

Colonel Thomas Baker and Founding of Bakersfield

(By NAOMI E. BAIN)

On the day before election the Colonel and Mr. Davidson were still quite confident of their election. But the following day the results of the election were published. Fowler and Doss had won by perhaps not too great a majority, but Baker and Davidson had made a valiant fight. The "Courier" states that not as many votes were cast in the general election as had been in the primary. At Havilah 76 Democratic votes had been cast in the June primary; at the general election only 66 Democrats had voted for senator and 52 for assemblyman. The editor of the "Courier" remarked that this fact was suggestive of great apathy among the masses of the party, and he suspected a lack of interest in the matter.

Morgan divides the early history of Kern county into two epochs from "an industrial point of view:" the dividing point, the years around 1870, brought a rapid influx of capital into the county. Before that time the settlers had been full of energy but short of cash. They had taken much from the land but put little into it; that applied to miners, farmers, and stockmen alike. Following 1870, Colonel Baker and his associates had reclaimed the swamp land, irrigated the barren places, and put new values into the land. These men might be called intermediaries, for they were yet of modest means and modest ambitions. Their energy and foresight were amazing, but they had their hopes set upon improving the land.

About 1868 General Beale acquired Tejon ranch, and Beale and a man named Robert Baker began to accumulate large flocks of sheep there. Simultaneously J. C. Crocker had established his headquarters at the Temblor ranch and began to accumulate properties and herds which were later to form the foundations for the vast holdings of Miller & Lux. The Chester brothers in Bakersfield were financed by H. P. Livermore, a wealthy druggist in San Francisco, and with this help were planning big enterprises.

And while Colonel Baker may have been defeated for the office of senator in 1869, far was it from him to retire into obscurity. Instead, he now turned his interests more earnestly to his surveying and to building Bakersfield into a city of which he could justly be proud. Later in

September, 1869, the newspaper reported that Bakersfield was "quite a thriving village" and "bids fair to be a place of importance at no distant day." By that time two stores, a church and a schoolhouse had been established. The town, as yet, had neither a hotel nor a saloon, but travelers could always find hospitable lodging within the homes of any of the permanent residents of the village.

Bakersfield was now in telegraphic communication with the rest of the world, and the railroad war was still being fought between the proponents of the Southern Pacific Railway Company and the civic leaders of the community who held out for a railroad through town on their terms or none at all.

Within less than two months a reporter gave account of a "Trip to the Island"; and while he still lamented the lack of a public hotel, he assured his readers that one would soon be supplied. The stores of Chester and Conn and Jacoby & Company were still operating and a saloon was in the course of construction. Likewise a photograph gallery and a blacksmith shop were soon to be in operation.

Such items recording the progress of the little city were interspersed at various intervals with others extolling the advantages offered by the Southern Pacific Railroad.

What else could A. D. Jones, editor of the "Courier," see but the blackout of the little county seat in the limelight of Bakersfield's capitalistic enterprise? And so, perhaps, to save his skin, on December 14, 1869, he said adieu to Havilah and confidently announced his intention of moving from the mines to the farms.

"Subscribers who have paid in advance will be supplied from Bakersfield. Those (if any such there be) who desire to discontinue the paper can do so by paying up arrears."

No change of policy or personnel was to be made in the paper. It would be called the "Bakersfield Weekly Courier" instead of the "Havilah Weekly Courier" when it resumed publication at the regular time on Tuesday, December 21, in its new home where it would be "closer to telegraphic communication and the iron horse."

(Continued Tomorrow)