

Colonel Thomas Baker and Founding of Bakersfield

(By NAOMI E. BAIN)

CHAPTER VIII THE PASSING OF COLONEL BAKER

In closing this story, it might be fitting to mention the last outstanding deed done by this gentleman. For many years Bakersfield's residences had been of adobe, brush, and tules held together by poles or rough-hewn logs. This type of shelter had been practical in the early period of development because of the prevailing climatic condition except, of course, in flood. It had also been the only type of building for which sufficient materials could be provided without too great an expense. Later sawmills were established in the valley, but even then, the lumber had to be hauled or floated some great distance from the mountains. Though this had reduced the expense of lumber considerably, the wooden houses were still impractical. To be properly insulated from the heat of summer and the equally extreme cold of winter, plastering was necessary, and this was practically unavailable and very expensive.

If one could build a home with two stories and a large deep cellar, the ground floor could be made reasonably comfortable in summer. Cellars were an impossibility, for in the rainy season they filled with water, and the danger of caveins was imminent. Large rambling frame houses with porches around the entire house were comfortable where shade trees were full grown. But by 1872 the new settlers were beginning to come too rapidly, and they were too impatient for comfortable houses to be supplied to all immediately at convenient prices. Nor did the settlers seem patient enough to wait for shade trees to grow. The answer to the problem was a more stable building material with the same insulating properties as adobe, namely brick. But the process of burning

bricks had not yet proved successful in that vicinity. Finally in November of 1872, Colonel Baker made the first successful attempt to burn a kiln of brick. The town rejoiced with its founder at his success.

As if his career had reached a fitting climax, it ended soon after this. An epidemic of typhoid broke out in the little community, and, like any plague, it showed no partiality. The Colonel was stricken. His father-in-law, Doctor Alverson, of Tehachapi, was summoned when the case became too serious for local physicians, but by that time the Colonel's advanced age and naturally weak lungs gave way, and pneumonia developed. All hope was given up on Saturday, November 23; but he rallied again on Sunday morning, hope was renewed, then unable to hold out even after only a few days' illness, he relapsed. As if falling asleep, he died easily and calmly.

Until after the funeral on Tuesday, business in the little valley came to a halt.

The last rites, conducted by members of the Masonic order, from Visalia (a lodge which he had helped organize in 1852 and of which he was a charter member), were held in the Town Hall and attended by every citizen in the community. The remains were quite fittingly interred in the cemetery, the location of which had been chosen by the Colonel little more than a year previously. From the site of the grave one's view of the great treeless plain and the majestic mountains in the background was unobstructed. The Colonel's body now lay almost directly south from where he had first set foot on the land in 1868, when he arrived with his family and, viewing the country, remarked to his wife: "Here at last I have found a resting place, and here I expect to lay my bones."

(Continued Tomorrow)