

2010 First Place & Perpetual Trophy

Dyer Egg Ranch - Jordan Mani, Flying Hills School

All of my life I have been hearing about the egg ranch that my granny lived on when she moved to California in 1957. My Granny grew up in Illinois and her name was Patricia Louise Ritchey. She came to visit her sister and never moved back to her family home in Illinois. Her sister's name was Alvira Ritchey Williams. We call her Aunt Mike and she lived with her husband, David Williams and their four daughters on an egg ranch in El Cajon, California. David Williams was a health and science teacher at El Cajon High School. Some El Cajon High School students kept animals at the egg ranch. When El Cajon veterinarian Kibbee was in high school, he kept animals at the ranch too.

My Granny and her sister loved all the animals on the ranch and there were tons of them. There were cows, hens, roosters, ducks, dogs, and cats. The cats kept the mice out of the house and out of the animals' food. The egg ranch was called Dyer Egg Ranch. It was located at 1017 S. Mollison Ave, in El Cajon, California. They sold eggs to Safeway Stores. The ranch had a little egg room. This is where the eggs were cleaned, graded, candled, boxed, and stored. It was 90% underground and made of rock and clay. It was very cool even though it was not refrigerated. The egg room is not there anymore. Feed for the chickens was stored in a large silo.

The egg ranch is now the home of the German American Society of San Diego. When Anza School was built on part of the land in 1960, the ranch was moved to Descanso. It is now called the Japatul Valley Old Dyer Egg Ranch. Don Dyer now owns the egg ranch. He is a teacher at El Capitan High School.

I enjoyed learning about the egg ranch and about my family living there. I loved learning about the history of family and about the history of the Dyer Egg Ranch.

2010 Second Place

River of Tears - Siena Welch, Rancho San Diego School

My name is Josephine "Sister" Romero. My people lived on the El Capitan Reservation east of what is now called El Cajon. We are descendants of the Kumeyaay.

My parents told me that before I was born, my people had lots of water and planted most of their food. They could fish in the river and hunt the animals that lived nearby.

In the late 1800's, things began to change. The non-Indian population in El Cajon and San Diego grew and they needed more and more water. Hundreds of men with horses and mules came to our lands to build the flume. It was a tall structure made of redwood. The flume took the water from our valley to El Cajon and San Diego. They used our water for farming and drinking. After this there was a lot less water in the valley for us to use.

Because there was less water in our river valley, we had less food and had to work harder to find the water we needed. People in my village wondered what those men who built the flume were doing with the water. Although there was less water we found ways to store water and we were happy.

In 1932, when I was 4 years old, my village had to pack up and move. We moved because the city of San Diego planned to flood our valley to gather more water. I will never forget the day my family left our home on the Capitan Grande Reservation. I woke up that morning and saw my family packing up everything we owned. I asked what was going on and my sister cried, "We are moving." I asked why and my mom answered, "The government is building a dam and flooding the valley to store water for El Cajon and San Diego." I finally understood why tribe member, Ramon Cuero Ames, had been digging up graves in the graveyard and putting them in wagons. He was packing our ancestors for the move.

For us kids parts of the move were fun and exciting. We went on winding roads that looked like snakes. At the same time it was sad, because we knew we would never come back to our homes. The adults were very sad about the move, because they wanted to stay on the land they were born on. They also didn't want to be separated from friends and family. Some families were sent to the Barona Valley and others to the Viejas Valley miles away.

Some called the relocation the "River of Tears", a title they got from the Cherokee relocation named the "Trail of Tears". |

We were promised new homes and water on our new land by the government. When we got to the Barona Valley, there were no homes just barns and tents. We unpacked in a barn to sleep. In the cold hard winter lots of our people died because they had no food or water and only poor shelter. That was a tough time for our tribe, but we recovered. Many years later I became a tribal leader to help our tribe. We got the right to have gaming on our reservation, which gave us the money to take care of ourselves again and support others in the non-Indian communities around us.

El Cajon and San Diego never could have become what they are today without the water from our lands. It is important that people remember how much the Kumeyaay sacrificed for El Cajon and San Diego to grow.

2010 Virginia Stead Award

The History of the Sycuan Band of the Kumeyaay Nation in El Cajon, Jasso De Matteo, Fuerte School

The Sycuan Band of the Kumeyaay Nation has lived in the El Cajon area for about 12,000 years. That's before the pyramids were built in Egypt. The Sycuan Indians are one of the thirteen Kumeyaay Bands in the El Cajon area was San Dieguito Paleo Indians. For thousands of years, the Kumeyaay lived happily and prospered in the moderate climates of San Diego County. Their territory ranged East to El Centro, North to Escondido, and South to Baja California. They were good hunters and gatherers. They hunted rabbit, wood rats, quail, and other birds. The Sycuan Indians also hunted bigger animals such as deer, antelope, and mountain sheep. Acorns were an important part of their diet. They also ate seafood. The Sycuan Indians gathered plants for food and medicine.

The Sycuan Indians lived in villages. A village was a group of family houses scattered out from each other. They were mostly linked by kinship. Their houses were round and supported by tree trunks. Sycuan Indians living in mountain areas built triangular houses covered with bark. This was so the cold would not go through. They liked basket weaving, pottery making, trading, music, dance, songs, games gambling, and social and religious events. The Kumeyaay Indians were very religious people. The village Shaman was the mediator between the spiritual world and the people. The Shaman was a healer, priest, spiritual leader, and he officiated at the important religious rites. The spiritual world was very important to them. Their ancestors were a big part of that. The Kumeyaay used songs to communicate their spiritual and social beliefs.

The Sycuan Indians lived peacefully until the Spanish arrived in San Diego County. The Spanish destroyed their crops. They also took their land and displaced the Sycuan Indians. The Spanish brought new diseases that killed a lot of the Indians. They have overcome many hardships. Now they own hotels, golf courses, and casinos. Their sovereignty and land is now protected by the government.

Next time you go to the Mission Trails, Singing Hills, or Dehesa Valley, I hope you will think about who was there before you.

2010 Fred & Nettie Kersten Award, Judges Award

My Family, Zach Pernicano

My essay is about how my family has lived in El Cajon since 1951 and has the oldest restaurant that has been open in El Cajon since 1952. In 1946 my great-grandparents, George and Isabelle Pernicano, came to San Diego when people here didn't know what pizza was. They also bought a ranch in El Cajon on Graves Avenue in 1951 that they still live in today. I interviewed my great-grandmother and my grandfather to learn about my family's place in El Cajon history.

In 1952 the Pernicano's restaurant was opened on Main Street in El Cajon. In 1952 El Cajon was very rural and had lots of farms and horses. The restaurant had hitching posts outside for patrons who came to get food. For the first year they gave away pizza until people learned what it was. The nearest home was about a mile away and the closest business was on 2nd Street. There was also a theater and ballroom that were in the area. In 1972, when my grandfather Gary took over the restaurant, El Cajon had really improved. There was a highway coming through and the hospital was right down the road. Business for my grandpa was at its best from 1972 to 1990. These days business is slower due to the recession.

The ranch that my great-grandparents live on has changed a lot since they bought it in 1951. In 1951 the area was very rural. It is by Rattlesnake Mountain. They had over 150 head of cattle. They also raised horses, pigs, chickens and goats. Some of the beef and pork they raised went to the restaurant. They also had pomegranates, apricots, pecans and eggs. They lived by Gillespie Field where the Marines and Navy did training for the war. In 1963, when Highway 67 was made my great-grandparents had to sell some of their land so the highway could go through.

My family has now lived and had the restaurant in El Cajon for almost 60 years. El Cajon has changed a lot over the years but it is still a great place to live and work. My family's restaurant is a landmark in El Cajon and I hope to keep it open for a long time. I am proud of my great-grandparents for what they have accomplished.

2010 Third Place Award

Major Levi Chase, Carter Boucek, Vista Grande Sch.

The first well-known legal case in El Cajon was handled by a lawyer named Major Levi Chase. He was called Major because he was in the Civil War.

Mr. Lankershim hired Major Levi Chase, a San Francisco attorney, because there was a fight about who owned the El Cajon land he had bought. Mr. Lankershim, a San Francisco businessman, bought a big tract of El Cajon Valley land from Jacob Knapp. The problem was that Jacob Knapp bought the land from a Mexican family who got it from the Mexican Government. The American government did not agree the Mexican government had the right to give the land away. The case went on for seven years and went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. In the end, Mr. Lankershim got to keep his land.

Mr. Lankershim paid Major Chase by giving him over 4,000 acres of his land. This land was near Avocado Street and Chase, close to where I live. Part of the land in dispute was called El Cajon Rancho. The original El Cajon Rancho would have included modern day Lakeside, Santee, El Cajon, Bostonia, Johnstown, Glenview, and part of Grossmont. Major Chase used his land to build a house and a ranch. He became a farmer and tried new ways of growing fruit trees, including apples, plums, oranges, lemons, and peaches. On flat land he planted grain fields using wells and a steam-driven pump to water them. He used deep plowing and gang plows for his extra large plantings of corn and barley. These were different methods than the other ranchers used. Chase Ranch became known as a showplace. Years later Major Chase even spoke at the County Horticultural Society and praised inland fruit growers and predicted their future success.

In the early days of El Cajon there were not very many lawyers. Not very much is written about the lawyers or laws during that time. Today there are hundreds of lawyers practicing in El Cajon, including both of my parents.