



# Episode 024 – A Tale of Two Ranchos (transcript)

## Introduction

You're listening to rememBURBANK, a podcast featuring stories from the history of Burbank, California, produced by the Burbank Public Library. Check out our collection of historic Burbank photos at [burbankinfo.org](http://burbankinfo.org).

## Announcements:

*Are you stuck in a reading rut?*

*Have you been reading the same authors and genres for years?*

*We've got a great way to bring some variety to your to-be-read list!*

Challenge yourself to bloom with the Burbank Public Library's Spring Reading Bingo Program! This is a free program that encourages readers of all ages to explore a wide selection of books. Begin today by tracking your reading either online or pick up a Spring Reading Bingo card at any of the three Burbank library branches. Complete a Bingo and win a prize! You can start playing along anytime from now through May 31, 2023.

## Story

And now for today's story:

In this month's podcast, we're going to go way back—to a time when the San Fernando Valley was virtually untouched. As most Californians know, the origins of the state started with Spanish occupation. It began in 1769 with the establishment of the San Diego Mission when King Charles III decreed to the Franciscan priests that missions be built along the length of California in order to lay claim to the land and spread the Christian religion to the indigenous population. In 1797, the San Fernando Mission was completed. It lies midway between the San Gabriel and the San Buenaventura Missions. And the resting point between the San Gabriel and the San Fernando Missions was located at what is now the intersection of Lake Street and Elmwood, right here in Burbank. According to history, four sycamore trees were planted in 1817 by the Spanish padres to create a landmark. Each tree denoted the four points of the compass to help travelers navigate their way between the missions. A crude structure was erected under their branches to provide shelter for the weary pilgrims. Although the original trees are no longer standing, in 2002 four new Sycamore trees were planted to mark this historic site that was dedicated as Compass Tree Park.

In 1810, Mexicans began fighting the Spanish for their independence and ultimately won in 1821. However, they did not send a governor to California until 1824. The missions maintained authority over indigenous peoples and land holdings until 1833 when the Congress of the Union of the First

Mexican republic passed the Mexican Secularization Act. This act nationalized the missions and transferred their ownership from the Catholic church to the Mexican authorities. They did this because most of the people at the missions remained loyal to the Roman Catholic Church in Spain. Once the act was fully implemented, the government took away much of the land and sold it or gave it away in large grants called ranchos. Both the Spanish and Mexican governments issued many land grants. They were often made to retired soldiers to compel them to remain on the frontier. "During Spanish rule, the ranchos were concessions from the Spanish crown, permitting settlement and granting grazing rights on specific tracts of land. During the Mexican era, grantees received legal title to the land." (Wikipedia)

"Ranchos provided the pattern of the pastoral age in Southern California and determined the character of its civilization...In the whole of California probably not more than 30 grants of ranchos were made during the Spanish period. The rancho movement did not get fully underway until the 1830s [after] the missions were secularized." (Robinson) In the days of the Spanish dons, there was no accurate way to measure the land. "It is said that this was done by using a reata or lasso rope, the kind used for catching cattle, as a measuring instrument. This reata was made of rawhide...and each Don could make his own rope as long as he wanted to, depending on how big a loop he could make and how far he could throw it. Thus, the Don with the longest reata got the largest piece of the land." (Palmer)

"Burbank is located on parts of two of these ranchos, San Rafael and La Providencia. Rancho San Rafael was granted to [Corporal] Jose Maria Verdugo in 1784. It was probably the largest land grant ever given. It included the areas known today as Glendale, Highland Park, Eagle Rock, [Glassell Park], [Atwater Village], and much of Burbank. Although Verdugo never knew how many acres his grant contained, it consisted of eight leagues of land stretching roughly from the Arroyo Seco in present-day Pasadena to the border of Rancho Ex-Mission San Fernando"—[totaling more than 36,000 acres]. Verdugo was a Spanish soldier who served on the Portola-Serra expedition of California. He retired from the military and became a full-time rancher in 1798. "The general understanding regarding the gift[ed land] was that it should in no way" undermine the San Fernando Mission, "that the owner should raise and keep 2000 head of [livestock], should build a stone house, and should provide two [bushels] of wheat or maize for the general good of the community." (Ranchos de los Santos) Verdugo also raised beans, peppers, and grapes with which he made wine. On July 28, 1817, Verdugo "reported that his ranch had 1800 large cattle, 100 small cattle, 600 wild horses, 70 gentle horses, 20 gentle mules, and 50 wild mules." (Mayers) "Jose Maria Verdugo died April 3, 1831, and his body was [buried] at his beloved [San Gabriel Mission] which he had guarded for many years. He willed his great rancho to" two of his children, Julio and Catalina. The siblings "made an equal division of the rancho between...the brother taking the southern portion and the sister the northern." (Rancho de los Santos) Historians recounted that Julio would ride on horseback through his acreage dressed like a Spanish Caballero. The Verdugo fiestas and rodeos were renowned in the area. Catalina Verdugo had been blinded by smallpox and never married. Both of them appeared to have sold portions of their parts of the estate at different times. The boundaries of the tracts were never clearly defined, and this, added to the fact that both brother and sister contracted many unwise debts, led finally to the 'Great Partition' by which the greater part of the land passed out of the possession of the Verdugos entirely." (Ranchos de Los Santos)

"Rancho La Providencia was a Mexican land grant created after Mexico won her independence from Spain in 1821." (Palmer) The grant consisted of 4,600 acres west of Rancho San Rafael. La Providencia was given to a former Los Angeles city councilman Vicente de la Ossa in 1843. The Burbank portion of the rancho lies north of the Los Angeles River. "The street grid change along Burbank

Boulevard marks the northwestern boundary of the rancho grant. The Walt Disney Studios, Warner Brothers, and Providence Saint Joseph Medical Center are all within the former boundaries of Rancho Providencia." (Wikipedia) This rancho is famous for being the site of the Battle of Providencia. As the native-born Californio population reached adulthood, many of them became exasperated with the Mexican government. They would only choose Mexican-born governors, many of whom had no concept of what life was like on the frontier. In 1842, the Mexican government appointed Manuel Micheltorena as governor. "He had been sent to California from Mexico, along with an army that had been recruited out of Mexico's worst jails." (Wikipedia) Micheltorena had no money with which to feed his army, so they pillaged their way through the countryside, enraging the Californios even more. A revolt was organized. "On February 19, 1845, Micheltorena's forces met a small army of native sons beside the Cahuenga Pass. Micheltorena had three pieces of artillery, the local forces two. At very long range the two little armies opened fire. [The following day], a grand artillery duel [took place] until ammunition ran low. Each side retrieved the other's cannon balls and fired them back. Neither force wished to shed blood, only to frighten off the other." (Mayers) The only casualty was a horse and one injured mule. Ultimately, Micheltorena surrendered and the defeated governor was unceremoniously whisked out of the country. Pio Pico became the last California governor under Mexican rule. "For many years, Burbank residents in the vicinity of the Warner Brother Studio dug up cannonballs from time to time. La Providencia was a proud, slightly battle-scarred rancho." (Palmer) It was only a few short years that the native Californios had undisputed rule before the land became the 31<sup>st</sup> state of the union in 1850. And while the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ensured property rights to their owners, it was only a matter of time before parcels were sold off and the ranchos dissolved to be merely a legend of the region's history.

## News from Burbank

**Today's news comes from the March 24, 1959, Burbank Daily Review.**

Any spare cannon balls around your house? How about a picture of Burbank as it was 30 or more years ago? Or any letters, diaries or other documents relating to Burbank's early days?

City Librarian Edward C. Perry wants to know because the department is now gathering materials for a museum of Burbank history. "It is a fact," Perry said, "that cannon balls fired during battles in California's early Spanish days have been dug up in Burbank, both by farmers plowing the land some years back and more recently by construction crews. The library would very much like to have one of those relics for its collection. We are also anxious to obtain old letters, old newspapers, or even diaries which tell about the community and community life some years back," he said, "Such historical materials are needed by students who are assigned to do research on Burbank. They are also valuable for reports, documentary films, and other projects involving the history of the City." While the library has a number of pictures in its files, Perry believes "there must be literally hundreds of other pictures packed away in trunks or old photo albums where they are of no benefit to anyone. We'd like to obtain them so that all of the people of Burbank, both young and old, may enjoy them and make use of them as needed." Citizens who have any such historical materials are asked to contact the Main Library. The library will be glad to send out a representative to examine the materials and determine whether or not they would be of public benefit as part of the historical collection.

**And while this is the news from March 24, 1959, the Burbank Public Library is still seeking donations of historical significance 64 years later, so don't be shy to share!**

## End Credits

rememBURBANK was researched, written, edited, and hosted by Carolyn Alves and Cesar Garcia.

Funding for the podcast came from the Friends of the Burbank Public Library, a nonprofit group dedicated to promoting books and the library to the Burbank community. The proceeds from their fundraising efforts help fund Library programming and purchase special equipment for the library.

The music you hear now, and at the beginning of the podcast, is Burbank's 1924 official song "In Burbank" by Code Morgan.

You can find show notes for this episode, learn more about the show, and view historical photos of Burbank at [burbankinfo.org](http://burbankinfo.org)

Thank you for joining us today.