

HISTORY OF MONTEBELLO

The colorful and romantic history of Montebello dates back to the days of the Franciscan Missionaries, Fathers Angel Somera and Pedro Cambon, who, on September 9, 1771, established the original San Gabriel Mission near where San Gabriel Boulevard now crosses the Rio Hondo River.

The Mission was the third in a chain of 21 to be established under the direction of Father Junipero Serra. The Mission managed to flourish under hardships, but heavy rains eventually drove the founding fathers to their permanent location in San Gabriel in 1776.

The City of Montebello originally consisted of parts of Rancho San Antonio, Rancho La Merced, and Rancho Paso de Bartolo. Here on the banks of the Rio Hondo, the last armed conflict was staged with Mexico for possession of California at the Battle of the Rio San Gabriel on January 8, 1847. The old Juan Matias Sanchez Adobe remains standing just north of the intersection of La Merced and Lincoln Avenue, the heart of the old La Merced Rancho. The old adobe has just recently been restored to its original splendor.

Following the Civil War, an Italian by the name of Alessandro Repetto built his ranch house on the hill overlooking his land, about a half-mile north of where Garfield Avenue crosses the Pomona Freeway. Repetto never married and, when he died in 1885, his brother Antonio sold his inheritance to Harris Newmark, Kaspar Cohn, John A. Bicknell, Stephen M. White, and I.W. Hellman, a group of business men well known in Los Angeles financial circles, for \$60,000, about \$12 per acre.

It was out of the Newmark and Cohn shares of the purchase, consisting of 1,200 acres, that Montebello had its beginning in May 1899. The original town site of forty acres was bounded by First Street on the east, Fifth Street on the west, Cleveland on the north, and Los Angeles Avenue on the south. It was originally given the name of Newmark, after the Newmark family. The remainder of the tract was divided into five-acre plots. This area was named Montebello, meaning beautiful hills in Italian, at the suggestion of a gentleman named William Mulholland. It was Mulholland who developed our water system, which was incorporated as the Montebello Land and Water Company in 1900.

Originally an agricultural community, Montebello boasted having the ideal climate, productive soil, and an abundance of water. From the turn of the century and through the 1920's, the area was famed for its production of flowers, vegetables, berries, and fruits. In 1912 the Montebello Woman's Club sponsored Montebello's first flower show in the high school auditorium.

The discovery of oil by Standard Oil Company on the Anita Baldwin property in 1917 brought about a revolutionary change to Montebello. The agricultural hills soon became a major contributor to oil production. By 1920, Montebello oil fields were producing one-eighth of our state's crude oil. On October 16, 1920, Montebello was incorporated as the 35th of the present cities in Los Angeles County.

