

Colonel Thomas Baker and Founding of Bakersfield

(By NAOMI E. BAIN)

Colonel Baker's other project of that year was building the "Baker Grade" between Bakersfield and Havilah. This was, perhaps, the only paying enterprise which the Colonel ever had in that country. It was customary at that time for an individual to lay out a private road over much-traveled areas. Others desiring to go that way followed him, and soon a trail was worn. The followers, however, were forced to pay a toll for the use of the "road" which merely guaranteed that they would arrive at the desired destination. But the road builder himself paid tribute to the ferry man when his road crossed a stream which could not be forded. Rates for the use of these toll roads were fixed by the Board of Supervisors at such prices as follows: "For a wagon and two horses, \$2; for each extra span of horses, 50 cents; for a horse and rider, 50 cents; for loose animals of all kinds, 25 cents each; for a footman, 25 cents."

Baker's road to Havilah from Bakersfield claimed to make the climb up the mountain an easy one by reducing it to a slowly winding road. It wended its way around the mountains through Walkers Basin, beyond and over a high rolling pasture country where herds of cattle grazed. In the spring of 1869 the road was reported to be in "fine condition" which is evidence that it was being sufficiently used. Judging from the newspaper reports from Havilah, this road was an engineering project properly acclaimed as a masterpiece of the era although it might seem a bit insignificant in the light of present achievements.

A month before this announcement of the Colonel's success in road building, the Courier had run an article which must surely have pleased the progressive-minded Mrs. Baker. On March 7, 1869, the following appeared in the local news column:

"Sewing Machines: We invite the attention of our readers to the advertisement of the Pacific Sewing Machine Company. The object of this company is that the people of this coast may have the same opportunity to procure a good serviceable sewing machine, at a low price, that the people of the eastern states have."

What a boon to the hard-working women of that pioneering country to be able to speed up the process of sewing in their busy days! Perhaps it lent a threatening note to Mrs. Baker's weekly sewing bees and the sociability which had been forthcoming, but at least the need in this line had been recognized and an achievement gained by her efforts.

In the same issue appeared a re-

port by the county superintendent of schools in which he said that since the organization of school districts in the county, schools had been maintained in each from three to six months. The credit was given mainly to trustees of the Linn's Valley, Kern Island and Tehachapi districts for "their energy in organizing and perseverance in maintaining" the schools in their respective districts under the many difficult circumstances surrounding them.

Although in March of the previous year, Kern county with its 283 school children, had been allotted \$715.99 by the state, the only county or state funds used for the benefit of the Kern Island and Tehachapi districts had been for a few books and the census marshal's pay. Lack of sufficient working materials had been a serious handicap with the superintendent in the successful conduct of the schools. The superintendent also stated in his report that "the law makes it obligatory upon the district clerks to furnish all books and necessary supplies, and makes it the duty of the county superintendent to see that the books adopted by the state board of education are used in the public schools." But the education of the younger generation continued in spite of the financial handicaps, and on April 20, 1869, the "Courier" announced: "The school on the island is under the superintendence of Mr. A. R. Jackson, and is well attended."

How satisfying such news must have been to Mrs. Baker! The sewing machines and the schools had now become of county interest.

And now that Bakersfield seemed well established, the Colonel perceived that he might well set up a business for himself. Subsequently the April 20 edition of the "Havilah Weekly Courier" announced that "Colonel Thomas Baker has established a real estate agency at Bakersfield, the center of the agricultural lands." The fact that he was serving his second term as county surveyor was included in the announcement perhaps as a recommendation. Also the fact that he took a lively interest in the progress of the county, and was so well known in the two adjoining counties that he required no commendation from the editor of the "Courier." Beside that announcement ran an advertisement for his business:

REAL ESTATE AGENCY BAKERSFIELD

Kern County — California
The undersigned will devote special attention to all matters pertaining to Real Estate in Kern County.
(Signed) Thomas Baker,
Surveyor.

(Continued Monday)