

A Brief History of San Fernando

I live in Canoga Park, a neighborhood in San Fernando Valley located in LA. Although I live in here, I consider the entire valley collectively as my neighborhood because most of the times I have to commute to different cities within the “valley” to find different things and places. Furthermore, after having done some research on Canoga Park, I found that a lot of its history of the cities in the valley is intertwined with the valley itself. Therefore, I chose to write about both the San Fernando Valley and Canoga Park.



Figure 1.1 San Fernando Valley viewed as viewed from a map and an overlook (Wikipedia)

Interestingly, San Fernando used to be known as “*El Valle de Santa Catalina de Bononia de los Encinos*” (Los Encinos SHP 2021)². In 1769, a group of Spanish expeditioners discovered the area and gave it the aforementioned name. After digging a little bit deeper, I found out that it means The Valley of St. Catherine of Bononia of the Oaks. At this point I got curious as to why Spanish voyagers would name a place after a person and who is St. Catherine? However, given my limited knowledge of Catholicism and Christianity, I was unable to pin-point who St. Catherine was as I found multiple people named St. Catherine. I’m assuming that it was named because Saint Catherine who settled in San Fernando established her missionaries, but the

million-dollar question is which Catherine? Is she from Banonia, Bologna, or Alexandria? Did the Los Encinos SHP website wrongly name St. Catherina's country of origin? Also, why did the Spanish rename the place to San Fernando? These are some questions that I'd like to explore further.

Now let's focus our attention on Canoga Park for a bit. Although I have lived here for the past 6 years now, I never found anything noteworthy about it. However, as I was researching about it, I came across some interesting facts. For example, the original inhabitants of present-day Canoga Park were Native Americans (Wikipedia). Furthermore, it's believed that Native American people have inhabited the city for almost 8000 years. This was surprising to me because I haven't seen many people of Native American descent around the neighborhood despite being here for almost 6 years. This just goes to show how history has constantly done injustice to Native American people to the point where they are no longer the majority landowners even in the areas where they have lived for more than thousands of years which ties into the theme of our class.



Figure 1.2 Owensmouth after it was founded in 1912 (Canoga Park at 100)

Another interesting fact about Canoga Park is that it was founded as a city named Owensmouth in 1912 when it was still a farmland. At the time, it was producing wheat, sugar, beets and eventually citrus, walnuts, chickens and eggs (Canoga Park: A history). During its first few years, it actually struggled quite a bit despite the big hopes of becoming a major city. For instance, it didn't receive any electricity until first year after its inception. To make things worse, it didn't have natural gas for years after its inception. By its fourth year, it only had 200 residents. Even though it was a farmland, it lacked critical water infrastructure. Eventually, it was annexed by Los Angeles so that it could take advantage of the LA aqueduct (Canoga Park at 100). Now you might wonder when and why was it named to Canoga Park?

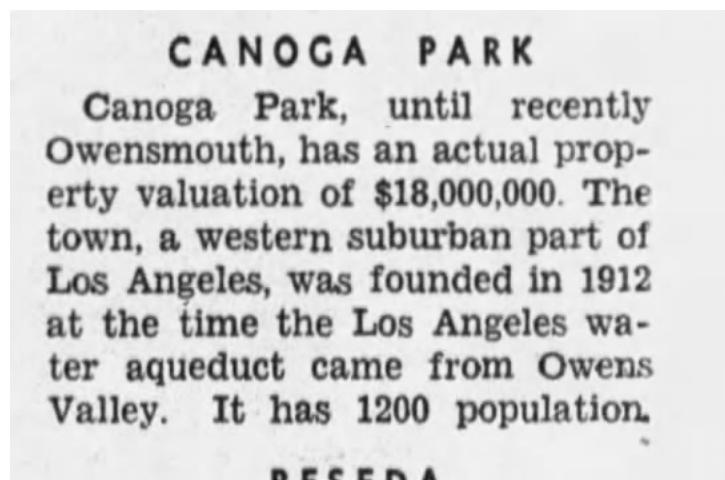


Figure 1.3 Canoga Park 1931

Firstly, it was renamed to Canoga Park because Owensmouth suggested that it was in Owens Valley which was quite far away from the critical infrastructure at the time. Secondly, to differentiate itself from Canoga New York, it was suggested to add the word park. Finally, in 1931, it was officially renamed to Canoga Park. In addition to that, the community college I transferred from, Los Angeles Pierce College, was built in 1941 in Canoga Park.



Figure 1.4 Old Canoga Park vs Modern Day Canoga Park

As you see Canoga Park has change has changed quite drastically over the years. However, it still struggles to be regarded as a good neighborhood as compared to its neighboring cities like Woodland Hills, West hills, etc. This bad image is fueled by things like pawn shops, porno places, aging subdivisions, and a crime ridden barrio (Klein 2019). On the contrary, I have had a pleasant experience living here. For example, I never witnessed any serious crime or shooting happening. Furthermore, there is a strip club a block from my house. Frankly, it has never bothered me. If you dislike the place, then simply don't go there. I do agree that this place is old; however, when I see this place from an immigrant perspective, this place is a heck of a lot better than where I was living in India. I think that these are just silly reasons to bash a neighborhood. I think the real reason behind this might be that Canoga Park has higher percentage of population living below poverty level compared to its neighbors. As a matter of fact, I have seen an influx of homeless people lately. On the other hand, it's very rare to spot homeless people compared in the neighboring cities like Woodland Hills or West Hills. This is mostly an observation around where I live rather than based on rigorous research.



Figure 1.5 Mission San Fernando Rey (Spanish Missionary)

Now let's focus our attention to San Fernando Valley. If we go further back in time even before 1912, you'd find that "San Fernando Valley" was actually was acquired by the Spanish Missionaries as a tribute to King Ferdinand III of Spain and that they renamed it. One of these missionaries was Mission San Fernando Rey de Espa~a. It was established in 1797 on Rancho Encino. It is the 17th of the California missions established by Fray Fermin Francisco de Lasuen. The missionary was built and ran by Native American workers and it quickly became one of the most prosperous in California, producing abundant harvests and goods. The mix of agrarian and industrial life at this early stage in the Valley's history sets a precedent for the future economy of the Valley as a pastoral region with some areas of industry (San Fernando Valley Timeline). Below are the images of what the mission looks like today.



Figure 1.6 Modern Day San Fernando Mission Rey de Espana

This is modern day San Fernando Mission. If we compare it to Figure 1.5, you can tell that it has come a long way from its humble beginnings in 1797. I must say that originally the purpose of the mission was to convert Native Americans into “good Christians.” However, after Mexico won independence from Spain, Mexico government redistributes the land to the Native Americans and you no longer had to be converted in order to be in the modern day San Fernando Valley. Again, it’s quite saddening to see that even though most of the land grants were given to the Native American people to the modern-day San Fernando Valley, they are not the majority here anymore.

Works Cited

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