

A Memorial and Biographical History of the Counties of Merced, Stanislaus, Calaveras, Tuolumne, and Mariposa, California

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Merced County Towns

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LOS BAÑOS

The principal town in Merced county, after Merced, is Los Baños. This is an old town, and has long been a good trading point on the West Side. The building of the San Joaquin and King's River canal gave an impetus to its growth that helped its importance considerably.

The Los Baños of to-day, however, is a new town. The extension of the West Side line of the Southern Pacific railroad to Armona in 1890 and 1891 caused, as is usually the case, a new laying out and new arrangement, and the firm of Miller & Lux have taken an interest in building up the town which has redounded greatly to its advantage.

There are a number of new and handsome brick blocks, among which are a fine hotel, the Los Baños, and a bank building with public hall overhead, both erected by Miller & Lux.

There are also two church buildings which are architecturally very creditable, a school which is among the very best in the county, and an enterprising and well edited weekly newspaper.

Among the advantages enjoyed by this live town are well-equipped water and electric-light works, supplying two of the most important essentials in a thoroughly satisfactory manner.

Adjoining the town is the Los Baños colony, on which a large number of families have settled.

Los Baños draws a large trade from the country to the east, south, and west, and is the best business point on the line of railroad from Tracy to Armona. It has a thrifty, energetic air, and is generally regarded as having a bright future in prospect.

MERCED FALLS

At the commencement of the foothills, twenty-one miles from the city of Merced, and at the dam on the river of the same name, is the thriving village of Merced Falls, which has long been a manufacturing place of importance.

William Nelson, a New Hampshire millwright, who had come to California in 1850, located here early in 1854, and in March of that year constructed a flouring mill. In 1866 he took his son Henry into partnership, and since that time the firm has been Nelson & Son.

In 1867 they formed a company and built a woolen mill nearby, which commenced operations early in 1868.

On the 1st of April, 1872, fire broke out in the woolen mills, and soon both woolen and flour mills were in ruins. The loss on the woolen mills, machinery and stock was \$67,000; insurance, \$35,000. Loss on flouring mill, machinery and stock, \$12,500; insurance \$5,500.

The flour-mills of Nelson & Son were rebuilt on a larger scale than before, and improvements have been made since from that time to time as occasion has required.

The woolen mills were not at once rebuilt, but in 1874 the Merced Woolen Mills Company was organized, with P. D. Wigginton, Albert Ingalsbee, C. S. Peck, James Morton, and I. H. Jacobs as directors, and this company at once proceeded to erect a new factory near the site of the old mills. The company has ever since continued to do a large business.

The other resources of the town are the farming and grazing interests of the surrounding country.

SNELLING

This is the oldest town in the county and the former county seat. It is beautifully located on the north bank of the Merced river, about eighteen miles in a northerly direction from Merced city. The first settlers on the site were John M. Montgomery, Samuel Scott, and Dr. David W. Lewis. The latter gentleman kept the first hotel, which was a very primitive structure.

In the fall of 1851 the Snelling family moved there, and Mr. Snelling built a large frame hotel to succeed the one previously mentioned, which took the name of Snelling Hotel. From Mr. Snelling, the proprietor of this hotel, the place took its name. At the election held in September, 1855, for the purpose of selecting a location for the county seat to succeed that of the Turner & Osborne ranch, the original seat of justice, Snelling proved the successful competitor, and a town was regularly laid out, Mr. Snelling donating the land for county building purposes. During the two years following there was constant improvement, as many people came to settle at the county seat, and in addition to residence and business buildings a courthouse and jail were erected.

Snelling remained the county seat until the first of January, 1873. On the 12th of the month preceding, at a special election held for the purpose of selecting a new location, Merced had carried off the honors, and despite an injunction obtained by the Snelling people the removal was effected with the close of the year.

This event naturally took away much of the importance of Snelling, but the town is still a good business point, being surrounded by fine farming land.

The flood of 1861-'62 did considerable damage at Snelling, destroying the hotel, together with other businesses and residence properties.

On September 12, 1862, a destructive fire laid a considerable portion of the town in ashes, one of the buildings to suffer being the hotel of E. Prince, erected after the flood of the preceding year.

The first newspaper in the county was issued at Snelling, under the name of the Merced *Banner*, with R. J. Steele as proprietor and he and his wife editors. The material was hauled by ox team from Knight's Ferry, where it had been previously use in the publication of the Stanislaus *Index*. The name of the paper was afterward changed to the San Joaquin Valley *Argus*, and it was removed to the city of Merced in 1873.

At this writing there are in Snelling four stores, a livery barn, blacksmith shop, etc., and the pioneer hotel of the county, the Gault House, which has been kept by the present proprietor, Mrs. Anderson, since 1864.

The Merced City Flour Mills are located on the Merced river, two miles from Snelling, and are the oldest mills in the county. They were established by H. J. Ostrander, who also located the first water right on the Merced river, the water being used to operate the mills. This institution is equipped with the roller process, and has a capacity of fifty-five barrels per day. The proprietor is Frank Howell.

Willow Lodge, No. 121, I. O. O. F., was instituted at Snelling August 22, 1869, with the following officers: R. R. Leake, N.G.; N. Breen, V.G.; G. W. Robertson, Secretary, and George Turner, Treasurer. The corner stone of the lodge building was laid with appropriate ceremonies September 3, 1869. The officers of 1892 are: G. Latour, N.G.; R. J. Scott, V.G.; G. Halstead, Secretary; J. Pruitt, Treasurer; T. J. Ramsey, C.; H. P. Field, R.S.N.G.; C. Galto, L.S.N.G.; A. Jacobs, R.S.V.G.; A. Thomas, L.S.V.G.; T. Connor, R.S.T.; W. M. Jacobs, L.S.T.; E. Latour, I.G.; L. P. Wilson, O.S.

Merced Lodge, F & A.M., was instituted at Snelling, August 12, 1865, with the following officers: E. G. Rector, W.M.; S. P. Jackson, S.W.; George P. Lake, J.W.; J. M. Strong, S.D.; N. I. Coats, J.D.; I. H. Jacobs, Treasurer; W. Mayrs, Tyler; P. D. Wigginton, Secretary.

Calaveras Chapter, No. 12, R. A. M., which was organized under dispensation September 18, 1855, and chartered May 3, 1856, at Murphy's Camp, Calaveras county, and which had been removed to Copperopolis in 1865, was located at Snelling in January, 1868, where it remained until March, 1874, when it was finally moved to Merced, its present location.

VOLTA

A prosperous village of about 200 inhabitants is on the west side of the Southern Pacific railroad. It is directly opposite Pacheco Pass, and is the shipping point for a large territory lying between that tributary to Newman and los Baños. The climate hereabouts is excellent, and on account of this and other advantages the prospects of the town are considered favorable.

PLAINSBURG

This is a small but old village in the southeastern part of the county, lying about three and one-half miles from the Southern Pacific railroad line on Mariposa creek.

It has been for many years a trading point and still does considerable business, being surrounded by a rich farming country.

ATHLONE

is a railroad station about ten miles southeast of Merced, and has warehouses, hotel and business houses. This place cut off considerable trade from Plainsburg, which is but a few miles away, and off the railroad. It is the shipping point for that village.

LIVINGSTON

is located on the main line of the Southern Pacific railroad, fourteen miles northwest of Merced. it is a good shipping point and is the headquarters of the East Side Canal & Irrigation Company, which is mentioned elsewhere in this work at some length. Livingston received 236 votes in the county seat election of December, 1872.

ATWATER

is seven miles northwest of Merced, on the main line of railroad and has been brought into prominence by the colony and fruit interests of the vicinity.

DOS PALOS

is located on the west side line of the Southern Pacific railroad, and has been entirely built since the construction of the extension of that road to Armona. It is now a thriving place, and in its vicinity is the flourishing Dos Palos colony.

INGOMAR

is another town on the same line which is supported by the surrounding country, and which is destined to be thickly settled according to appearances.