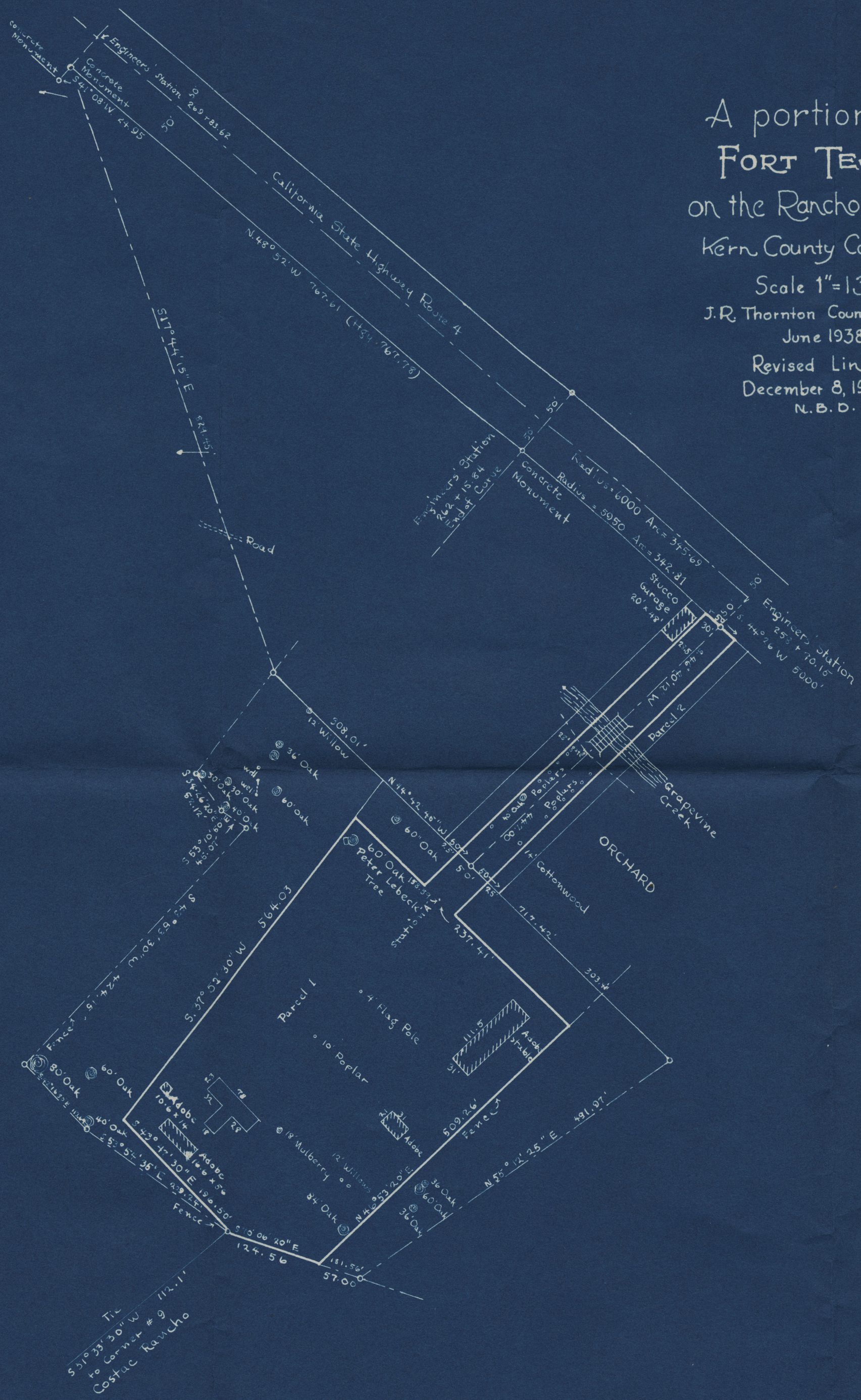
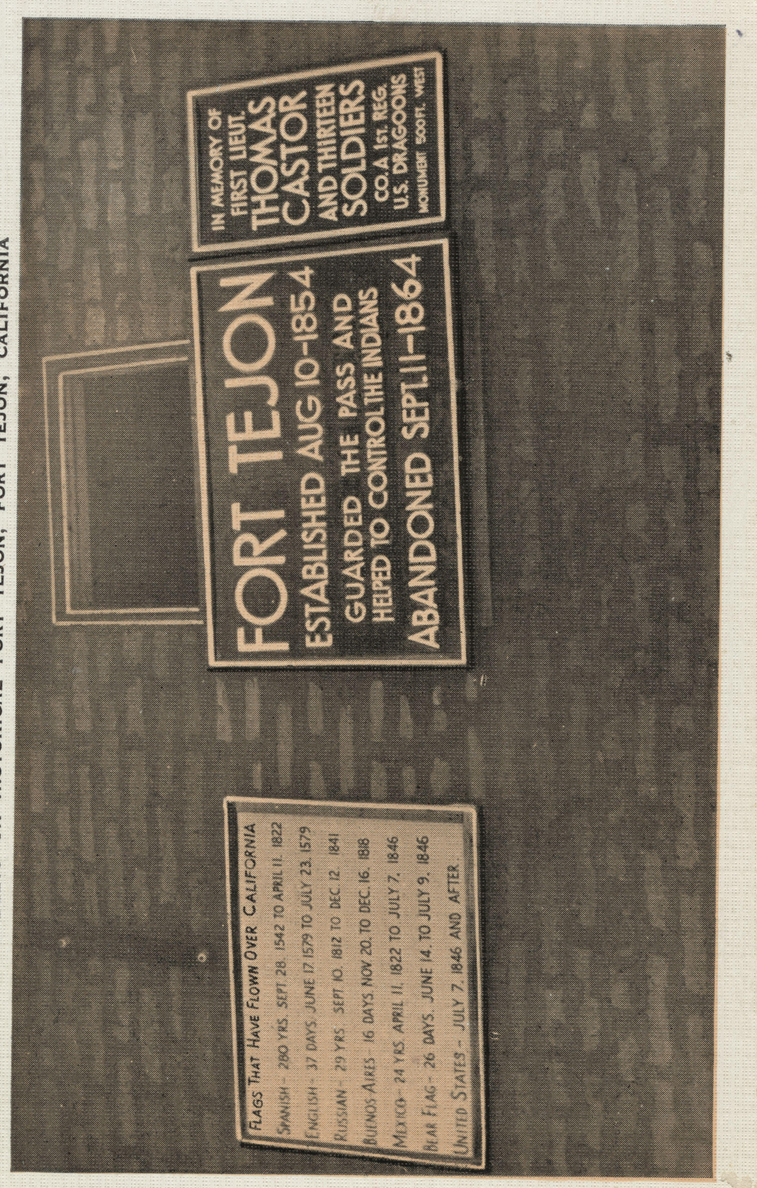
A portion of
FORT TEJON
on the Rancho Castac,
Kern County California

Scale 1"=138'

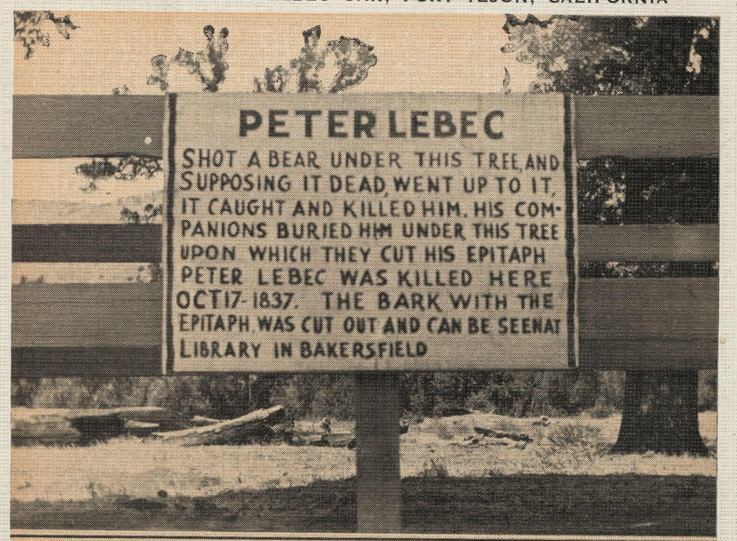
J.R. Thornton County Surveyor
June 1938
Revised Lines
December 8, 1938
N.B.D.



TABLETS ON HISTORICAL FORT TEJON, FORT TEJON, CALIFORNIA

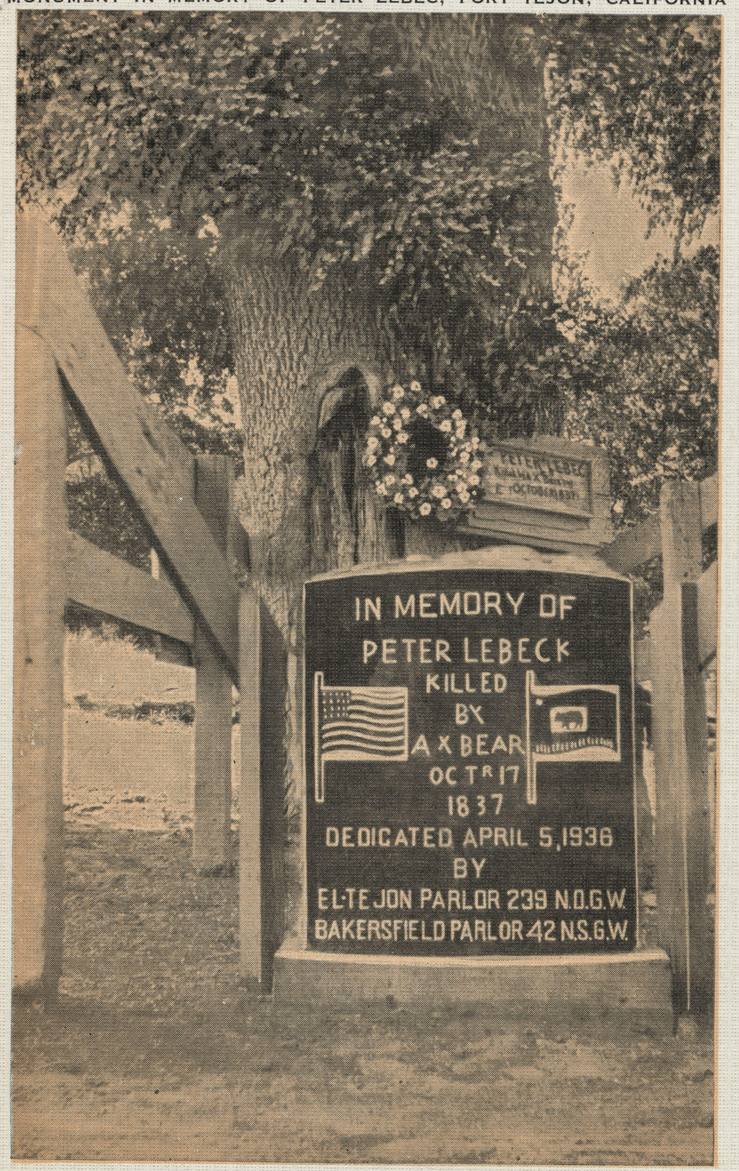


TABLET AT PETER LEBEC OAK, FORT TEJON, CALIFORNIA



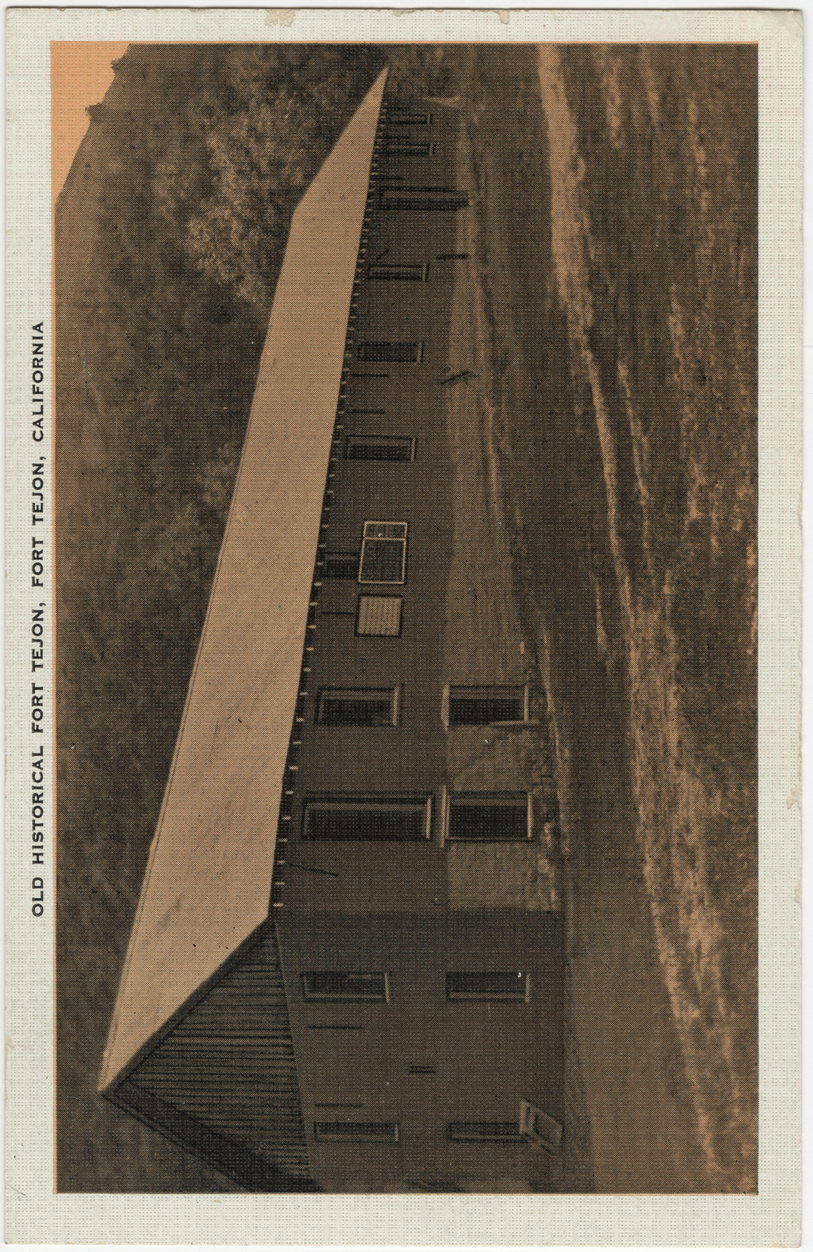
BARK FROM PETER LEBEC OAK

MONUMENT IN MEMORY OF PETER LEBEC, FORT TEJON, CALIFORNIA



MONUMENT IN MEMORY OF FIRST LIEUT. THOMAS CASTOR,

FORT TEJON, CALIFORNIA



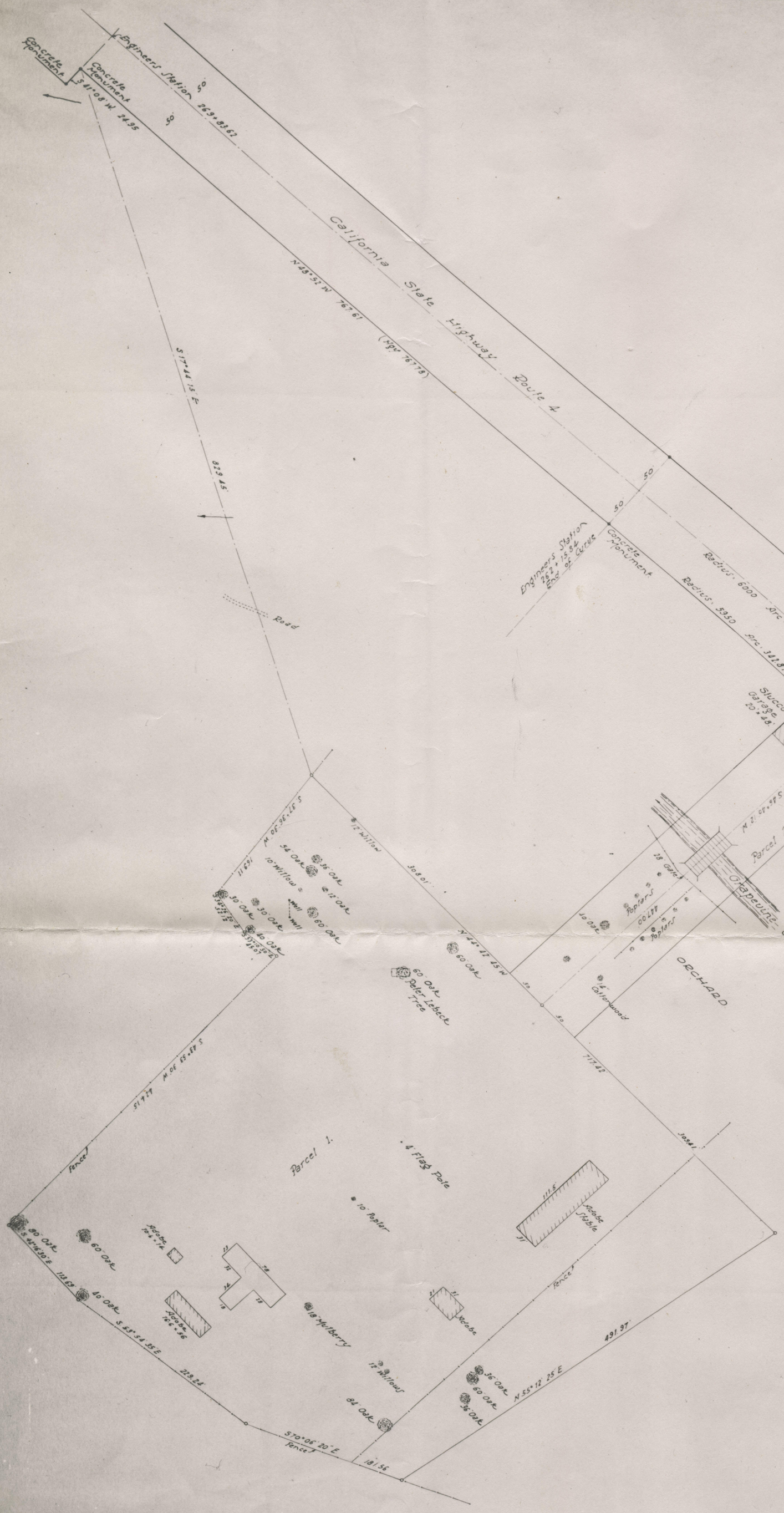
OLD HISTORICAL FORT TEJON, FORT TEJON, CALIFORNIA

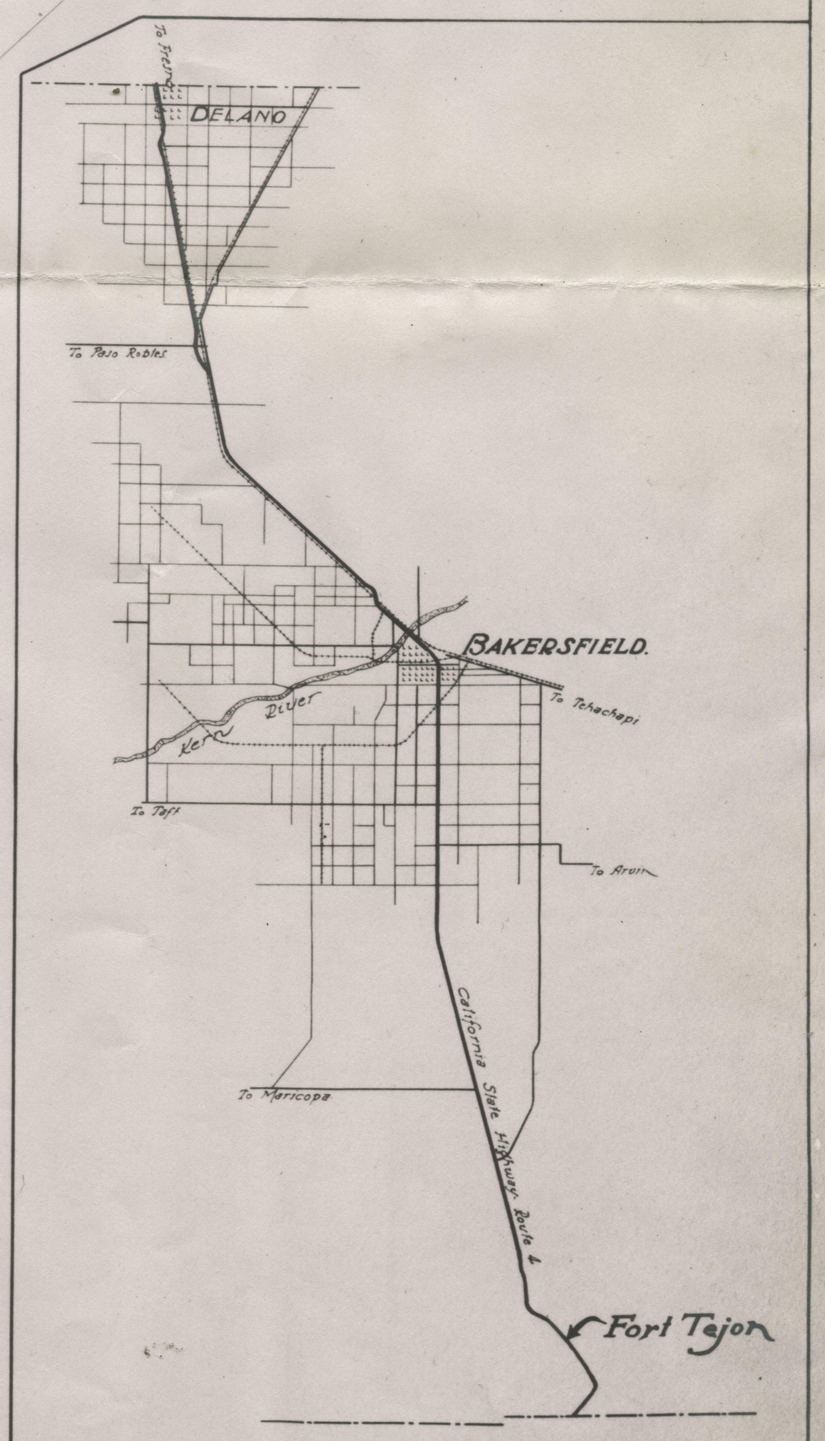
A portion of FORT TEJON on the Rancho Castac, Kern County, California.

Scale 1" = t..

J. D. Thornton, County Surveyor.

June 1938.





CALIFORNIA HISTORICAL LANDMARKS SERIES

Edited by Vernon Aubrey Neasham

FORT TEJON

Registered Landmark #129

by

George Walcott Ames, Jr.

for

State of California, Department of Natural Resources
Division of Parks

Berkeley, 1936

Written under auspices of Works Progress Administration
District #3, Project #65-3-3218, Symbol #1073

FORT TEJON

Romance was inherent in the story of the advance to the West by the people of the United States. Many were the types and figures whose recorded deeds call to mind those exciting days, but among them were almost always the Indian, the desperado and the soldier. To curtail the activity of the first two and to act as a supply base for the other, frontier army posts were dotted on the map at strategic points. Fort Tejon, situated in Grapevine Canyon in the mountains at the southern end of the San Joaquín Valley, was established for that purpose, and for the short ten years of its existence did its work well.

Disturbed conditions, always identified with a change of political régime, to say nothing of the chaos produced by a change in culture, were present in California after the conquest in 1846-1847. Conditions were also aggravated by the influx of all types and nationalities of people to the gold fields. From the very first, the Indian situation was acute. As mining activities and general settling extended farther and farther into the mountains and into the more inaccessible parts of the State, conflicts with the natives who were the original inhabitants of the fastnesses or who had been driven there became more and more

frequent. It was apparent to the governors, from General Kearny forward, that something had to be done to ease the strained relations between the two races. There was no Mexican example or machinery which the new government could inherit to deal with the problem, because with the breakup of the mission system the Mexicans had done little to govern or care for the Indians.

At first several sub-agents were appointed temporarily to induce the Indians to a favorable frame of mind toward the United States government. Sutter held such an office.[1] In 1850, an attempt at more permanent establishment of mediators was made, and the president appointed, with poorly defined instructions, three commissioners who were to bring some order into the chaotic conditions. The commissioners were handicapped from the beginning because they arrived immediately after the outbreak of the Mariposa War. They were active in bringing the conflict to an end and aided in the peace negotiations. The reservation idea was introduced to keep the Indians under control; supplies were to be furnished to compensate for loss of hunting grounds. In the Kern River area, a treaty was made with eleven tribes, the senate refused to ratify it; so matters were no better than before,[2] except that hostilities in the main had ceased.

---

1. C. B. Leonard, The federal Indian policy in the San Joaquín Valley; its application and results, 64-68.
2. H. H. Bancroft, History of California, VII, 483-485.

A new figure then was introduced into the scene, Edward F. Beale. He had a considerable knowledge of the California Indians from his previous sojourns in the area, and in 1852 he was appointed Superintendent of Indian Affairs with almost viceregal powers. The members of the commission had individually expressed the opinion that one agent in charge of California and Oregon would be able to coördinate matters and increase efficiency. That view was supported by the general in command of the Pacific Department and several other persons who were in a position to know the needs in the new State.[3]

A serious problem confronted Beale, and that was the formation of a workable plan. The senate had so emphatically turned down the idea of reservations based on treaties that a new system had to be conceived. After much consideration, he submitted the plan which was adopted. Beale was determined to train the Indians to be useful citizens - as the commissioners had been before him. His plan called for a type of reservation embodying new stipulations. The methods and success of the old mission system, with its discipline and instruction, had appealed strongly

---

3. S. Bonsal, Edward Fitzgerald Beale, a pioneer in the path of empire 1822-1903, 64-66; Leonard, Federal Indian policy, 252-255.

to him; so his establishments would be "semi-military, semi-agricultural." The natives were to become to a great extent self-sustaining. The scheme got away from the old treaty reservation idea, whereby certain sections of land were actually to be given to the Indians, because the land was to be a military reservation for use by the army. Under the protection of a military post, one of which was to be on each reserve, the Indians would be invited to live and farm. A resident agent was to live at the post and have charge of the discipline and teaching of the nation's wards.[4] The military would serve in two capacities, not only to keep the Indians from committing depredations but also to safeguard the natives from the predatory and unscrupulous white men who all too often openly avowed the saying "the only good Indian is a dead Indian."

Because of the limited appropriation which was given him, Beale determined to expend all his effort on one spot. The question was, where. In the northern part of the State the communities were thick and were well able to care for themselves, as were those in the central portion. The south, however, was given over, to a large extent, to cattle raising, with communities far apart, and the population was

---

4. Leonard, Federal Indian policy, 258-260.

sparse. In the Tulare region, to the north, were Indians who were not above raiding the grazing lands or preying on the traveling herds on their way to the San Francisco and mining settlement markets. The key to such activity was Tejon Pass, the most feasible route north and south. Therefore the reservation was placed in the vicinity of that pass and also among the Indians who would be most likely to cause friction. After some concern over the land title which was covered by Mexican grants, Beale gathered the Indians and the establishment was formally started. It took all of 1853 to settle his charges.[5]

The original plans called for coöperation between Beale and the military commander of the Pacific Coast in choosing the location and founding the army post on the reservation. General Hitchcock, commanding officer, expressed himself as favorable toward Beale's scheme but there seems to have been nothing done relative to the military establishment. In January of the next year, General Wool was ordered to relieve Hitchcock, and his instructions, in part, read:[6]

> The removal of the Indians in California to reservations provided for them...

---

5. Leonard, Federal Indian policy, 269-277.
6. 35 Congress, 1 session, Executive document, House, No. 88 (Ser. No. 956), 6-7.

> will govern in an important degree the disposition of the troops and the location of military posts, and it will greatly increase the control of the military commanders over the Indians there assembled. You should confer freely with the Indian agents, and give them all needful aid in the execution of their duty, affording them the countenance and support of the military power, which are so essential in the negotiation of treaties, and in all dealings with savage tribes.

After a study of the situation, Wool declared that Beale's plan was feasible and that, although the troops in his command were inadequate for the task contemplated, when expected reinforcements arrived he would establish a post on the reservation. In May of 1854, Colonel Mansfield, inspector general, arrived on the coast and during his tour of the southern part of the department visited the Tejon for the purpose of selecting a site for the new post. He found one, and, in the latter part of June or early July, he began the work.

The place chosen was in the Cañada de las Uvas, grapevine canyon, the most accessible pass to the South San Joaquin from the plains of the southern part of the state.[7] This pass was early known to whites because in 1772 Don

---

7. 35 Congress, 1 session, Executive document, House, No. 88 (Ser. No. 956), 61; H. R. P. Forbes, Fort Tejon, 1.

Pedro Fages recorded his passage through it - the first written account. Four years later Father Garcés, the peripatetic friar, followed Fages. From then on the pass was used with increasing frequency by all sorts of travelers. The location of the post was cannily picked because traffic had almost to go by its front gate; and it included beauty, being situated amongst live oaks. Quarters for one company of dragoons and one of infantry were to be erected immediately, although it was specified that those for the dragoons were to be built first.

Records at hand concerning the building of the post are scanty. General Wool reported on September 14:[8]

> I have the honor to report that a military post is now being built at the Cañada de los (sic) Uvas, fifteen miles southwest of the Tejon Indian reservation, which is to be called Fort Tejon, to indicate its location. I have assigned Brevet Lieutenant Colonel B. L. Beall, Major 1st dragoons to the command, and company A, 1st dragoons is now there as a garrison. The recent reduction of the limits of the reserve prevented the post from being placed within its limits. Santa Barbara, California, is now the nearest post office.

Progress, evidently, was rather slow; whether it was because of lack of materials, or money, or just what, is

---

8. 35 Congress, 1 session, Executive document, House, No. 88 (Ser. No. 956), 103.

not clear. Bishop Kip, who traveled through the country in the fall of 1855, not only leaves a nice description of Fort Tejon but also one of the isolated life endured by the soldiers of those early times:[9]

> The fort at the Tejon is on a little plain, entirely surrounded by high mountains, which give it a confined appearance. It is, however, a beautiful place, surrounded by oak trees....
> The barracks - handsome adobe buildings - are being erected around the sides of the parade ground. None of them are yet finished, and the soldiers were living in tents. The officers, too, were living in canvas houses, except one who had a small adobe building which is soon to be demolished. There are ordinarily about six officers and one hundred and twenty dragoons stationed here, besides the numerous civilians who are store-keepers and employees of the post....
>
> Sunday, Oct. 14.
>
> There is no service of the Church within two hundred and fifty miles of this place.... We had service in a large room of the unfinished barracks. At noon I baptized at one of the officer's quarters, his child, which could not be brought out to service....In the evening I visited the family of a soldier who had died that day. He was buried early the next morning, his comrades firing their volleys over his remains, after I had read the burial service at the grave.

By the middle of 1856, the number of soldiers attached to Fort Tejon had been diminished considerably. The

---

9. W. I. Kip, A Californis pilgrimage..., 38-39.

commanding general's report gives the total as eighty-seven, six being officers and eighty-one enlisted men. Colonel Beall was still in command.[10]

Life at the fort settled into a sort of routine for the next five years, or until 1861. Troops, at times, would be ordered out to help subdue a small rancherías of Indians blamed for running off stock. Very little fighting took place on those expeditions, although some very stormy experiences were had by the soldiers with parties of belligerent white men who wanted to exterminate the Indians in their vicinity.

Police work was done by the soldiers of the fort. Not only did they arrest murderers and thieves, but they also acted as escorts to take the prisoners to the nearest civil authority. Organized gangs of bandits were often a cause of "campaigning." An example is the case of Pancho Daniel and his band. Daniel became active around Los Angeles, and terrorized the countryside, finally killing the sheriff. Forty troopers from Tejon were sent to assist the authorities in running down the bandit.[11]

Several times, troopers were detained for escort

---

10. 34 Congress, 3 session, Executive document, House, No. 1, 246-247.
11. H. Newmark, Sixty years in Southern California, 204-210.

duty with the numerous government surveying parties which were performing such excellent service during those years. In 1857, an escort from Tejon convoyed a payroll of 147,000 dollars to pay troops in the Salt Lake area.[12]

Occasionally, monotony was relieved by a trip to Los Angeles to attend some function there. Harris Newmark, an early settler, records that a party of officers from Tejon attended his wedding.[13]

There were several events in the history of the fort which shook the routine to its very foundations. One of them occurred in January, 1857. About six o'clock in the morning a slight earthquake shock was felt; however, it was hardly noticeable. At half past eight, a second shock, which lasted several minutes, was felt. Practically all of the buildings at the fort were seriously damaged. Chimneys fell; plaster and walls collapsed. Although no one was injured, many of the garrison were endangered by falling debris and walls. So great was the damage that the soldiers were forced to return to canvas while buildings were being repaired.

In the latter part of that same year, there hap-

---

12. H. G. Comfort, Where rolls the Kern, a history of Kern County, California, 26.
13. Newmark, Sixty years in Southern California, 223-224.

pened an event the nature of which still causes comment. This was the arrival at the fort of the United States-government camels. At different times since 1836, army officers, impressed by the need of a new system of transportation, urged an experiment of trying camels. Horses and mules were not only expensive but they could carry only comparatively light packs. It was hoped that camels would prove superior in both respects. When Jefferson Davis became secretary of war, in 1853, he pushed the scheme with vigor, as did his successor. The result was that in 1857 a party led by Beale was not only to survey a wagon route from Fort Defiance in New Mexico to the Colorado River, but also it was to test fitness of the camel in the southwestern deserts. Before the end of the year they arrived at the Tejon. With their activities centering around the fort for the next few years, the camels were used in all kinds of work. During 1861, until the fort was partially abandoned, the camels were kept at Fort Tejon itself. From there they were moved to Los Angeles. Inability to obtain reliable drivers and the coming of the railroads forced abandonment of the plan for United States army transportation by camel.[14]

---

14. L. B. Leslie, Uncle Sam's camels, the journal of May Humphreys Stacy supplemented by the report of Edward Fitzgerald Beale (1857-1858), gives a good account of the camels in the United States. Also, the monograph on Drum Barracks in the present series deals with them.

Fort Tejon was brought to the attention of every traveler bound north in 1858. It was in that year that the Butterfield Overland mail company began operating a stage line through the central part of California. One of the stations was at the fort. It must have seemed to the soldiers isolated for so long that they were at last in the very heart of civilization with the regular arrival and departure of the stage coaches.[15]

Building at the fort was proceeding all the time. Even as early as November, 1857, enthusiastic descriptions were being written. A correspondent of the Sacramento Daily Union said:[16]

> The first object that strikes your view, upon entering the limits of the garrison, is the sutler's store, a fine commodious adobe building plastered on the outside and white washed. To the right of the sutler's store, is the quartermaster's store and office, also a fine two-story building.... The Sutler's and Quartermaster's stores are about 250 to 300 yards from headquarters. The headquarters, company quarters, hospital and commissary, are built on a slight elevation on either side of the parade ground. For instance, at the head of the parade ground are three fine buildings, two stories, with all

---

15. See article in the Daily Evening Bulletin, July 11, 1859, for an account of a stage journey; L. R. Hofen, The overland mail, 1849-1869, 116.
16. Sacramento Daily Union, November 27, 1857, 4.

> the modern improvements; on the right are the companies' quarters; on the left, the hospital and commissary department. All the quarters are furnished in the best style....There is one building partitioned off, as follows: carpenter, blacksmith, wheelwright and harness shops. So you will perceive that everything is complete about the post. The temporary stables are in the rear of the quartermaster's store....There are fifteen buildings in all, in the garrison. You can form no idea of the beauty of this place until you visit it.

With the beginning of the Civil War, troops were needed in more strategic places. In 1860, there were but thirty-seven soldiers, all told, at Fort Tejon. Next year that number was increased to 174, but before the year ended most of the troops were moved to the southern part of the state to overawe the Southern sympathizers. Most of the government materiél was transferred also. In answer to the petition of citizens, the fort was not abandoned entirely, and for three more years volunteer militia garrisoned the post. In 1864, it was abandoned permanently.

It was not long until only memories remained to garrison the empty barracks - although civilians occupied different buildings from time to time. There remains part of a wall and a fairly complete building. A bronze tablet, unveiled in 1923 by the Bakersfield Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, commemorates the site.[17]

---

17. F. Rider, Rider's California, a guide-book for travelers, 565.

AUTHORITIES

I. Bibliographical Aids:

1. Cowan, Robert Ernest, and Cowan, Robert Granniss. A bibliography of the History of California, 1510-1930. 3v. San Francisco, 1933.

II. Periodical Literature:

2. Cleland, Robert Glass. "Transportation in California before the railroads, with especial reference to Los Angeles," in Historical Society of Southern California Publications. XI. Los Angeles, 1918.

3. Historical Society of Southern California Annual Publications. Los Angeles, 1884-.

III. Newspapers:

4. Bulletin. San Francisco, 1855-1929.

5. Daily Union. Sacramento, 1850-1870.

6. Star. Los Angeles, 1860-1865.

IV. General Works:

7. Bancroft, Hubert Howe. History of California. 7v. San Francisco, 1884-1890.

8. Bell, Horace. Reminiscences of a ranger; or, Early times in Southern California. Los Angeles, 1881; Santa Barbara, California, 1927.

9. Bonsal, Stephen. Edward Fitzgerald Beale, a pioneer in the path of empire 1822-1903. New York and London, 1912.

10. Brewer, William Henry. Up and down California in 1860-1864;... edited by Francis P. Farquhar. New Haven and London, 1930.

11. Comfort, Hubert G . Where rolls the Kern, a history of Kern County, California. Moorpark, California, 1934.

12. Drury, Aubrey. California; an intimate guide. New York and London, 1935.

13. Eldredge, Zoeth Skinner, ed. History of California. 5v. New York, 1915.

14. Hafen, Le Roy R . The Overland Mail, 1849-1869; promoter of settlement, precursor of railroads. Cleveland, 1926.

15. Hayes, Benjamin Ignatius. Pioneer notes from the diaries of Judge Benjamin Hayes, 1849-1875. Los Angeles, 1929.

16. Hittell, Theodore Henry. History of California. 4v. San Francisco, 1885-1897.

17. Kip, William Ingraham. A California pilgrimage....Fresno, California, 1941.

18. Lesley, Lewis Burt, ed. Uncle Sam's camels, the journal of May Humphreys Stacey, supplemented by the report of Edward Fitzgerald Beale (1857-1858). Cambridge, 1929.

19. Morgan, Wallace Melvin. History of Kern County, California, with biographical sketches....Los Angeles, 1914.

20. Newmark, Harris. Sixty years in Southern California, 1853-1913. Ed. by Maurice H. Newmark (1959); Marco Ross Newmark (1970).

21. Nensch, Nero Eugene, and Nensch, Ethel Grace, and Hoover, Mildred Brooke. Historic spots in California, the valley and Sierra

ecuntion. Stanford University, California, 1933.

22. Rider, Fremont, ed. Rider's California, a guide-book for travelers.... by Frederic Taber Cooper. New York and London, 1925.

23. Saunders, Charles Francis. The southern sierras of California. Boston and New York, 1923.

V. Documents:

24. 33rd Congress, 2nd session. House. Executive document No. 1, part 2.

25. 34th Congress, 1st session. House. Executive document No. 1, part 2.

26. 34th Congress, 3rd session. House. Executive documents No. 1, and No. 76.

27. 35th Congress, 1st session. Senate. Executive document No. 11.

28. 35th Congress, 1st session. House. Executive document No. 60.

29. 35th Congress, 2nd session. Senate. Executive document No. 1.

30. 36th Congress, 1st session. Senate. Executive document No. 2.

31. 36th Congress, 2nd session. Senate. Executive document No. 1.

32. 37th Congress, 1st session. Senate. Executive document No. 1.

VI. Manuscripts:

33. Forbes, Harris Rebecca Piper. Fort Tejon. Archives of State Park Commission of California. San Francisco, 1934.

54. Leonard, Charles Perdan. The federal Indian policy in the San Joaquin Valley, its application and results. Ph.D. thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1928.