

Dayton

Today as one drives through the quiet little town of Dayton it is difficult to imagine that a century ago it was the gayest and most thriving spot in this part of the Sacramento Valley.

Sunday, standing on the porch of the old Dayton Schoolhouse where she taught for many years, Mrs. Elsa Boydston Brookes of Paradise reviewed its history for 100 members and guests of the Butte County Historical Society. (April 24, 1963)

She said the town is located on a strip of what was public land which was surrounded by the vast Mexican land grants in the pioneer days. It was shoulder high in grasses and the valley oaks told of the fertility of the soil. Among the early settlers were her own grandfather and the grandfathers of many prominent families in Chico and Durham today, including the Bouchers, Hulens, Fimples, Crouches, Coons, Troxels, Stevens, McKenzies, and others.

Dayton was the center for the surrounding farmlands. Merchandise arrived by the river boat and was brought to the town, or the buyers often rode or drove to the boats to see the displays.

There were three hotels and at least three saloons, Fatty Miller's, the Honkadora, and Ogden's. Minersw and farm hands came to these to spend their hard-earned money.

Lafayette Zumwalt and Henry F. Yocum ran the wagon shop which made the first gang plow in the state. Mrs. Brookes told her audience these men would hitch a dozen plows behind a wagon and drive south as far as Woodland, selling them along the way.

William Troxel had a merchandise store with a large corral in back where mules and burros were broken to carry supplies to the mines.

There were dances every Saturday night with dancers coming from miles around and tripping merrily until dawn. Private dancing parties were given at the Parrott Grant and in the large country homes.

With the coming of the railroad in 1870, Dayton, which was originally known as Grainland, declined and the town of Durham on the mainline was established.

Before the talk at Dayton, the society gathered in the oak grove at Perkins Lake on Llano Seco Rancho. After a picnic lunch, Mrs. Dorothy Morehead Hill, whose grandfather had operated part of the ranch a century ago, told of its history.

Mrs. Hill paid tribute to the ranch superintendent, W. Hugh Baber, and told of the development of Llano Seco from the time he arrived when there was one tractor and 250 head of horses and mules.

There are now 50 year-round employees who form a village with private homes for the married men and dormitories for the single men. The most modern of these is known as the "hotel".

Llano Seco Rancho, owned by John Parrott and his descendants for over a century, is the only Mexican land grant in northern California which is still intact. Its approximately 18,000 acres are operated as a whole and there are also large holdings in Colusa County and in the Butte foothills.

Mrs. Anna Belle Compton Sexton of Willows, told of the life of her grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Henry C. Compton, when they lived on the ranch prior to the ownership of the Parrotts. They had expected to obtain a patent for the land and when the courts upheld the Mexican land grants, it was necessary for them to find other acreage.

Mary Lemcke, *Chico Enterprise Record*, April 24, 1963, Reprinted in *California Places*, Volume 9, F. Styles Research Room, Paradise Genealogical Library