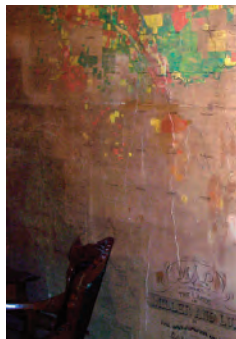


Our History and Culture

Every town has its story of the people and events that made it what it is today, and Los Banos is no exception. It was the early 1800's when sailors from Portugal and Spain arrived in Monterey and brought their sheep over the mountains to the grassy plains of the Central Valley. It was also during this time that a Franciscan priest named Padre Arroyo would journey from the mission in San Juan Bautista to the clear pools along Los Banos Creek. That is how it started for Los Banos, but the real story of our community comes with the arrival of a German immigrant in the mid 1800's named Henry Miller.

Story has it that Miller arrived in San Francisco in 1850, at the age of 22, with just \$6.00 to his name. He immediately began working as a butcher. By 1853 he had managed to save enough money to buy the first herd of American cattle ever driven into San Francisco. And thus began his move into the cattle business. Since cattle needed land to graze on, Miller began purchasing land with his partner Charles Lux, another German immigrant.



Miller's first land purchase was 8,830 acres of the Santa Rita Ranch for \$10,400. Forty years after he first arrived in San Francisco it is reported that he owned over 1,400,000 acres with controlling grazing rights to ten times that amount. A large map is on display at the Milliken Museum that shows his extensive land holdings. When he died in 1916 he left an estate that clearly showed he was a multi-millionaire at a time when that was a rarity. It is estimated that he once owned a million head of cattle- which

is why he is known as the "Cattle King"- and a hundred thousand sheep.

Also noteworthy is his genius with reclamation and irrigation projects. He realized early on that water was more valuable than gold and he would purchase naturally irrigated land along the state's waterways. Even more amazing is the impact he made when, in 1871, he built thousands of miles of irrigation ditches and levees, three canals with a total length of some 190 miles and a dam across the San Joaquin River that spanned 350 feet.



In 1860 he married Sarah Wilmarth Sheldon and they had 3 children- two daughters and a son.

In 1890 Miller founded the town of Los Banos and went on to plant hundreds of shade trees and improve the streets. He also built several brick buildings, which are still standing in the downtown area, to house his banks, store and hotel. Canal Farm, now the home of Espana's Restaurant on Pacheco Blvd., was Miller's headquarters and you can see many old photos on the wall from earlier years.

Each year Miller would host a picnic for the town and later it evolved into the May Day Spring Fair. Some of the biggest parades in the State could be found here in Los Banos and for a long time there were 3 parades associated with the May Day Fair. This fair continues today as the County Fair and runs 5 days and includes a large parade on Saturday. The start date changes each year but it always ends on the first Sunday in May.

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