

CALIFORNIA HISTORICAL LANDMARKS SERIES

Edited by Vernon Aubrey Neasham

CAMPO de CAHUENGA

Registered Landmark #151

by

Chester Lyle Guthrie

for

State of California, Department of Natural Resources

Division of Parks

Berkeley, 1936

Written under auspices of Works Progress Administration  
District #8, Project #65-3-3218, Symbol #1873

CAMPO DE CAHUENGA  
FRÉMONT - PICO MEMORIAL PARK

Seldom did the peaceful, carefree land that was Spanish California witness the grim spectre of war; but on two of the most important occasions when it was so threatened, the place called Cahuenga witnessed the final acts. Though lying in a quiet, grass-covered valley, near the sleepy old mission of San Fernando, Rey de España, it nevertheless marked one of the highroads into Los Angeles, and consequently, had, as it were, a box seat to any far-reaching, violent drama which might shake the usually pleasant province of California. It is indeed fitting that such an important location should be set apart in memory of California's early struggles.

The center of these various conflicts was the old ranch house of Cahuenga. Even its early history was somewhat turbulent, in that it was the focal point of one of the early contests between the mission padres and the Californian settlers. In 1810 the reverend friars of Misión San Fernando built a dam across the Los Angeles River, which, of course, raised the ire of the Los Angeles dons, for the river was depended upon as a source of water supply. The ayuntamiento of Los Angeles appealed to the courts, and after a bitterly

contested legal battle the San Fernando padres were summarily ejected. However, the good mission fathers were not so easily abashed, for in a few years they once more erected a dam; and this time they built a ranch house, where one of the friars took up his abode. Once more the angelenos, as the people of Los Angeles were called, took the matter under consideration, and on this occasion selected José Antonio Carrillo to defend the rights of the city - Don José, interestingly enough, was the man appointed fourteen years later as one of the commissioners to draw up the treaty with Frémont.<sup>1</sup> As a result of Carrillo's activity, the mission padres had to abandon their ranch house and the dam. Furthermore, in the following year, 1834, the missions were secularized, losing consequently all their possessions; so the adobe ranch house was left unoccupied without even the possibility that the persistent priests might return.<sup>2</sup> Ten years later the site of the old ranch house once more became the place of human abode, for, in 1844, Don Tomás Feliz built an adobe house there of almost one hundred feet in length and forty feet in width.<sup>3</sup> Probably Feliz used much of the old build-

---

1. See below, 8.

2. J. M. Guinn, "History of the Cahuenga Valley and the rancho La Brea," in Historical Society of Southern California, Publications, VIII, 94.

3. C. J. Prudhomme and T. F. Keaveney, "Early days in Los Angeles County. I. Conquest of pueblo de Los Angeles," in Grizzly Bear, February, 1917, XX, 4:14.

ing of the padres, and even yet (1936) there is a bell there showing that it was once an outpost of the Misión San Fernando.<sup>4</sup>

Some time after the secularization of the missions, Cahuenga witnessed, in 1845, its first armed conflict. This struggle, of which the battle of Cahuenga was the climax, partially explains why the Californians were so easily separated from Mexico and annexed to the United States. The independence of feeling, the consciousness of differing from Mexico as a whole, as shown in this struggle, went far to ease the task of the United States commanders during the invasion of the following two years.

Discontent with the Mexican administration had begun at least as early as the first quarter of the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Strife and dissension had continued, and increased to such an extent that by 1842 Alvarado, the then acting Mexican governor, felt constrained to resign his post, and Manuel Micheltorena was sent as governor to remedy the situation. Unfortunately, the new representative of the Mexican government brought with him a band of rather unsavory individuals to serve as part of the Californian armed forces.

---

4. H. E. Rensch, Historic spots in California, the southern counties, 81.

5. G. H. Tinkham, California men and events, 35-38.

These soldiers soon became known popularly, and somewhat sardonically, as Micheltorena's Lambs, because of their depredations and cut-throat appearance.<sup>6</sup> Added to the restlessness of Spanish California, these Lambs were the final grievance which caused the revolt to flare.

When the revolution broke out, Pío Pico was proclaimed governor by the rebels, and Don José Castro was chosen as his chief military commander. Meanwhile, Governor Micheltorena enlisted the aid of Captain Sutter and other prominent foreigners in the northern part of the State by promising to validate the titles to their lands. Then, with what looked to be an overwhelming force, the doughty governor pushed south to crush the rebellion. It indeed looked dark for Castro and the little band which he was able to scrape together in and around Los Angeles.

On February 19, 1845, news arrived in Los Angeles that Micheltorena had arrived in the valley of Cahuenga, and was advancing to the Encino River.<sup>7</sup> The Californian forces immediately rode to meet him. The next morning, on February 20, the forces began maneuvering for position; Micheltorena advanced from the Encino and the rebels from the Cahuenga towards the Los Angeles River - both sides taking advantage

---

6. C. D. Willard, The Herald's history of Los Angeles, 145.

7. H. H. Bancroft, History of California, IV, 502.

of all the protection which the dry gulches and inner banks of the river could offer. Soon both armies opened fire with their cannon - of which the Californians had two and the governor three; and while the governor used grape shot the irrepressible Californians had to content themselves with the round stones of the river bed. The barrage was most impressive with its smoke and noise, but not particularly dangerous, for the only casualty on the California side was a horse which was so unfortunate as to have its head blown off. Among Micheltorena's forces, it was reported a mule, somewhat unimpressed by the fierce battle raging around it, wandered too close to the Californians while looking for grass, and lost, thereby, part of its tail and rump.<sup>8</sup>

One factor went a long way toward undermining the forces of Micheltorena. The foreign immigrants with the Californians, most United States frontiersmen, got into touch with their fellow countrymen of the governor's forces and succeeded in getting them to withdraw. Consequently, Micheltorena found himself weakened by the loss of some of his most determined fighters.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, it was diplomacy

---

8. G. Tays, Revolutionary California, 762-763.

9. F. J. Polley, "Americans at the battle of Cahuenga," in Historical Society of Southern California, Publications, III, ii, 49-52.

rather than powder and ball which finally defeated Governor Micheltorena.

While the firing and maneuvering continued, those left at home in Los Angeles - the women and children especially - suffered agonies of anxiety for their absent dear ones.

They rushed to the top of Signal Mountain, north of the city, where the battle could be viewed. The firing began at nine o'clock in the morning and it was reported by an eye-witness that:<sup>10</sup>

The scene upon the hill was a remarkable one. Women and children with crosses in their hands, kneeling and praying to the saints for the safety and protection of their fathers, brothers, sons, husbands, lovers, cousins - that they might not be killed in battle; indifferent to their personal appearance, tears streaming from their eyes, and their hair blown by the wind, which had increased to quite a breeze. Don Abel Stearns, myself and others tried to calm and pacify them, assuring them that there was probably no danger; somewhat against our convictions, it is true, judging from what we heard of the firing and from our knowledge of Micheltorena's disciplined force, his battery, and the riflemen he had with him. During the day the scene on the hill continued. The night that followed was a gloomy one, caused by the lamentations of the women and the children.

When evening came, the governor attempted a flanking movement toward Los Angeles. The rebels, however, prevented this by withdrawing through the Cahuenga pass. The

---

10. W. H. Davis, Seventy-five years in California, 129.

next morning, before another engagement could be fought, Micheltorena flew a white flag and offered to negotiate. As a consequence, Governor Micheltorean agreed to take his Lambs by the most direct route to San Pedro, there to embark immediately for Mexico.<sup>11</sup> As was to be expected, the news was received with great relief and rejoicing by the people of the city, who had spent such a terrible day and night of worry.<sup>12</sup>

Hardly had the winter rains washed the tracts of Micheltorena's forces from the fields of Cahuenga, when once more armed men began to appear in the valley. The United States had declared war on Mexico, and California was one of its objectives. In the closing days of that struggle interest settled itself around Frémont's buckskin army and the retreating soldiers of the Hijos del País, or Sons of the Country, as the native Californians styled themselves, for both of these forces were making their way towards San Fernando Valley and Cahuenga as the best line of march towards or away from Los Angeles. A meeting was practically inevitable.

Frémont's army presented a very wild and motley appearance indeed. Usually Frémont was riding in front,

---

11. Polley, Americans at Cahuenga, III, ii, 52.

12. Tays, Revolutionary California, 765.



dressed in a blouse, army trousers, leggings, and a felt hat. His men followed, riding two by two, each with his long rifle balanced by one hand across the pommel of the saddle. They were attired in deerskin suits composed of long, loose coat, tied in front by leather thongs, and trousers with long fringe on them.<sup>13</sup> Their feet were encased in moccasins. Slouched hats of felt or skin completed their wardrobe. In their belts glinted their deadly hunting knives and their single-barreled pistols. Their untrimmed locks flowing out from under nondescript hats, their black beards and their white teeth gave them a wild and savage aspect. Following the army came the herd of bawling cattle, which formed the most important part of the commissariat.<sup>14</sup> Such an array was enough to strike terror to the heart of any foe that might oppose them.

At San Luis Obispo, Frémont was fortunate in attaching to his service Don Jesús "Totoi" Pico, an influential Californian, whom he had pardoned after Don "Totoi" had been condemned to be shot. This act of clemency contained a considerable dramatic element, for it was reported that:<sup>15</sup>

---

13. Tinkham, California men and events, 50.

14. W. F. Swasey, The early days and men of California, 73.

15. Swasey, California, 76-77.

Fremont, with two or three officers, was present awaiting the coming of the prisoner's family to take their last look at the living form of a beloved husband and father. The prisoner, with bowed head, sat in a chair. Frémont, with folded arms and stern, unrelenting countenance, stood near, while the officers, in grave silence, were grouped about him, when the wife, accompanied by eight or nine children, entered the room. They were clad in the deepest mourning. The wife was a most stately and beautiful woman, and the children were lovely. Not one word was uttered, but they fell on their knees, and, with streaming eyes, stretched forth their little hands in mute appeal for mercy.

The scene was too much for the gruff soldiers. Frémont immediately pardoned Don Jesús Pico. From that time on, Pico did all in his power to assist Frémont in successfully  
16  
ending the campaign.

On January 12, 1847, the bronzed, picturesque army of Frémont entered the San Bernardo pass leading into the valley of San Fernando. Knowing the proximity of the enemy, it was expected that the pass would be disputed, but fortunately for Frémont the Californians had taken no such precautions. That afternoon Frémont's men encamped in the old mission, San Fernando, Rey de España. This mission was then the residence of Don Andrés Pico, who was at that moment the chief commander of the Californians.

When the United States troops, under Commodore

---

16. J. C. Frémont, Memoirs, I, 599.

Stockton and General Kearny, drove the Californians out of Los Angeles and into San Fernando, General Flores was in command of the defeated army. However, Flores soon realized that, hemmed in on one side by Frémont and on the other by Stockton and Kearny, resistance was almost hopeless. Consequently, he resigned his post in favor of Don Andrés Pico and left for Mexico. Such a turn of affairs made it easier for the two sides to come to terms, for Pico more nearly represented the native Californian faction and was less objectionable to the United States commander. Also, he was a cousin of Don Jesús Pico, who had sworn to support Frémont. Thus was an excellent channel for negotiations opened.<sup>17</sup>

Frémont, on the very afternoon he arrived in San Fernando, sent Jesús Pico to the Verdugo ranch, where Andrés Pico had his headquarters, and instructed him to sound out the enemy as to the terms of surrender. Pico urged his cousin to submit to Frémont, and told him of the generous treatment he himself had received when the firing squad had been ready to execute him. After some discussion, it was agreed that it would be an advantage to negotiate for a treaty with Frémont; so the successful Don Jesús was able to report to Frémont that General Pico would meet him the following morning

---

17. Bancroft, California, V, 403.

at the Rancho de Cahuenga.<sup>18</sup> A truce was immediately ordered, and the commissioners on both sides were appointed to work out the details of the capitulation. José Antonio Carrillo and Agustín Olvera were named by General Andrés Pico as his representatives, and Major P. B. Reading, Major William H. Russell, and Captain Louis McLane were chosen by Frémont. These men labored through the night to bring the treaty, which was written in both Spanish and English, into proper form.

Next morning, January 13, 1847, the two generals, Frémont and Pico, met to sign the treaty. After the usual formalities the following articles were signed:

ARTICLES OF CAPITULATION MADE AND ENTERED INTO AT THE RANCHO OF CAHUENGA, THIS THIRTEENTH DAY OF JANUARY, ANNO DOMINI EIGHTEEN HUNDRED AND FORTY-SEVEN BETWEEN P. B. READING, MAJOR LOUIS McLANE, JR., COMMANDING ARTILLERY, W. H. RUSSELL, ORDNANCE OFFICER, COMMISSIONERS APPOINTED BY J. C. FRÉMONT, LIEUTENANT-COLONEL UNITED STATES ARMY, AND MILITARY COMMANDANT OF THE TERRITORY OF CALIFORNIA; AND JOSÉ ANTONIO CARRILLO, COMMANDANT [sic] DE ESQUADRÓN BY DON ANDRÉS PICO, COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE CALIFORNIA FORCES UNDER THE MEXICAN FLAG.

Article 1. The commissioners on the part of California agree that their entire force shall, on presentation of themselves to Lieutenant-Colonel Frémont, deliver up their artillery and public arms, and they shall return peaceably to their homes, con-

---

18. C. J. Prudhomme and T. F. Keaveney, "Early days in Los Angeles County. I. Conquest of the pueblo de Los Angeles," in Grizzly Bear, February, 1917, XX, 4:14.

forming to the laws and regulations of the United States and Mexico. But will assist and aid in placing the country in a state of peace and tranquility.

Article 2. The commissioners on the part of Lieutenant-colonel Frémont agree and bind themselves on fulfilment of the first article by the Californians, that they shall be guaranteed the protection of life and property whether on parole or otherwise.

Article 3. That until a treaty of peace be made and signed between the United States of North America and the Republic of Mexico, no Californian or other Mexican citizen shall be found to take oath of allegiance.

Article 4. That any Californian or other citizen of Mexico desiring, is permitted by his Capitulation to leave the country without let or hindrance.

Article 5. That in virtue of the aforesaid articles equal rights and privileges are vouchsafed to every citizen of California as are enjoyed by the citizens of the United States of North America.

Article 6. All officers, citizens, foreigners, or others shall receive the protection guaranteed by the second article.

Article 7. This Capitulation is intended to be no bar in effecting such arrangements as may in future be in justice required by both parties.

(Signed) P. B. Reading, Major California Battalion.  
W. H. Russell, Ordnance Officer of California Battalion.  
Louis McLane, Jr., Commanding Artillery California Battalion.  
José Antonio Carrillo, Commandante de Esquadrón  
Agustín Olvera, Deputado.

(Approved) J. C. Frémont, Lieutenant-Colonel United States Army and Military Commandant of California.

Andrés Pico, Commandante de Esquadron y en  
Jefe las Fuerzas Nacionales en California.

Cuidad de Los Angeles, January 13, 1847.<sup>19</sup>

Such was the manner in which the United States invasion ended. The importance of the capitulation at Cahuenga and the humanity and moderation of its terms made it forever one of the focal points and one of the bright spots in California history; for, because of it, two people of different race and tradition were able to live in harmony without the festering memory of a fierce, bloody struggle, a ruthless conquest and despairing defense. Life could once more be taken up in the usual manner; and friendship, not hate and rancor, hovered over California.

In another sense, the treaty is worthy of remembrance. When the war with Mexico ended, the settlement at Cahuenga had no small part in determining that California, and even the Southwest, should be ceded to the United States. This, then, was the document forwarded to Los Angeles for Commodore Stockton's approval. The commodore, in spite of the somewhat irregular procedure of a subordinate taking to himself the authority to sign such a treaty, nevertheless thought it best to give his indorsement, and sent the completed draft on to Washington.<sup>20</sup> The pact at Cahuenga be-

---

19. Prudhomme and Keaveney, "Los Angeles," in Grizzly Bear, February, 1917, XX, 4:14.

20. Bancroft, California, V, 406-407.

came officially binding.

To be sure, the ranch at Cahuenga was a place of such prominence, because of the notable events it witnessed, as to receive the attention of many public-spirited citizens who wished to keep its memory intact. Soon after 1897 there were two attempts made to get the congress of the United States to erect a tablet on the spot, but both times the suggestion failed to meet a response. The adobe ranch house was allowed to go to ruin, and even its location seemed in a fair way to be forgotten. By 1908 only the foundations were visible, but even these practically disappeared before many more years. However, in 1923, the City of Los Angeles finally purchased the site for \$15,000, and built upon it a park as a memorial to Frémont and Pico.<sup>21</sup> It is three miles northwest of Hollywood on the Lankershim Boulevard, and is one hundred by two hundred feet in area, surrounded by walls with an iron gate at the entrance. Inside the walls are a few small buildings of recent construction, a fountain, some trees and other landscaping. There is, also, a bell in front, which marks it as once having been an outpost of the Misión San Fernando. Indeed, the Campo de Cahuenga is worth saving, for it has been the historical setting for the stirring climaxes in two of California's most important dramas of history.

---

21. H. R. P. Forbes, Campo de Cahuenga, 1.

## AUTHORITIES

### Printed Material

#### I. Bibliographical Aids:

1. Cowan, Robert Ernest, and Cowan, Robert Granniss. A bibliography of the history of California, 1510-1930. 3v. San Francisco, 1933.
2. Underhill, Leslie. "Historical and reminiscent articles in the first twenty volumes of the Grizzly Bear magazine (1907-17)," in Grizzly Bear. Vol. XX; No. 6. Los Angeles, April, 1917.

#### II. Periodical Literature:

3. California Historical Society. Quarterly. San Francisco, 1922-.
4. Grizzly Bear Publishing Company. The Grizzly Bear, a monthly magazine for all California. Los Angeles, 1907-.
5. Guinn, James Miller. "History of the Cahuenga valley and the rancho la Brea," in Historical Society of Southern California. Publications, VIII. Los Angeles, 1911.
6. Historical Society of Southern California. Publications. Los Angeles, 1884-.
7. Polley, Frank J. "Americans at the battle of Cahuenga," in Historical Society of Southern California. Publications, III. Los Angeles, 1894.
8. Prudhomme, Charles J. and Keaveney, Thomas F. "Early days in Los Angeles County. I. Conquest of pueblo de Los Angeles," in Grizzly Bear. XX, No. 4. Los Angeles, February, 1917.



## III. General Works:

9. Ayers, James J. Gold and sunshine; reminiscences of Early California. Boston, 1922.
10. Bancroft, Hubert Howe. History of California. 7v. San Francisco, 1884-1890.
11. Chapman, Charles Edward. A history of California; the Spanish Period. New York, 1921.
12. Colton, Walter. Three years in California. 1846-1849. New York, 1850.
13. Davis, William Heath. Seventy-five years in California; a history of events and life in California: personal, political and military;... a reissue and enlarged illustrated edition of "Sixty years in California." San Francisco, 1929.
14. Eldredge, Zoeth Skinner, ed. History of California. 5v. New York, 1915.
15. Farnham, Thomas Jefferson. Life, adventures and travels in California. New York and St. Louis, 1851.
16. Frémont, John Charles. Memoirs of my life. Chicago and New York, 1887.
17. Guinn, James Miller. A history of California, and an extended history of Los Angeles and environs. 3v. Los Angeles, 1915.
18. Guinn, James Miller. Historical and biographical record of Southern California, containing a history of Southern California from its earliest settlement to the opening year of the twentieth century. Chicago, 1902.
19. Hill, Laurance Landreth. La reina, Los Angeles in three centuries. Los Angeles, 1929.
20. Hittell, Theodore Henry. History of California. 4v. San Francisco, 1885-1897.

21. Hunt, Rockwell Dennis, and Sanchez, Nellie Van de Grift. A short history of California. New York, 1929.
22. James, George Wharton. Fremont in California. Los Angeles, 1903.
23. Layne, J . Gregg. Annals of Los Angeles from the arrival of the first white man to the Civil War, 1769-1861. California Historical Society. (Special publication No. 9.) San Francisco, 1935.
24. McGroarty, John Steven. California of the south, a history. 4v. Los Angeles, 1933.
25. McGroarty, John Steven. History of Los Angeles County. 3v. Chicago and New York, 1923.
26. Newmark, Harris. Sixty years in Southern California, 1853-1913;... ed. by Maurice H Newmark (1859); Marco Ross Newmark (1878). New York, 1916.
27. Rensch, Hero Eugene, and Rensch, Ethel Grace. Historic spots in California; the southern counties. Stanford University, California, 1932.
28. Stockton, Robert Field. Report of secretary of navy, communicating copies of Commodore Stockton's dispatches relating to military and naval operations in California. Washington, D. C., 1849.
29. Swasey, William F . The early days and men of California. New York and Oakland, 1891.
30. Tinkham, George Henry. California men and events, 1769-1890. Stockton, California, 1915.
31. Tuthill, Franklin. History of California. San Francisco, 1866.
32. Valentine, Percy Friars. California, the story of our state. Sacramento, 1916.
33. Willard, Charles Dwight. The Herald's history of Los Angeles City. Los Angeles, 1901.

34. Wilson, John Albert. History of Los Angeles County, California, with illustrations descriptive of scenery, residence, fine blocks and manufactories. Oakland, 1880.

MANUSCRIPTS

35. Bepler, Doris West. Descriptive catalogue of materials for western history in California magazines, 1854-1890,... M. A. thesis. University of California, Berkeley, 1920.
36. Forbes, Harrie Rebecca Piper (Mrs. A. S. C.). Campo de Cahuenga - Frémont - Pico memorial park. Archives of State Park Commission of California, San Francisco, 1934.
37. Shubert, Helen Victoria. California's defense against United States military occupation, 1846. M. A. thesis. University of California, Berkeley, 1933.
38. Smith, Marion Elizabeth. Pío Pico, ranchero and politician. M. A. thesis. University of California, Berkeley, 1928.
39. Stamps, Pearl Pauline. Abel Stearns. California pioneer, 1798-1871. M. A. thesis. University of California, Berkeley, 1925.
40. Tays, George. Revolutionary California, the political history of California during the Mexican period, 1822-1846. Ph. D. thesis. University of California, Berkeley, 1932.