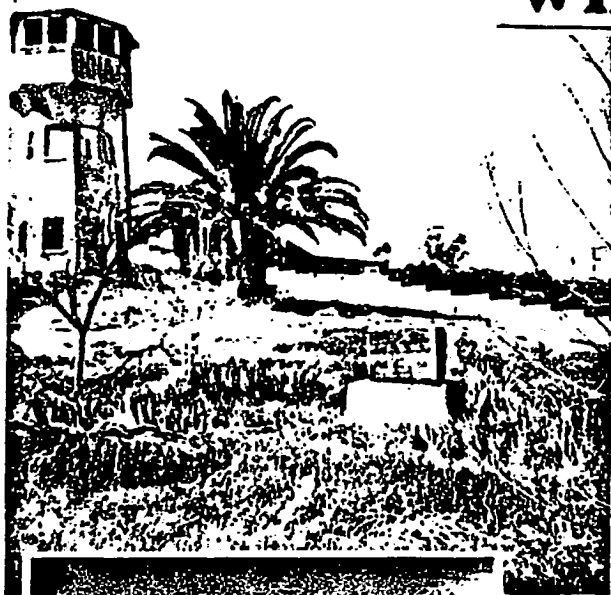


WHERE WAS POLITANA?

By Arda M. Haenszel



(Top) De Siena Springs in 1971.
Note monument at right front.
(Below) Closeup of monument.

THE location of Politana has been the subject of a controversy among historians over many years. It has a long and interesting history. But no one really knows where it was. Perhaps it was at several different places within an area, parts of which were occupied at different times by different residents.

The first of these were probably local Indians. There is said to have been a prehistoric Indian rancheria on the ridge which extends from the present Valley College to Bunker Hill, possibly at or near De Siena Springs, though no archaeological investigation has ever established that fact. Some historians, such as Father Caballeria and G. Hazen Shinn, maintained that the naming of the San Bernardino Valley took place there in 1810 at a site later called Politana. On that occasion a mass was conducted for the Guachama Indians by Father Dumetz of San Gabriel Mission. So sure were they of the location that a part of the San Bernardino Centennial Celebration took place at the De Siena Springs site at the south end of K Street, and a granite monument was dedicated by Bishop Conaty. It was intended to become the cornerstone for a museum building, for which the land had been donated, and a Board of Trustees appointed. But for some reason these plans were never carried out, and the stone remained in the form of a monument until recent years, when the land was sold. The inscribed stone was held in storage for a while, then mounted by the Native Sons in a monument beside Colton Avenue.

However, the eminent historian George Beattie's research convinced him that the Guachama Indians' rancheria was not at Politana but at a site along the present Mission Road, where the headquarters of the mission rancho was established in 1820. He maintained that this was the site of the 1810 mass and naming. He found convincing evidence that the Guachama Rancheria was there in 1819, when work on the Zanja was begun.

The controversy may never be settled conclusively, but reconsideration by more recent historians indicates a possible compromise. The Indians were there at Guachama in 1819, all right, but it is possible that they were at Politana in 1810, when the mass was said and that they moved some time in the intervening years. A severe earthquake struck in 1812, making major alterations in the activity of hot springs in the valley, including De Siena and Urbita. The Indians reacted with superstitious fear, and even attacked one of the Padres, Father Estenaga. A move away from the springs may have been a result. It must also be noted that there were no springs or natural sources of food to attract the Indians at the Guachama site, but the good soil and the future prospects of irrigation promised by the mission fathers may have induced the Indian settlement there after the quake. However, if the reaction of the hot springs was indeed a factor, then the Politana of this period might even have been Urbita Springs, where a large Indian village is known to have existed, rather than at De Siena.

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