

Colonel Thomas Baker and Founding of Bakersfield

(By NAOMI E. BAIN)

In 1870 the established business enterprises of Bakersfield were the stores of Livermore & Chester and Coswell and Ellis, one telegraph office, one printing house. ("The Courier"), a blacksmith and carriage shop owned by Fred Making, the harness shop of Phillip Reinsteint, Littlefield & Philan's livery stable, John B. Tungate's saloon, a carpenter shop, a schoolhouse with 50 pupils, two boarding houses, one doctor, L. S. Rogers, and one attorney, C. H. Veeder. A hotel and a grist mill were in contemplation and good wagon roads to Havilah, Tehachapi, Visalia and Los Angeles were in operation.

In the following March, the townsite was re-surveyed and the planting of shade trees on each lot corner was begun. This last, incidentally, has proved a great boon to Bakersfield's citizens in summer heat, and has encouraged the planting of more trees. Bakersfield today is noted for its beautiful shade trees and its appearance as an oasis in a desert. The prospect of cheaper lumber was in sight, for Colonel Baker had plans under way for a new saw mill; another at San Emidio had just put in new machinery, and Livermore & Chester's saw mill at Tecuya valley was about to resume work. In the county were five post offices, Bakersfield's postmaster being George B. Chester. The other four mail stations were at Havilah, Kernville, Linn's Valley and Tehachapi. The Buena Vista Petroleum Company was working "hopefully but not profitably" at McKittrick, then known as Asphalto, almost due west of Bakersfield in the Santa Maria valley. The unprofitable nature of the business was probably due to the fact that the little local settlements could not consume all of the oil produced, and transportation to the outside was too expensive for profit or competition with other oil producing territories supplied by railroads.

Capital was flowing in mainly

from the travelers and the sale of horses, mules, lumber, posts, etc., from Greenhorn mountain; the sale of sheep and wool by the Jewett brothers, the Troys, Gustave Sanger, Beale & Baker, and other sheep raisers; the sale of cattle by George Young, Launder, Tracy and Canfield.

The population of the "Island" was now estimated at 600 and a bill to make Bakersfield the county seat passed the Assembly that same year. But since it failed to pass the Senate, it did not become a law.

Then things began moving rapidly for Colonel Baker. No sooner had the capitalists begun to move in and replenish the fertility of the soil than they began buying up at meager sums the plots of ground left unimproved. The poorer farmers welcomed the opportunities to sell, and such companies as Livermore & Chester and Miller & Lux were beginning to run the town by remote control. Julius Chester ran the affairs of Livermore & Chester and was resident manager; Livermore supplied the necessary cash and lived elsewhere. Many others did likewise, and except for Henry Miller, they paid little heed to the details of their investments. The large companies bought vast tracts from Colonel Baker at the lowest possible prices under the Montgomery patent and, as in the case of Livermore & Chester, advertised 20,000 acres for re-sale at \$2 to \$10 per acre. In July, 1870, Baker, in conjunction with the Chesters, Livermore & Chester, A. R. Jackson, B. Brundage, C. C. Jackson, John Howlett, H. A. Cross, Solomon Jewett and L. G. Barnes filed a petition for the formation of a reclamation district comprising 28,000 acres in Township 29 South, Range 27 East; Township 28 South, Range 28 East; and Township 32 South, Range 28 East. This included the townsite of Bakersfield and that territory south of Kern lake.

(Continued Tomorrow)