LOMPOC VALLEY HISTORY

ORIGIN OF NAME

The name comes from the Chumash; various translations suggest the lakes and lagoons resulting from the spring flooding: "lagoon, little lake."

INDIAN PERIOD

The Chumash Indians lived in small villages, surviving off the sea and the land. They were non-agricultural. Two of their greatest achievements were the design and construction of the plank canoe and the fine workmanship of their baskets.

EXPLORATION

1542 - Expedition by Juan Cabrillo (first white contact with the Indians)
1769 - Don Gaspar De Portala camped with his expedition at the mouth of the Santa Ynez River and found an inviting area about which he wrote in his diary.

MISSION PERIOD

In 1769, King Carlos III of Spain acquired land from San Diego to Monterey for the purpose of building 21 missions and to protect the land from the invading Russians.

In 1787, Mission de la Purisima Concepcion de Maria Santisima was founded. It was built at the end of South "G" Street--just below the hills. Twenty-five years later the Mission was destroyed by an earthquake. Some wall structural remains are still at the site, and a huge, deep crevice can be seen in the hill above the ruins.

The Indians moved across the Valley to the present site, taking 5 years to build and complete the new mission. Unfortunately, white man's diseases wiped out the Indian population and the mission fell to ruin.

The Union Oil Company later owned the land where the Mission ruins lay. In 1933, Union Oil deeded the Purisima Mission site to the county, and a 507-acre State Park was later created. During the 1930's the CCC, the State Park Commission, the National Park Service, and the Department of the Interior restored the mission to its present condition. It is one of the most authentic restorations of an historical landmark in the nation. The restorations were completed in late 1941.

RANCHO PERIOD

In 1837, the Mexican Governor of California gave land to his soldiers as payment for excellent service. In Santa Barbara County, land was divided into 40 Ranchos. In the Lompoc area there were 5.

In the early 1850's, Thomas Wallace More and his brothers A.P. More and H.H. More bought Rancho Lompoc from the Carrillos family. The partnership of Mr. W. W. Hollister, Hubbard Hollister, Albert Diblee, and Thomas Diblee purchased the two Ranchos in 1863 for $60,000.
RANCHO PERIOD (cont'd)

They also owned most of the Ranchos between Lompoc and Santa Barbara. On this land, they ran thousands of sheep and the floor of the Lompoc Valley was covered with 20,000 sheep grazing on lush grass.

LOMPOC COLONY PERIOD

Mr. W. W. Broughton, a lawyer and newspaperman, from Santa Cruz, California, was looking for a place to start a new town. He was unhappy with the drinking problem in the Santa Cruz area, and wanted to start a new town where he could raise his children in a peaceful atmosphere.

In his travels throughout the state, he saw the Lompoc Valley and realized that, because of its beauty, rich soil and excellent climate, this was the dream land he had been looking for. The land was very fertile and would be perfect for farming and raising sheep and cattle.

His town was to be a Temperance Colony - a town where no liquor could be made, consumed or sold. Mr. Broughton organized 100 farmers, ranchers and businessmen from Santa Cruz, Santa Barbara, and San Francisco. They purchased the land, which consisted of all the territory of the Lompoc and Mission Veija de la Purisima Ranchos. It was a total of 46,500 acres, and was purchased on October 19, 1874, at a cost of one half million dollars. These 100 businessmen made up the Lompoc Valley Land Company.

The land was divided into 5, 10, 20, 40 and 80-acre lots and it was to be put up for auction. One square mile would be for the town itself and the rest would be for farmland. One block was set aside for a school (the original site is where El Camino is located). Lots were set aside for churches and fraternal organizations, and a 10-acre section was to be used for a cemetery. Everything was well planned before the auction was ever held.

Mr. Broughton then advertised his land sale in all the newspapers in the Santa Cruz, Santa Clara, San Jose and Watsonville areas. Families arrived in wagons, which held all their belongings and they lived in tents or the ruins of the first mission while anxiously awaiting the day of the auction. Lots sold fast and furiously.

Five hundred dollars from the land sales was set aside to start a newspaper, because news needed to be sent to the "Easterners" to come West to this wonderful new town. The first auction was so successful that another one was arranged. This time, with his new newspaper, Mr. Broughton was able to advertise throughout the United States. The second sale would be held Monday, April 26, 1875. (Terms of the sale were 15% down with purchase; 15% on the last Monday in December of the first year; and then 10% annually on the last Monday of December of each year.) The average price per acre was $60.00. These people, who now called Lompoc their home, were peaceful, non-drinking, farmers and ranchers. They brought their trades with them. They ran blacksmith shops, harness shops, made wagons and buggies, set up a creamery and ran grocery and drug stores.
LOMPOC COLONY PERIOD (cont'd)

The first two years were great ones. By the end of the first year, 200 families had settled in the valley; school was in session; the stage coach came to town three days a week; there was a post office; a newspaper was being published; the town had a doctor; a five-acre picnic ground had been established in Miguelito Canyon; there were plans for an agricultural college; and plans for a much-needed wharf. The wharf was needed so that butter and cheese and other farm products could be shipped to San Francisco. As it was, wagons were hauling these goods to the Gaviota wharf 22 very-rough miles away. It was the plan of the stock company to set aside a quarter of all proceeds from the land sale for the building of an agricultural college. The wharf was urgently needed and so the money from the college fund was loaned for the building of a wharf - with the idea that the profits from shipping Lompoc goods to San Francisco would repay the loan for the college. Soon after the wharf was completed, disaster struck, and rough seas washed the wharf away. It was rebuilt a couple of times - only to wash away again - along with the dreams of a college. All that was left of the dream is the name of the street where the college was to be built - College Avenue.

Disaster seemed to be the key word following the shattered dreams of a wharf and college. For the next few years, no rain fell, and a damaging drought hit the valley. Animals died by the thousands and many people became discouraged and left. Colonel W.W. Hollister loved the new town and hated seeing these people losing everything they owned just because Mother Nature wasn't cooperating. He and the two Mr. Diblees saved the people and the town from total abandonment by remitting interest charges on the land payments for a few years until the drought had passed.

There were still hard times for 4 years - a diphtheria epidemic killed many of the children. However, many of these tough people clung to the rich soil and their new homes, and survived.

The town prospered and in years to come another industry, besides agriculture, developed. This was the mining of diatomaceous earth.

In 1896, the Balaam Family found the largest uniform deposit of pure diatomaceous silica, so far discovered in the world, on their property in Miguelito Canyon. The rights were sold in 1929 to the Johns Manville Corporation. At times, 1,200 people have been employed at one time at the Company. Most of the early employees lived in company housing on the property - which also had a store, a hospital and a school. Manville continues to be one of Lompoc's top industries.

The flower seed industry followed and has probably brought more fame to Lompoc than any other industry. Mr. Burpee from Philadelphia heard of the beautiful flowers growing in the yards of Lompoc residents. He came out to investigate and found it to be true. He first tried growing sweet peas here and because of the rich soil, cool ocean breezes for air pollination, and the long summers, the flowers grew profusely. Later, the sweet pea became the City flower. Today, Lompoc grows 500 varieties of flowers for seed for the world. Two major seed companies plant hundreds of acres of flowers. Lompoc has the distinction of being known as the Flower Seed Capital of the World.
In 1941, 86,000 acres of the Jesus Maria Rancho owned by the Olivera family, just north of Lompoc, was purchased by the Army for an Army base. The name of the new base was Camp Cooke - named for a pioneer cavalry officer. Camp Cooke was to be used for artillery firing and tank maneuvers. It was the first armored training center on the West Coast.

Camp Cooke was at one time a prisoner of war camp. Italian and German prisoners were brought to the camp by ships. It later became a federal penitentiary - built where the United States Penitentiary is now.

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, there were rumors of enemy submarines off the coast of California. A blimp base was established at the Lompoc Airport for the purpose of spotting submarines. (At that time, the Lompoc Airport was at the site of the Lompoc Shopping Center and Lompoc High School).

Camp Cooke was reactivated for two and a half years after the outbreak in Korea. In 1956, the Air Force took over Camp Cooke for the purpose of launching missiles from the West Coast, and on December 26, 1958, the first missile was sent soaring into space. The name of the new facility was changed from Cooke Air Force Base to Vandenberg Air Force Base to honor the late General Hoyt S. Vandenberg, second Air Force Chief of Staff and early proponent of aerospace preparedness.

By 1944, Lompoc had grown to over 5,000 people. Four years after the Air Force's takeover of the base in 1957, Lompoc's population was more than 20,000. By 1988 the population was more than 32,300. The little farm community would be no more.