the evenings cool, and a sleeper must generally use a cover.

The School

The Carrisa Plains elementary School District is the largest in the area in San Luis Obispo County and loyal patrons are rightly proud of its structure and tradition.

In spite of its huge size the enrollment is small and the pupil transportation problem is solved without a school bus. The parents bring the children to school from as far away as twenty miles and return for them in the evening at the close of the school day. The district compensated them on a mileage traveled basis. A bus would not be practical as children arrive from every direction.

The school architecture is very modernistic and the structure even includes an electric kitchen, an auditorium, and it has playground equipment often lacking in many schools. It was constructed in 1954 – 1955 on a ten acre site three miles west of the old Simmler School, which is now used by the Farm Bureau. The new school was named Carrisa for a long grass reed so abundant in pioneer days.

The school fathers or trustees represent the oldest of the plains pioneers. There is a Beck whose maternal grandfather, Bell Fairbanks, was a pioneer and served on what was probably the first school. The Lewis that is a member, is the grandson of a Lewis that pioneered and homesteaded near the La Panza around 1885.

A King, the wife of the son of an early post master and pioneer, takes very unusual care of the school plant and serves as an emergency doctor and nurse to the children and adults of the community.

At this time nineteen of the twenty-four students are grandchildren or great-grandchildren, either on the maternal or paternal side, of the earliest pioneers. In the school registers appear the names of Beck, Cavanagh, Bowman, Kuhnle, Lewis, Cooper, Garcia, King, Livingston and Rude.

The students, after graduating from the elementary school, attend Atascadero Union High School where a resident hall is provided by the district. These students return to the Plains on week-ends and holidays.

Because of parent interest, the public of the elementary school enjoy faraway field trips in the school curriculum. Most of the parents were present on a trip to Hearst Castle. They also benefit by associating with other schools in team sports such as basketball, softball, and rhythms.

Comfortable quarters are provided for the teachers in a setting that is very scenic and attractive near the school.

The original Simmler School was located six miles east and a mile north of the new school. All that remains is the old well and memories. It was established in 1891. The site was probably donated by F. H. Cavanagh who was on the first board. It is said that Lopez donated the building which was later moved to a new location and another room added. Sell Fairbanks is said to have served as one of the first trustees along with Lopez who donated the building.

In 1907 the school was located in an upstairs bedroom of the J. B. King home on the A. F. Hubbard place and the present home of the Becks. At that time there were only five pupils, the four Kings and a neighbor.

At another location, across the road from the Carrisa Store, the Galarte school was in session for a few years.

In 1910 Mr. Nunes donated an acre for a school site. The original school was then moved to the present location. Later another room and teachers' quarters were added when the school enlarged. When the present new school was built, this school and surrounding property was taken over by the county. The Farm Bureau leases it at the present time. Also, the California Division of Highways has its headquarters here, as well as the San Luis Obispo County Roads Department.

Another school was located on the La Panza Ranch on School House Flat, according to stories.

The Farm Bureau and Farm Bureau Women

The old Simmler School Building houses the social and business activity of the Plains. It is here that the Farm Bureau and the Home Department met once a month to discuss their problems and relax.

On the evening of February 27, 1930, Parker Talbot, County Farm Advisor, came to Carrisa and introduce Mr. McChesney.

As president of the San Luis Obispo County Farm Bureau, Mr. McChesney explained the purposes and objectives of the Bureau. Mr. Yoakum, secretary of the of the Edna Farm Center, also gave a short talk.

This visit resulted in the election of the following officers” First Directory – Harry F. Pond, Second Vice Director – Rowland W. Cooper, on the first Friday of each month. This is still the meeting date. At this meeting the number present was ten, the number absent was nine.

The Farm Bureau Women is said to have been organized shortly before the Farm Bureau by Lottie King, who served many years as the leader. The Home Department’s main interest is the home and family cooperation.

The Carrisa Plains Saddleite Riding Club

The Carrisa Plains Saddleite Riding Club was organized February 4, 1958. This is the exact month, day, and year that our country launched the first satellite from Cape Canaveral, Florida – hence the name “Saddleite.”

Judy Bowman, granddaughter of Birma McClaan, an early pioneer, was the first president of the Club. Janice Rude is the present chairman.

Horses have played an important role in the Plains history and development as in other regions of the West. Although there were no original wild horses as those in Europe, renegade bands of horses did exist. The McAllister Ranch (sometimes called Los Yaquas, Spanish for Mares) was probably named for a band of wild horses.

Joe Arana, and early post rider in this area, rode a beautiful Arabian mare which he sold to Mr. Still because she had saddle sores Birma McClaean still talks about Kit a descendant of this mare.

During round-up time members from many ranches would gather from miles around for the branding of the calves. The rodeo started here. The string of horses from the cowboys chose their horses was called the remuda.

Wheat and Cattle ranchers farmed with many teams, hauled supplies from the surrounding towns, and hauled grain to the markets.

The well bred horses were forgotten for many years on account of the automobile and modern farm machinery. Now, however, interest has been revived by pleasure riding and riding and roping clubs. The saddleite Club of Carrisa Plains is one of these.

Mrs. Latimer, a daughter of Chester R. Brumley, of the Painted Rock Area, relates an interesting story concerning her attempt to capture and break two antelope to pull a buggy. It was her ambition at one time while she lived on the Plains to drive down the streets of San Luis Obispo driving a team of antelopes. Her ambition was never realized. She failed to raise to maturity the two antelopes which she had captured.

Agriculture on the Carrisa Plains

There are approximately 500,000 acres of land included in the Carrisa Plains. The principal agricultural products from this land are wheat, barley, cattle and sheep.

The earliest settlers raised sheep then soon turned to cattle. The grain that seemed to thrive so well in the rich soil was fed to livestock which would be driven to market and thereby furnish their own transportation which was difficult in those days. Later when transportation and roads improved, the golden grain which was mostly wheat was sacked and taken to market in three or four team wagons. Finally around 1929, when trucks were improved the grain was transported by the bult (sic) method. It was no longer sacks.

When government restrictions on wheat began the grain ranchers turned their attention to the production of some barley.

The ranchers soon learned that planting a field every other year increased the yield and conserved the moisture in the soil. It is difficult for some mid-western visitors to believe that so much moisture exists a few inches down in the soil when it gets so little rainfall. The rainfall averages from eight to ten inches annually.

Very little irrigation is practiced because of irrigation installation costs. Some ranchers successfully raised potatoes until the prices went down and larger growers made it difficult to sell a crop. However, some alfalfa, maize, and other crops are irrigated and the crop fed locally.

Visitors driving along the road occasionally see bee hives setting in the fields. These bees collect the honey from the sage and turpentine weed. Special trucks with booms load the hives and move them to different locations. Rent is generally paid to the ranchers in honey.

Although grains grow readily, weeds do too. Along with water the weeds are one of the grain ranchers' major problems. They especially dislike the Russian thistle which the Hessian soldiers brought to this country when they were hired by the British during our country's fight for freedom. At least for the past six or seven years the crop duster has come to the Plains. When the wheat is a few inches high, they appear early in the morning spray with a weed killer.

The dusters spray with a converted Army Air Corps Primary Training plane called the PT-178. It is fascinating to watch them in the cool of a Spring day. Occasionally they take some of the people for a ride.

Cattle on the Plains

First deer and antelope grazed on the Carrisa Plains. Now deer remain in the foothills and mountains, but the antelope is gone. After the deer came the hardy sheep of the pioneers. The longhorned Texas cattle soon took the place of the sheep in importance, and today the sheep is mostly used for gleaners or to clean up the part of the grain that the harvesters have missed.

Today the Whiteface or Hereford cattle dominate the cattle ranches on the fringe areas and the foothills of the mountains. Both the horned and polled Herefords are increasing rapidly. One particular Hereford breeder enjoys breeding the registered stock, and he is fast acquiring a successful name as a breeder.

Miller and Lux, famous California ranch owners and breeders, once had extensive holding on the Carrisa Plains especially in the southern part. It is said that Henry Miller could travel from almost one end of California to the other without stepping off his own land. Henry Miller visited the Plains a few times on his many trips to his holdings. It is probable that Miller Well on the Carrisa was named for him.

Visitors to the Plains might think that the rancher would butcher their own beef. Strangely though, the ranchers are able to purchase their meat from the butcher shop or the packing house cheaper than they can butcher their own. A few raise garden vegetables for their own use, but this is the exception rather than the rule.

Sheep on the Carrisa Plains

[It was difficult to transcribe this page due to the poor quality of the copy]

The seep was probably the first domesticated animal on the Carrisa Plains except the ??? ??? horse. Although they fade early every spring to be replaced by cattle, they are still here in ??? after the grain has been harvested they pasture herds of sheep to enter their fields to eat the ? ----? They are still here

??? The best herder, Joe Auperian, with his country men herd as many as 8000 sheep. They live in trailers that they bring with them and tend the sheep with trained Border Collies.

??? herders although they speak little or no English.... Some Plains people invite them local dances. They in-turn Learn other dances and to eat their native.

Mining on the Carrisa Plains

All evidence of gold mines in the region of Navajo and Placer Creeks is fast disappearing. The ore on this part of the Carrisa was never much more than the kind that would bring a few hundred dollars for a winter's work. In other words it was little better than the existing wages at that time.

According to some sources \$100,000.00 was taken from Navajo Creek from 1878 to 1882. However, it is doubtful if a mother lode ever existed here.

The mining was of the sluice box type called placer mining. The main mining activity was centered around the mouths of side creeks at the point where they entered the larger ones.

By 1900 only the never-do-well workers and Chinese were left. The remains or some Chinese graves were left. The remains of some Chinese graves are found along Placer Creek.

Gypsum mines near Soda Lake give up much of their minerals for the farm land in the San Joaquin Valley. The gypsum when spread over the soil prevents it from hardening when water is applied, and it also neutralizes alkali soil. It is loaded into large trucks and hauled from the Plains.

In the upper part of the Plains there are indications that uranium prospectors combed the area short time ago.

The Mail

All that remains of the old Simmler post office still stands near the home of Paul Freeborn.

Sell Fairbanks asked J. B. King to take over as postmaster in 1904. The location was on the old Hubbard place, now Nels Beck and sons. Later the post office was moved into this building and discontinued in 1930 due to the ease by which mail could be transported in a modern age of transportation.

The first post office on the Plains, however, was near the Painted Rock, and it was operated by C. R. Brumley. There was no regular delivery to this office from the LaPanza post office operated by Dr. Still. Mr. Brumley sent for the mail from the LaPanza when it was convenient. The old Simmler post office was named from Mr. Simmler, a postmaster in San Luis Obispo.

At the present time C. Arebalo is the Carrisa Plains Star Route carrier. He has held the government contract for this route since 1934. Mr. Arebalo tells us he has worked on the route as far back as 1916. At that time he was a substitute carrier. Then, a spring wagon was used to carry the mail. He remembers staying overnight at the J. B King home. It took all day to make the trip from San Luis Obispo.

Joe Arana served as an early post rider.

It has only been during the last few years that the Carrisa Plains people have been receiving their mail more than three times a week.

The present carrier, Mr. Arebalo, is very accommodating. He will be glad to bring out foodstuffs from any store in Santa Margarita.

Telephone by Radio on the Carrisa Plains

By Greg Beck

In the early 1950's a great need for telephones was felt on the Carrisa Plains. So the people got busy. It was found that it would be very expensive to construct a telephone line from Carrisa to the nearest line thirty to forty miles away.

Finally, the American Telegraph and Telephone Company agreed to furnish the material if the people would set the poles and string the wires for the local telephones. This was done and all rights were turned to the A.T. & T. for maintenance and repair.

In 1952 the Federal Communication Commission assigned the Carrisa Plains a V. H. F. (very high frequency) band and the Carrisa Telephone System became the first installation of its kind on the West Coast. Now, through the medium of wires and radio, customers on the Carrisa may talk to anyone anywhere.

It operates in the following manner. On the Plains a customer picks up the telephone. This turns on the transmitter at Carrisa plains. The transmitter sends a radio tone to the switchboard at Paso Robles through the receiving antenna there. The operator answers by plugging into the line. This opens the Paso Robles transmitter. The customer may then talk to the operator.

An operator may call the customer in much the same way. One transmitter and receiver is located near the Carrisa Plains Mercantile owned and operated by Walter Calyton. Another transmitter is locate just eight miles away in the Rowland W. Cooper garage.

Stores on the Carrisa Plains

The present and only store on the Carrisa Plains is owned and operated by Mr. and Mrs. Walter Clayton. The Claytons of the Carrisa Mercantile opened for business in August of 1950. They stock foods and wearing apparel in conjunction with a filling station.

The store generally closes on Mondays and Thursdays. On these days the Claytons journey to nearby cities and towns to replenish their stock and make special purchases for the people of the Plains.

In early days many of the ranchers stocked the most needed or urgent supplies which their employees might need. They made only two or three trips to town in one year. Most of the purchasing was done in San Luis Obispo or Paso Robles.

One wagon load of supplies, drawn by two or three teams, often times cost as much as two or three hundred dollars. They would consist of barrels of flour, fifty pound sacks of sugar, wooden boxes of crackers, barrels of apples, cases of fruit, vegetables, meats, and fish and coconut in ten-pound tins.

Dr. Thomas Chalmers Still, his wife Martha, and their children opened a store on the LaPanza in 1879. This store served the placer mines operating the region at that time. They also weighed gold for the miners. Dr. And Mrs. Still were the great-grandparents of Paw Bowman. Dr. Still was also the postmaster.

County Roads

The San Luis Obispo County Roads Department is represented on the Carrisa Plains by Audry Hysell. The headquarters is situated on land now owned by the county, but originally part of five acres donated by the McDonald Estate for a park. The old Simmler School is close by.

Mr. Hysell and family live in the old teacher's quarters. Four Hysell children attend the Carrisa School.

The County Roads Department maintains all roads in the Carrisa Plains not maintained by the state. Some roads maintained by the county include the Poso and Soda Lake Roads. Others have such names as the Santiago and the Hurricane Roads.

State Sign Route 178

In 1933 the county road from Santa Margarita through Pozo and the LaPanza and on to Kittrick was designated a state highway by the California legislature. This road bisects Carrisa Plains. The State Department of Public Works, Division of Highways reamed it State Route 178.

There are maintenance stations at Pozo and Simmler. The Simmler Station is located near the old school and has employed Paul Freeborn since it was designated. Paul was with the County Roads Department before being employed by the state.

Bill Dennison is also employed by this division. His son, Bill, Fr., attends the Carrisa School.

In May of 1936 the state started hard-surfacing the road. Before this, it was maintained as a dirt and gravel road. Many ranchers in the area help maintain the roads.

On February 4, 1954, the state returned to the county that part starting two miles east of Santa Margarita to the junction of the Cammatti at the LaPanza Ranch. The state then took the Calf Canyon and Cammatti Roads into the state system. This road is sometimes called the Cross-Country Road.

Fire Control

Especially in the dry summer months the California State Division of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry, is active on the Plains.

When a fire occurs on the plain or in the foothills, very often the ranchers [the remainder of this sentence is missing in the original].

Fires of unknown origin do little real damage because of the rancher alertness.

The Simmler Station was established in 1930 on the Dewey Werling Ranch by Soda Lake. It is now located on county property near the old school and on land originally donated by the McDonalds.

The LaPanza Fire Control Station was first established in 1940, on the LaPanza Ranch, in a tent. The station was then moved to the Cammatti Ranch and remained there until the present site was purchased from the Walter F. Lewis Ranch in the early part of 1950.

Oil Wells on the Carrisa Plains

In the late 1940's the Richfield Oil Company discovered oil in the southwest part of the Carrisa Plains. The Norris Oil Company drilled the first well that produced fifty barrel a day.

Everyone was excited when leasers took to every conceivable means of transportation and communication to get in touch with land owners.

Many Carrisa Plains ranchers benefitted from the lease money and the oil wells have done much to relieve the school tax burden in the district.

The Pacific Gas and Electric Sub-station – Carrizo

On November 3, 1949, the Pacific Gas and Electric Sub-station, Carrizo, was completed. This sub-station is about the only place on the Plains that carries the old Spanish spelling for the name Carrizo. This is the original Spanish spelling for the grass reed from which the Plains received its name.

Before the opening of this sub-station, each individual rancher had to furnish his own power which was generally from a diesel or gasoline-driven power plant. Many ranchers are still too far away from this sub-station to benefit from it. Distance makes the stringing of a line impractical.

Outlaws on the Carrisa

Outlaws frequently visited the Carrisa Plains. Probably the most famous, at least to Californians, was Joaquin Murrietta. Joaquin, who reputedly had his headquarters near Coalinga, was of the Robin Hood type and never practiced his trade in this area. According to all local opinion he was apparently a good fellow. He robbed from the rich Spanish on the Coast and helped the poor and those in need. He is remembered to have stayed overnight at the J. B. King home as well as the Garcias. However both of these homes operated as sort of an inn.

Jesse James, the famous bandit from Missouri, visited his uncle D. W. James, one of the owners of the La Panza Ranch. It is said that Jesse's uncle once sent him home by boat around the Horn. There are initials on Canaris Rock said to be those of Jesse's.

The Daltons, Bill, Bob and Emmett according to local settlers, have visited the Plains when the law got too hot on their trails in the mid-west. On one occasion, when watering their horses near Choice Valley, they were accosted by San Luis Obispo deputies. They promptly took the guns away from the deputies and departed for Cedar Canyon on the Carrisa. After being the guest of Mr. Bacon of Cedar Canyon, their whereabouts again became known by San Luis deputies. They then returned the previously borrowed guns to a girlfriend of one the deputies and left.

Bill Dalton according to records owned a ranch on the Estralla. On other occasions his brother are supposed to have visited Bill. According to all information, they as the others, did not practice their art on the Plains.

The San Andreas Fault in the Carrisa

Along the south base of the Temblor Range which forms the eastern boundary of Carrisa Plains are the distinct evidences of the famed San Andreas Fault. The break forms a straight furrow or fault line between the hills and the lowlands. It parallels the Temblor Range for miles and may be plainly seen from the air.

It is possible that the Temblor Range was named for this fault because "temblores" in Spanish means a tremble or an earthquake.

This fault is part of the two hundred and seventy mile break which was a part of the San Francisco quake and fire that occurred in April 1906.

State Sign Highway crosses this fault line about six miles east of the school on the road to McKittrick.

A Famous Old Landmark The Old Mill

A famous landmark of the Carrisa, as well as San Luis Obispo County, still stands on the Nels Beck and Sons Ranch. In 1891 A. F. Hubbard moved his grain mill from the Estrada Gardens in San Luis Obispo to its present location. He hired a M. Michaels as his miller.

The old mill is rapidly deteriorating and leans precariously in every strong wind. Part of one side has fallen in. A few organizations have discussed the possibility of protecting it for future generations, but no one has definitely done anything about it. Mr. Hubbard was a man that thought ahead of his time. In 1901 he constructed a model of a lighter-than-air craft. It was a very good one and it was to have been powered by two light French motors. A company with a capital outlay of \$100,000.00 was formed to produce the machine. Many prominent San Luis Obispo citizens were investors, including Dr. Still of the La Panza. Mr. Hubbard, however died in 1903 before his project became a reality.

In 1904 J. B. King moved to the Hubbard Place where he was postmaster. The King children remember playing with this model dirigible which they tried out for size in the horse trough.

The Sandhill Cranes of Carrisa Plains.

Among many of the interesting features of the Carrisa Plains are the Sandhill Cranes. They are unique because it is said that this particular species is usually associated with swampy areas. They migrate north in the summer and nest and breed in the Arctic of Alaska.

In the winter they come south and 7,000 to 10,000 of them spend the winter season on Soda Lake, much of which is located on the Dewey Werling Ranch. They spend the day in the area of the Lake looking for food and return to the Lake at night to roost. Some say the cranes feel protected by the unrestricted view that the lake affords. Here it is almost impossible for predatory animals to sneak upon them. They are also protected from hunters by the ranchers in the vicinity.

These cranes are probably our wariest birds, but at times they respond to kindness.

When migrating they fly in long lines or V's like geese. Their call is a loud gar-oo-oo--oo, gar-oo-oo-oo. This call may be heard even farther than the honking of geese.

One of their most distinctive habits is that of dancing during the mating season. The dance is generally held in the fall and winter. Flocks of from six to eight gather on a bare hilltop and perform what resembles an old fashioned barn dance. What these dances have to do with securing a mate I not clear. Their average length is forty-four inches.

The Droughts

“Rain is necessary, water is the medium of life, more important even than the light of the sun,” someone once said. The people of the Plains really enjoy the sound of rain falling on their roofs. The lack of rain means a poorer grain crop and less grass for the sheep and cattle.

Probably the drought of 1855-1856 that created a terrible hardship on growing California did not greatly affect the Plains people because it must have been sparsely settled. However, in 1863-1864 hay sold for one hundred fifty dollars a ton and was scarce; many cattle perished. That was the year one million head of cattle died in the state. This drought came just three years after J. H. Blackburn and D. W. James (uncle Jesse James) had paid \$1.25 per acre for the LaPanza Ranch. That was the drought that forced these ranchers to drive their herd to Tulare to secure water.

The droughts of the 1880's and early 1890's were the ones that discouraged many Carrisa ranchers. It was during this drought that Many ranchers were forced to seek credit. Sinsheimer of San Luis Obispo credited many. Many were so discouraged, however, that they left their ranch and land deeds to Mr. Sinsheimer for payment and left the Plains.

There have been lesser droughts since, but those who were good managers and saved for the days that it did not rain did not become discouraged.

A rhyme frost occurs occasionally when a cool night freezes moisture on the trees.

Old Settlers

Around the perimeter of the plains and on the rolling foot hills, many places may be found that clearly indicate the presence of early settlers.

Although the heart or level land of the Carrisa was purchased in large tracts by such men as the McDonalds, Miller-Lux, the homesteaders and pioneers claimed the edges. Many thought the foot-hills and the perimeter of the Plains better land. This was probably because of the luxuriant growth of grass in this location. R. C. Brumley settled near the Painted Rock in 1865 as an employee of the McDonald's. This old original dwelling remains in part. Mr. Brumley's daughter, Mrs. Latimer, remembers that transportation of the materials alone for this dwelling cost three cents per mile just for transportation. This old dwelling is now a part of the Bingman place commonly called the Salcita for “little willows.”

Mr. Still, the great-grandfather of Pat Bowman built a substantial stone structure. The old home burned just a few year ago.

The Garcias have been residents of the Plains and nearby communities since 1850. J. Garcia once purchased the Salcita from George Bill.

A great-grandfather of the Lewis children homesteaded on the Navajo Creek around 1850. The old original ranch is still owned by a Lewis.

The name King dates back to 1887 as well as names like Cavanagh, Freeborn and Lopez.

Time and space does not permit us to mention all the pioneers at this time.

Soda Lake of the Carrisa Plains

Streams running down from the Caliente Range on the south and the almost barren Temblor Range on the north are trapped on the Carrisa Plains at Soda Lake. Here the water cannot escape, so it sinks and evaporates leaving a salt deposit approximately four miles square. After heavy rains the trapped water remains for a few days only to evaporate during the dry periods.

It was here that the early settlers obtained salt for their domestic use as well as securing salt for their livestock.

During World War I (1916-1918) a narrow gage railway was built across one of the southern necks of the lake in order to remove the salt or soda to sell on the market. The railway moved the salt to a loading area where it was transferred to trucks to be taken to market. It is said that one of the uses for which it was used, was a dyeing agent for paper. This was by the Kraft paper company. However, because of the softness of the deposit beds, it became increasingly difficult to load the mineral. For this reason the marketing was discontinued.

The United States Air Force used the lake during World War II as a bombing range for light artillery. One day a new pilot mistook road maintenance machinery for a target. This was probably on account of the similarity of color. Large caliber bullets killed the operator of the road machinery. Also, many heads of cattle were reported to have been killed by careless pilots.

Again just a few months ago the Farm Bureau reported that the Air Force wished to secure the area for a practice bombing range for a nearby airbase.

Indians on the Carrisa Plains

At the time the white men landed on the west coast of California, the Chumash Indians used the Carrisa Plains for a hunting ground. These Indians were small in stature (about five feet) and they were few in number. The Chumash have often been called "Diggers" because they dug in the ground for a lot of their food, such as roots and herbs. On the Plains many caves are found, show evidence of fire used for warmth. However, it is thought that not much food was cooked.

Anthropologists do not believe that these Indians painted the pictures found on so many rocks in the foothills and on the Painted Rock. By infra-ray, archaeologists have found that these paintings have many

layers of paint beneath the outer layer, that now can be seen. This indicates that the painting may be much older than they appear.

It is thought that these Indians used the Plains only as a hunting ground. Their permanent homes were probably over on the coast. Anyway here they ground acorns and the like on bowls. Ranchers still plow up to the surface many sandstone bowls used by them. They are of all sizes.

Mrs. Louisiana Dart of the County Historical Society and Museum, calls these Indians "stone eaters" because of the great amount of sand and stone they ate in their food. Grinding their food in the soft sandstone caused much loose sand to be eaten in their food. This caused their teeth to become hollowed out.

It is said that this Chumash Indian has become extinct. Few or no full bloods remain. They have passed away because they were subjected to the diseases of the white man, as well as his whiskey.

The Painted Rock of Carrisa

In the south-central part of the Carrisa Plains, near the foothills of the Caliente Range and close to the southern edge of Soda Lake, is an age old landmark, the Painted Rock. The Spaniards called it "La Piedra Pintada," and Myron Angel in his history of San Luis Obispo County called it "The Great Natural Temple of Carrisa."

Here the Chumash Indians ground corn in the still visible hollowed out holes, painted figures in black, white, and red paint and used it as a shelter as well as a shrine.

Whether it was pushed up out of the ground by volcanic action or whether the soil eroded from around it, no one seems to know or is quite sure. The rock is approximately 140 feet high, near 1,000 feet in diameter, and has a hollow center that once sheltered as many as 2,000 pioneer sheep from the weather and wild animals. Inside the hollow, the paintings of the Indians have been badly damaged by the carved initials of thoughtless visitors and the weather. However, many more paintings remain in the adjacent foothills. In season the rattlesnakes are also plentiful.

It is not known just which tribe of Indians painted the pictographs. They are probably done well to be the work of the recent Chumash Tribe. Some think the Hopi Indians from the high mesas of northern Arizona might have painted them on one of their trading trips to this region to trade for shells.

Chester R. Brumley, who might have been the first settler in the Plains in 1865, built a home near the Painted Rock. The first post office was established here by him.

Frank Reynolds, a miner that worked the placer mines on the La Panza, discovered gold or a trace of it just back of the Painted Rock sometime around 1880. Also found in the rocks with the gold dust were ancient scorpions, alive, but blind. They died soon after being uncovered.

The importance of this old landmark is rapidly fading after it failed to gain State or Federal attention and protection. The Telegram Tribune and many others failed, after a lengthy campaign many years ago.

Now, there are no trespassing notices along the road to discourage visitors.