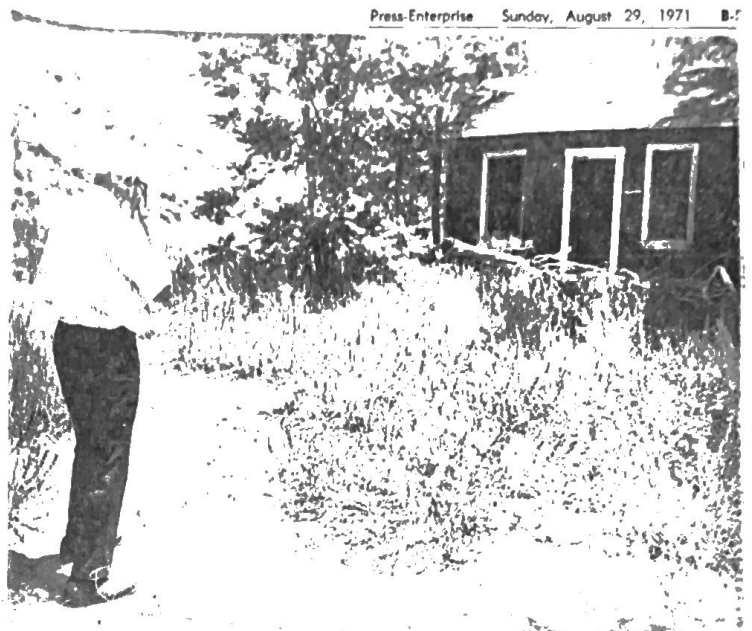




This site, along the dirt road extension of north Orange Street beyond Center Street, was the site of San Bernardino County's La Loma School, where

Salvador Alvarado (here) started his formal education in 1894.



Salvador Alvarado snaps his shutter at an abandoned house, the home of Esquipula Garcia in the

1880s and of his Uncle Pedro Garcia in the early 1900s.

Elderly artist recalls when La Placita was alive

By TOM PATTERSON

"It wasn't like this at all," protested Salvador Alvarado, 83 years old and returning to La Placita, where he was born and where he lived until about 1905.

His remark was prompted by the scene around a tumbled-down wooden house along the dirt road that extends north of Orange Street — his Uncle Pete's house.

But he wasn't referring to the sagging roof or falling plaster.

"Everything around here," he continued, "was so beautiful and green. There was water running in the ditches, and the fields out there were green too."

That was the big difference.

NOW LA PLACITA is no community at all. Even the Antoine Pellissier dairy, whose barn replaced the adobe house where Alvarado was born, is an ancient-looking collection of buildings and sheds. The barn houses a riding stable.

"And that was the Pellissier winery," Alvarado said, pointing to one of another cluster of buildings and sheds, "or part of it. The winery was pretty big."

Today's Riverside antiquarians, intrigued by the story of the vanished Mexican era towns of La Placita and Agua Mansa, have read of them as idyllic little villages, with small homes, gardens and fields.

The Trujillo Adobe of La Placita, near north Orange and Center streets, has been identified. The original Riverside canals, upper and lower, once ran along the hills above La Placita incorporating the earlier Trujillo ditch. Since 1886, newer canals from higher intakes have flowed east of the hills. Since 1914 those above La Placita have been abandoned — dry and unlined.

IN THE YEARS since 1905 the Pellissier winery, vineyards, pastures and dairy took over the area, irrigating from wells.

Then the city of Riverside bought the land for the underlying water right. The community had already died.

Now the location itself dried. The river-bottom has been green before the community started in the 1840s during the Mexican era. Now upstream dams, intakes and wells had taken the water from the stream and lowered the underground water level.

"There were cottonwood trees along the canal," said Alvarado. Now there are whitened stumps and trunks of cottonwoods.

"Uncle Pete had a one-inch water right. It flowed all the time. His pipeline came out of the upper canal, and came down this way.

"He had a beautiful walnut tree overhanging the house."

HERE THE OBSERVER might suspect that the old gentleman was letting his chagrin over the change interfere with his ability to see what remained. Despite dryness all around, there is still a green walnut tree overhanging Uncle Pete's house, with green puts on it. There are also other shade trees, without fruit.

Their green and healthy look makes it clear that they are consuming some of the underground water which was the city's reason for buying and holding the property.

But Alvarado doesn't believe these particular trees were present in his youth, and they aren't enough to alter the total impression of dryness all around.

When he moved in the 1905 era, Alvarado was about 18.

He was an expert budder of citrus trees and found employment in Ontario.

HE BOUGHT himself a two-story house, he married, raised children, lived a better life. Eventually he retired and devoted himself in part to painting — pictures of people, houses, hills, pastures.

His English is the meticulously correct kind of English typically spoken by educated non-Anglo people who endow their speech with a touch of their original languages. (He has an espannish accent.)

HE SPEAKS in the language of gentility, although his education beyond elementary school was self-education.

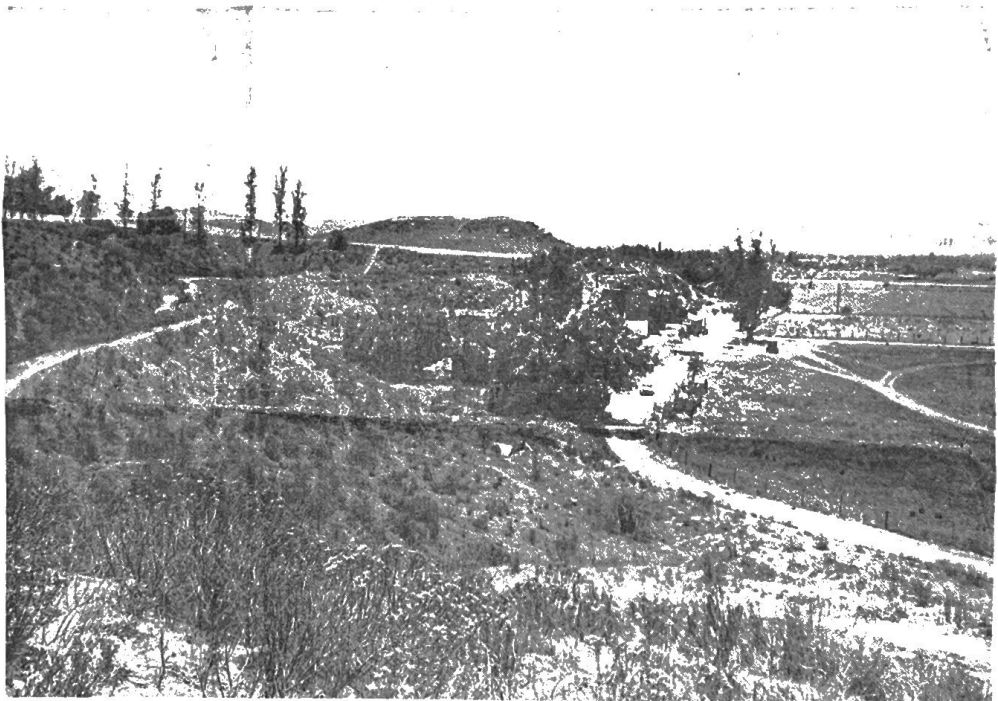
He has been living for some years in Alta Loma, close to the foot of Mt. Cucamonga.

A collection of his paintings is currently on display at the San Bernardino County Museum in Bloomington, off Cedar Avenue near its interchange with the San Bernardino Freeway.

Talking with him while driving through the dry roadways of old La Placita and Agua Mansa brought out much about who lived where, and what went on while the two communities of the Mexican era still lived.

Early Riverside clashed with the La Placitans, who had been using the Riverside area and government land to the east and south as grazing land. Riverside won, but towns like La Placita don't die as a result of one setback.

"WHAT HAPPENED," explained



The original Riverside canal, which was replaced farther east in 1886 and abandoned in 1914, contours the La Loma Hills above Uncle

Pete's house (among trees). It passes the Pellissier Dairy buildings, which replaced Salvador Alvarado's birthplace adobe.

Alvarado, "was that people just left gradually. The old people died off. The younger ones left for better jobs elsewhere as I did.

"Some of them worked in mining, especially in the Gavilan district near Perris. There are many descendants of La Placita and Agua Mansa today, all up and down California and elsewhere."

He confirmed, from what he heard in his youth from elders, that the apparent kilns dug into the Agua river bluff south of the Main Street crossing of the river were indeed kilns — used for burning limestone to obtain material for whitewash.

Dr. Gerald Smith of the San Bernardino County Museum had conjectured as much, from appearances.

The kilns have now been all but obliterated by the caving of the bluff.

Along Agua Mansa Road, he pointed out the houses of the Woods, and of others. Mr. Woods raised vegetables and sold them out in the mining area. He was one of several Anglos who married into the Spanish speaking community and joined it.

Over there, above the bluff, lived Senor Miguel Bustamente, justice of the peace of San Salvador Township. And so on.

THERE ARE SEVERAL explanations as to the location of the particular "gentle water" which accounts for the name of Agua Mansa. Alvarado believes it was a year-round swamp, long since dried up, in the river bottom below the cemetery — which is about all that remains visible of old Angua Mansa.

It has been assumed that the Trujillo adobe, on north Orange Street just beyond Center, was the last remaining house of La Placita. It has been marked by the County Historical Commission as a "Point of Historical Interest."

In Alvarado's time it was owned by Juan Trujillo, probably a grandson of the original Lorenzo.

"His mother," said Alvarado,

"lived in an adobe farther out toward the river."

ALVARADO BELIEVES the present adobe was built after the 1882 flood, which contemporary reporters said destroyed every house in the community. Still, he doesn't believe the flood reached the site of the existing adobe. It came 25 years before he was born, but he understands that "The houses were farther out toward the river then."

Among other sites, Alvarado pointed out the location of La Loma School.

"It was a new school when I started in 1894," he said. "I remember the smell of the wet plaster."

Its location, he says, was in another cove in the hills — where a present small rodeo corral is located.

The year fits well with other known facts. Riverside County was formed in 1893, separating most of La Placita from Riverside by the new county line.

The Trujillo school, started in 1875, was south of the county line — south of Center Street and east of Orange Street. Alvarado pointed out the spot — "beside that big pepper tree, the one that's dead and blackened." It operated as a Riverside County district until it was annexed by the Riverside district in the 1920s.

THE ORIGINAL Bandini Donation of the early 1840s, on which La Placita and Agua Mansa were started, had its southern boundary a little north of Center Street — along the line of Highgrove's Main Street if it were extended. But the original location of the Trujillo School indicated that the business and town part of the community was developing around Orange and Center Streets. Many homes were south of the line.

A slaughter house and the Trujillo saloon of 1900 were in that vicinity.

Maps of the late 1890s identify this area specifically as "la placita" or little plaza, notwithstanding court testimony back in the 1880s that the original

homes of the Trujillos before the 1862 flood were about 1,000 yards above the line — which would be in the vicinity of the Pellissier dairy and winery buildings and Uncle Pete's still-standing home.

IN POINTING out Uncle Pete's house, Alvarado made another disclosure — that not every La Placita home of the 1890s was adobe and the Trujillo adobe isn't the only La Placita home still standing.

William H. Hall's "Irrigation in Southern California" names the Garcia Flume on the original Riverside canal, the description enables current historians to identify its foundations in the ravine behind the house.

Uncle Pete, or Pedro, Alvarado said, was the son of Esquipula Garcia. He would have been the owner when Hall in 1888 wrote of the Garcia Flume.

"All this," said Alvarado, pointing to an old kitchen sink, "was put in later. Uncle Pete didn't have any sink or any other plumbing. And this plaster that's all broken — it was later too. This is the same house all right, but it didn't have any plaster inside."

IN THE EARLY years of Riverside, La Placitans were resentful when the new neighbors took the grazing lands they had used without owing. They even raided Riverside corrals to release horses which Riversiders had impounded for grazing on Riverside property.

But old La Placitans grew older. Property laws, time and increasing Anglo population wore them down. Younger La Placitans moved. Alvarado prospered more than did his parents. He lives in comfortable retirement.

Present-day Mexican-Americans who feel they are slighted in today's world could find kindred spirits in the original La Placitans. The resented the invading Yankee horde, which came with the advantage of Yankee language, Yankee law and a sense of manifest destiny.

But Alvarado is between these generations. Without pointing the finger at any particular current events, or individuals or movements, he said: "I don't like riots."

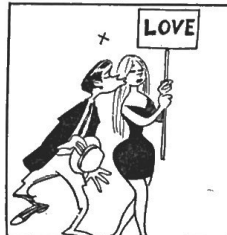
He didn't care to discuss the subject further.

FARRISWHEEL



"How about throwing a 1,000-ducat-a-plate dinner for me?"

BOY AND GIRL



BY ROUSON

