

A DATE WITH GARDENA HISTORY



THEN AND NOW—The old Rosecrans homestead, left photo, which as seen here was being dismantled Feb. 10, 1950, was located on the southeast corner of Rosecrans and Vermont avenues. At right, the same corner as it appears today.

GEN. WILLIAM STARKE ROSECRANS: Another Chapter

BY JAMES OSBORNE
SPECIAL TO THE GVN

This is the first of an ongoing historical series of Gardena Valley by local historian James Osborne.

One of the earliest pioneers and eventual owner of the region of Los Angeles County that was to later become much of the City of Gardena was the famous Civil War general, William Starke Rosecrans.

In 1867, he acquired 16,000 acres of land that was bordered approximately between what would be today's Crenshaw Boulevard on the west, Central Avenue on the east, Florence Avenue on the north, and Redondo Beach Boulevard on the south.

An interview with Rosecrans' grandson, the late William Starke Rosecrans III, conducted in 1963 by Claremont College explains the origins of the Rosecrans ranch house. The grandson described the old ranch house that was once located on the southeast corner of Rosecrans and Vermont avenues as originally being constructed by a "squatter" named Kleghorn. Mr. Kleghorn was manipulated into building on the site by the Southern Pacific Railroad as a way of preventing the general from filing a lawsuit to recover stock in the company that he believed was owed him.

The railroad's plan was to attempt to prove that another man owned the land before Rosecrans, who needed it to

fund the cost of his lawsuit.

Kleghorn was unaware he was being used by the railroad and Rosecrans was eventually successful in securing the ownership of the land, but finally lost the suit to recover the stock in the railroad he believed was owed him.

The house was further described as consisting of a main building, which was about 14-feet wide and styled as "board and batten with a shake roof." It contained a dining room, living room, and a master bedroom. The kitchen contained a wood stove but did not have running water or indoor plumbing.

However, in 1893, the addition of a new kitchen with running water was built onto the house to accommodate the general, due to his declining health. He died five years later at his ranch on March 11, 1898 and, after a temporary burial at St. Vibiana's Cathedral in Los Angeles, was later interred at Arlington National Cemetery. Rosecrans' son, Carl continued to live with his family in the old home, which finally had electricity installed in 1924.

At the beginning of the Civil War, Rosecrans held command of the 23rd Ohio Volunteer Infantry which included two future United States Presidents, Rutherford B. Hayes and William McKinley.

Rosecrans himself was actually given an offer to run as Abraham Lincoln's running

mate during the election of 1864, even though he was a Democrat and Lincoln was a Republican.

Rosecrans telegraphed his acceptance of the offer, but it was intercepted by his rival, Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton who controlled all telegraphic messages from active-duty officers, and he discarded it.

Therefore it was Andrew Johnson who became the 17th President after Lincoln's assassination and not Rosecrans.

Gardena Valley Yesterday & Today

Life on the ranch was mostly peaceful and remote during the early 1900s.

Rosecrans' grandson described the entire landscape of Gardena during this time as, "...full of wildflowers with no billboards and no unpleasant looking improvements. The total population of Gardena was roughly 150 people and the nearest store was Herbert Jeffers' Grocery Store." (The old store building still stands at 825 Gardena Blvd. and now houses the Gardena Hotel.)

The road that ran east to west beside the house had, over time, taken on the name of Rosecrans Avenue due to the old home being considered an early landmark. The street was described as "...just an ungraded, un-oiled, and unimproved road maybe twenty-feet

wide with dust blowing by the house in the afternoon."

Some of the necessities of life were often delivered to the Rosecrans home. "Meat was brought out every day. There was no refrigeration. We had a fish man who came out once a week on Friday. He came from San Pedro, then later from Redondo Beach.

There was a man who came with notions, buttons and thread, and ordinary linen. He came about once a month. The beer man came once a week and delivered beer from the Meyer Brewery. The pickle man came once a month and brought pickles and sauerkraut and various things.

And we had tinkers. The tinker had no regular schedule but came perhaps every six weeks. The tinker wanted to fix the pots and pans and he also did soldering. Of course, the tinker is extinct at this time."

After the general's death, his son, Carl conducted early attempts at dry-farming on the ranch and planted four, 10 acre orchards full of deciduous fruit trees including apricots, peaches, and pears.

He later exhibited the fruit at the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce in order to advertise the good quality of the fruit. Signs beside the fruit read: "Grown on the Rosecrans Ranch without irrigation."

At the beginning of this enterprise dried fruit sold for a good price in the east at about

20-25 cents per pound until an over abundance of fruit on the market dropped the price to six cents per pound. The price drop, coupled with a prolonged drought, caused the orchards to become unprofitable.

Eventually, by the late 1940s and early 1950s, new homes and businesses had begun to cover much of the remainder of the former Rosecrans Ranch, and the old house was finally leveled to make way for commercial development on the corner lot.

Fortunately, in 1948 the grandson donated a portion of the former ranch site so that it could be dedicated as a park. It remains on Vermont Avenue, north of Redondo Beach Boulevard, as a memorial to his parents Carl and Lillian Rosecrans, who lived in the old home from 1888 until their deaths.

James Osborne is an author of South Bay history and was a contributor to the book: "Gardena" published by Arcadia Publishing in 2006. His family was among the early settlers in the Gardena area, arriving in 1902.

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