

Historical Ramblings

Lompoc's Ill-Fated College

In 1874, the Lompoc Land Colony surveyed one square mile in the Lompoc Valley and reserved it for a town site. The streets were laid out in a grid and measured 80 and 100 feet wide, wide enough to successfully turn around a wagon and team of horses. Each city block was rectangular, measuring 300 by 500 feet and bisected by 20 foot wide alleys. The streets running north and south were named alphabetically from A to O. The Avenues, running east and west were named for trees, except for the main street leading to the Ocean, which was naturally named Ocean Avenue. The tree names utilized were Willow, Locust, Olive, Hickory, Cypress, Walnut, Chestnut, Maple and Pine. Another exception to the tree naming scheme was a street between Maple and Pine Avenues, named College Avenue. This deviation was intentional and easily explained.

The founders of the Land Colony had established a fund to build an agricultural college in the newly formed temperance colony. A percentage of revenue from the sale of each town lot was invested into the fund. A site was selected and the street on which the college was to eventually be built was named College Avenue.

To get the valley's agricultural products to market cheaply and quickly was a problem which the directors of the Colony believed could only be solved by the construction of a wharf. A spot was selected south of Purisima Point, on the Jesus Maria Rancho, five miles north of the Santa Ynez River (now the site of North Vandenberg). This location was used during mission days to deliver hides and tallow to waiting Yankee trading vessels. In 1875, the citizens of the town voted to borrow \$20,000 from the college fund, which would be repaid from wharf operating profits by June, 1885 at seven percent interest. After a couple of false starts, a 700 foot wharf was finally completed in August of 1876. Steamers made regular stops at the Lompoc Wharf to load and unload cargo. In October of 1876 a fierce storm ravaged the coast and destroyed a great part of the new wharf. Produce on the pier, consisting of barley, wheat, potatoes, mustard and beans, was destroyed. Little was done to repair the damaged wharf in 1877 and 1878. In 1879, it was sold outright to John Rudolph for \$7,700. Over \$30,000 had been spent in its construction. In 1886, the wharf was rebuilt a second time under the ownership and management of a private steamship company. A hotel to accommodate passengers was even constructed at the site. The wharf operation was never completely satisfactory. If the weather was bad, boats would not dock, leaving many good crops of Lompoc potatoes to rot at the water's edge. It wasn't until 1890, when a Southern Pacific spur line was built from Surf into Lompoc, that the valley's produce transportation issues were resolved.

But what about that college? The money initially borrowed from the college fund was never repaid and the agricultural college never built. College Avenue, however, remained on the map as a reminder of the colony's noble plans.

In 1962, the new campus of Lompoc High School was constructed on College Avenue, finally fulfilling the Avenue's legacy of hosting an educational institution. Not until 1999, did Lompoc finally become home to its own college campus. Although not even close to College Avenue, Allan Hancock College's Lompoc Valley Center near the Wye, north of town would certainly meet with the approval of Lompoc's founders. The only problem they would have foreseen with this location is access during the winter months, when the Santa Ynez River raged toward the ocean. There were no bridges in 1875, but that's another story.