



The New Spanishtown Roadhouse.

History book

They called it La Placita

By TOM PATTERSON

Before there was Riverside, there was Spanishtown, of which very little recognizable evidence remains.

The people who originally lived there called it La Placita, the little place. Spanishtown, of course, is a gringo term although it may already have been in use when the founders of Riverside came along in 1870.

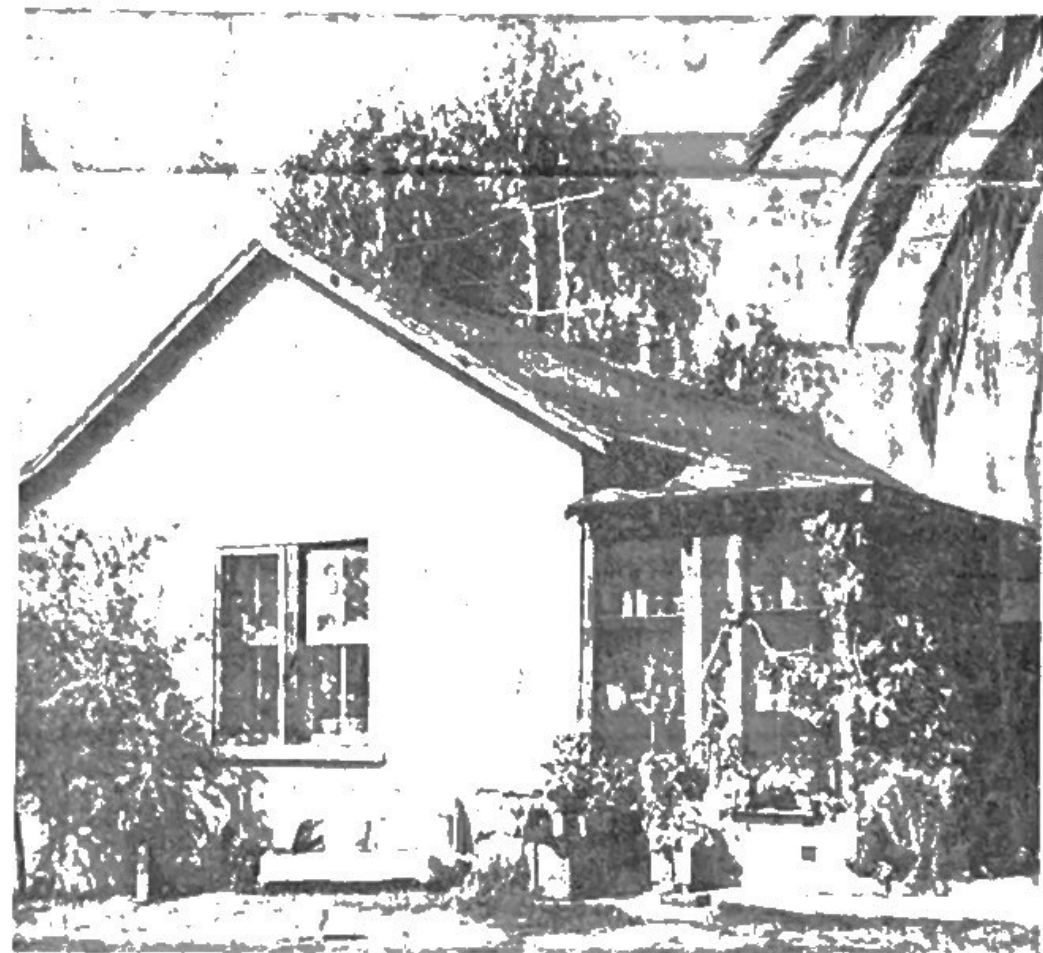
Spanishtown was a group of small farms and adobe homes along what is now north Orange — far up against the hills north of Center and close to the river. It was formed by some of the Spanish-descended trader families who came with Lorenzo Trujillo in 1845, before the Mexican War, on an invitation to start a community on the Rancho San Bernardino. They did live on that rancho for a time, near present Colton, then moved down the stream to a tract given to them by Juan Bandini of the Rancho Jurupa.

THEY STARTED the settlements of Agua Mansa on the west bank and La Placita on the east bank, but when Agua Mansa was wiped out and its land damaged by the 1862 flood, more of them moved to La Placita.

A pioneer of 1870 wrote home to the East of the Spanishtown adobe houses that scarcely rose above the height of the dunes. But there seems to be no living memory of sand dunes there.

The accompanying pictures show two visible remains of Spanishtown. Be careful which you assume to be the older.

THE RUNDOWN one, facing Orange just north of Center, was built shortly before 1900, although it was supposed to have been built from adobes taken from an older building at Center and La Cadena. It is probably



The Lorenzo Trujillo House

the newest of all the Spanishtown adobes. It became a cantina, with Spanish-Mexican atmosphere, to which Riversiders used to venture during prohibition days. It was a pool hall and occasionally a dance hall.

One theory was that it could take liberties with the prohibition amendment because it was just over the line in bad old San Bernardino County. Actually it is barely on this side, and another adobe just beyond was the dispensing point of alcohol.

Being new among the Spanishtown buildings, it has modish ceilings of pressed sheet iron. Now it houses only hay. Birds flit in and out.

IMMEDIATELY behind it, also with an Orange

Street number, is what appears to be a well-kept stucco bungalow. The front portion of it is a genuine old Spanishtown adobe — one of the oldest, and probably a century old at the least.

Lorenzo Trujillo owned it and lived in it and probably built it. It was owned by his descendants or closely related families until recent years. Ted Trujillo, owner of Binford Furniture Co., and his sister, Mrs. Olive Vlahovich, were born there.

The building has been modernized by Mr. and Mrs. Robert G. Snyder, who own and occupy it.

THERE WAS a Spanishtown school, for which county records go back to 1900. The building is gone, but it was about 100 feet south

of Center and east of Orange. The district was called Trujillo District. It went out of existence in 1926.

The home-made irrigation system of Spanishtown was called the Trujillo Ditch, and its upper portion, which ran around the base of the hills, was later used by the Riverside Water Co. lower canal, dug in 1876. Trujillo Ditch then became a lateral from the lower canal.

The original upper canal, dug in 1870-71, traversed the same hill slopes, 30 feet higher. The remains of both canals are still plainly to be seen.

IN RIVERSIDE directories the names of original Agua Mansa and La Placita families still appear. On the east or La Placita side of the river there were the Trujillo, Baca, Pena, Atencio, Romos, Espinosa, Archuleta and Garcia families. On the Agua Mansa side were the Bustamente, Martinez, Aciana, Alvarado, Jensen, Jaegar, Woods, Aguayos, Lujan and Salazar families. Those with non-Spanish names came not with the Trujillo group, but lived on part of the Bandini land on the west side of the river, acquired from Louis Rubidoux.

The La Placita people were creole — descended directly from Spanish, that is, Mexican-American sections of today's Riverside and Colton originated in later migrations, from Mexico. Old La Placitans have made acquaintances in all parts of town. While they no longer have a locality, they retain an identity.

