**THE HISTORY OF CHESEBRO MEADOW**

The history of Chesebro Meadow is a prime example which illustrates the active involvement and perseverance of our Old Agoura Homeowners’ Board. Over many years, the Board and residents have expended much time, effort, and money with respect to dealing with actions by the City Staff, City Council, State and Los Angeles County agencies. Some of those actions were supported in the interest of Agoura Hills and Old Agoura, but there were many instances of strong opposition to some decisions that negatively affected our City and Old Agoura. This activism came from volunteers who were and are enthusiastic, diligent and watchful. In some instances, negative decisions were appealed, or involved litigation and compromise. But for Old Agoura Homeowners’ activism, many undesirable projects, developments and concerns might not have resulted in a positive outcome or benefit for our City and community.

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

1790s Franciscan 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 many of our property deeds. 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 within LA County. By 1935, the 53 families living in Picture City got a Post Office and it was erroneously 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, the 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 recently retired State Senator. The newly formed Las Virgenes Homeowners Federation 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 a 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 National Park Service for the new Cheeseboro Rec Area.

1982, the 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 Colman and Phil Ramuno were part of that cityhood effort before the Colmans 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 even then.

In the mid 1980s Potomac Investments Associates 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 $1.6 million, and spent $2 million trying to develop a new private school.

The 2000 LA County North Area Plan was created to guide un-built land. Jess Thomas and Phil Ramuno 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 County Planning to approve the school against our homeowners and the City’s wishes. At a meeting of the Agoura Hills City Council, the City allowed Zev to “bully” them to not fight the decision, and to accept a list of 75 conditions that the County and City would agree to. Old Agoura residents and Save Open Space “SOS” filed a legal action, spending almost $200,000 in legal fees, along with many years of intense work by our board members and our own lawyer members working without a fee.

The Heschel School fell on hard times, and defaulted on two trust deeds. On March 18, 2010, the City purchased the subject property for $630,000 at a trustee's sale conducted on behalf of U.S. Bank’s foreclosure on a deed of trust.

Thereafter, U.S. Bank disputed whether the subject property remained subject to another deed of trust recorded against the property, and asserted clerical error in the original recording of the deeds of trust. This dispute became the subject of another lawsuit in the Los Angeles County Superior Court. A land speculator and developer subsequently purchased the interest of U.S. Bank and succeeded to the interest of U.S. Bank in the pending legal action. To avoid further litigation, the City entered into a purchase and sale agreement whereby the developer agreed to purchase the subject property from the City, and entered into a settlement agreement with the City to resolve the title dispute.

On June 14, 2013, the developer submitted its Master Planning Application for a Conditional Use Permit, Annexation, Development Agreement, General Plan. Amendment, Zone Change, Tentative Tract Map and Parcel Map to develop and construct a 15-home residential community on the subject property. Agoura Hills required the project to undergo a review under the California Environmental Quality Act, and prepared a Final Environmental Impact Report (“FEIR”) for the project. On September 9, 2015, the City Council certified the FEIR. Old Agoura Homeowners’ filed a petition in the Superior Court of Los Angeles County for Injunctive Relief against the City and the developer for failure to recirculate the revised FEIR, and non-compliance with the California Environmental quality Act. All the while the Old Agoura Homeowners continued to search for sources of funds to buy the meadow. With Fran Pavley’s assistance, Proposition 117, California Wildlife Conservation Board, Supervisor Sheila Kuehl, and the Santa Monica Mountain Conservancy (“MRCA”), we entered into negotiations for the developer to either (1) sell the subject property to MRCA or its Assignee, (2) exchange the subject property with MRCA or its assignee, (3) assign to MRCA's the developer’s rights to purchase the subject property from the City, or (4) enter into an option agreement that would allow MRCA to purchase the subject property from the developer, or obtain developer’s rights to purchase the subject property from the City. An agreement was reached, and there was no need to continue with the lawsuit.

Thus,

“But for” Old Agoura fighting the Heschel School, the stipulation of 75 varied concessions would never have been completed by Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky.

“But for” Old Agoura litigating the Heschel EIR, the City would have never been in a position of gaining title and ownership of the “Meadow.”

“But for” Old Agoura, Chesebro Meadow would never have been secured as open space and now owned by the Santa Monica Mountain Conservancy.

“But for” Old Agoura there would not be this additional open space accommodating the future of the Liberty Canyon Wildlife Corridor, or the newly renamed Wallis Annenburg Liberty Canyon Wildlife Crossing.