



Foothills

Nature Notes

CITY OF PALO ALTO • COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT • OPEN SPACE, PARKS AND GOLF DIVISION

From Rancho to Parkland

In 1769 Spain, seeking to protect its interest in Alta (upper) California, sent forth the recently appointed governor of the Californias, Don Gaspar de Portola, to establish a military outpost at Monterey. Portola failed to recognize Monterey, so glowingly portrayed by Viscaino earlier, and continued northward where his group instead discovered San Francisco Bay. As a result, the path to Alta California was found. By 1777 missions were established at San Francisco and Santa Clara, and the process of doling out lavish land grants was under way.

In 1833 Governor Figueroa gave a square league of land (4,400 acres) above the confluence of Los Trancos and San Francisquito Creeks to Domingo Peralta and Don Maximo Martinez. Subsequent additions boosted this grant to about 23,000 acres. The area was known as the Rancho del Corte Madera, "the place of the woodcutters," for here firewood was cut for the stoves of the missions and settlements below. Most of what is now Foothills Park was once part of this rancho. Las Trampas ("the traps") Valley, in fact, was so named by the Spaniards who found the Indians trapping the abundant grizzly bears there.

The land passed on to a daughter of Martinez who married into the Boronda family. The family retained title to the land, which became known as Boronda Farm, until 1914. In that year Sanford Sachs, a stock broker, purchased the land. He later planted the fruit trees and other exotic trees at Orchard Glen and erected a tea house at that site. The tea house, a pagoda-like structure, had previously been displayed at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition at San Francisco in 1915. The building, in a serious state of disrepair, was taken down before the opening of the Foothills Park.

Dr. Russel Lee and his wife Dorothy purchased the land in 1941 from Leander James, who had previously acquired it from Sachs. In 1958 the City of Palo Alto purchased 1,194 acres of land from the Lees for the sum of \$1,294,000.



A Spanish carreta. This was used to transport huge redwood timbers.

The purchase of the land though was not without controversy.

The voters of Palo Alto approved the purchase of the land in a referendum. Opponents challenged the acquisition in the Superior Court, District Court of Appeals, and the State Supreme Court, but the decision of the voters and the City Council was upheld in each case.

Finally, on June 19, 1965, Palo Alto Foothills Park was officially dedicated and its gates opened for the first time to those who love the out-of-doors. The “barn” that was constructed by the Lees as a stable and meeting place for guests was renovated by the city and is now the Nature Interpretive Center.

The years that followed saw additional land being added to the preserve, bringing it to its current 1,400 acres. Its woodlands, rolling hills, and enchanting vistas remain a heritage in trust, preserved for the enjoyment and inspiration of future generations.

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