

Phil Ramuno's Now 7 minute History of the Chesebro Meadow

For 8000 years Chumash Indians enjoyed the creeks, springs and acorns from the land located on the meadow located right across the street and behind the first dozen houses on Chesebro Road. It was an oak savannah and not a meadow then.

1790s Franciscans Friars put a road, now Agoura Road, through to connect the San Fernando Mission with the Ventura Mission.

Early 1800s Spanish Land Grants gave ownership of this neighborhood land to Espiritu, the daughter of the Chumash chief of the Humaliwu village. Her name is still on my deed. She was taken as a servant/wife by Basque shepherd Miquel Leonis. They kept the land by virtue of the 1862 Homestead Act. Their land was eventually broken up into several sheep and cattle ranches...Jordan (Of Fibber Magee and Molly radio fame), Agoure and Morrison who owned the Chesebro meadow.

1901 George Lewis from Chatsworth bought the ranch where we are standing just west of the meadow.

In the 1920s Lewis sold to the Colodny Brothers, who broke it up into these lots for up to \$800/acre. One of the brothers lived in the first house on this street...the one Steve and Katy Rischoff now inhabit. The Colodny's named the area "Independence Acres" and named the two of the streets after the Silent film stars who came to the grand opening, Laura LaPlante and George Chesebro. There was not enough ground water to support many houses. In the 1930s there were only 53 homes. Paramount Pictures bought their ranch across the freeway and started calling the area "Picture City." The meadow remained grazing land for sheep and cattle.

The Picture City Chamber of Commerce was formed at that time and was the only voice of the people with LA County. By 1935, the 53 families living in Picture City got a Post Office and it was named Agoura when the Government misspelled or anglicized Agoure (the local Basque shepherd), the shortest and first of 10 possible names submitted.

By the early 1960's 101 Freeway was built and the Water District formed. This opened a housing boom from the late 60s to the early 80s when thousands of houses were built, but the meadow remained.

In the late 1970s a State Prison was slated for the meadow. This got people organized including the Liberty Canyon young mom Fran Pavley, now our State Senator. The newly formed Las Virgenes Homeowners Association competed with the Chamber of Commerce for a local voice with the county.

In 1978 Encino real estate developer Jerry Oren bought 811 acres, including the meadow and cut down all the giant oaks, at dawn of the day before County Oak tree ordinance went into effect. Residents rushed out of their homes and were able to barricade themselves against that last giant tree that still remains. Pat MacGregor and Ron Troncatty were two of them. Oren later was found guilty of falsifying the appraisal in the transaction of selling the land to the US Parks for the new Cheeseboro Rec Area.

1982 City of Agoura Hills incorporated only 8 square miles after Supervisor Mike Antonovich removed this land and all the other un-built land from the 40 square mile Las Virgenes City proposal. If you think Zev Yaraslofsky was bad for this Meadow, he was no match for Mike. The stranded LA County half of Westlake Village quickly incorporated and Calabasas soon followed. George Coleman

and I were part of that cityhood effort before we moved here. Fran Pavely was our first mayor, but three Chamber of Commerce members were elected to that first Agoura city council. When those three proved to be too interested in development, they were replaced at the second election. There was a strong voice of the residents then which we hope will come back.

In the mid 1980s Potomac Investments wanted to build a city larger than Westlake Village with two PGA golf courses by building a 4 lane road up Chesebro to Jordan ranch. After massive complaints, they agreed that the road would be moved on to the meadow. Everyone was resigned to this "Best Deal" except for one voice, Mary Wiesbrock and the newly formed Save Open Space.

They stopped the project in the early 1990s. The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy took over the the 811 acres but these 72 acres of the meadow were removed from the public land as a last minute deal to allow entertainer Bob Hope to be given his guaranteed payoff by Potomac since he was the then owner of Jordan Ranch. Heschel West purchased the Meadow property in 1997 for \$1.6mil and spent \$2mil on trying to develop a new school.

The 2000 LA County North Area Plan was created to guide un-built land. Jess Thomas and I were part of the Advisory committee for the plan. Under it, the meadow could have remained open space, 8-14 small ranch lots or possibly a small local school but certainly not a regional one as proposed by Heschel.

In 2007 Zev Yaroslavsky pushed Country planning to approve the school against we homeowners and the City's wishes, but at a meeting before the Agoura Hills City Council, the city allowed Zev to bully them to not fight the decision and to accept that the county would pay the bulk of road widening to serve the school. Old Agoura and SOS had to go it alone without city support and spent almost \$200,000 on legal fees along with many years of work by our own lawyer members working for free.

Heschel fell on hard economic times because of Bernie Madoff and the bank held a March 2010 court bankruptcy auction. At Jess's urging, the City of Agoura Hills bid, spending a fraction of the money that their portion of road construction for the Heschel school would have cost them...just over \$630K. The bank goofed and didn't tie together the two loans they foreclosed from Heschel and wanted to force the city to pay for the other loan. They persuaded a judge to put a temporary unprecedented hold on the County Auction land purchase. The City still holds title to the land but foolishly and possibly illegally directed a land speculator to make a deal with the bank and reimburse the city for their purchase in exchange for railroading through a 15 lot/30 home subdivision.

With the leadership of Jess Thomas and Mary Weisbrok from SOS, we are suing the city over this approval. At the same time, with Fran Pavely's great help they have persuaded a coalition of State and County wildlife, land and water agencies to authorize ten times the city's cost to be gifted to the land speculator...if he will walk away from his deal. He foolishly, so far, is trying to play hard ball and force us to spend extra money on the suit thinking he can somehow make us give up on this land and then he could sell it more quickly to a builder.

That's it. This centuries old land still remains a beautiful Meadow thanks to Jess and Mary and the help of a lot of local people who walk their dogs, ride their horses, bicycle, hike and enjoy the wildlife. Its value is even more important now that a remarkable wildlife bridge is planned. This Meadow, will keep that wildlife corridor wide enough to be much more successful.