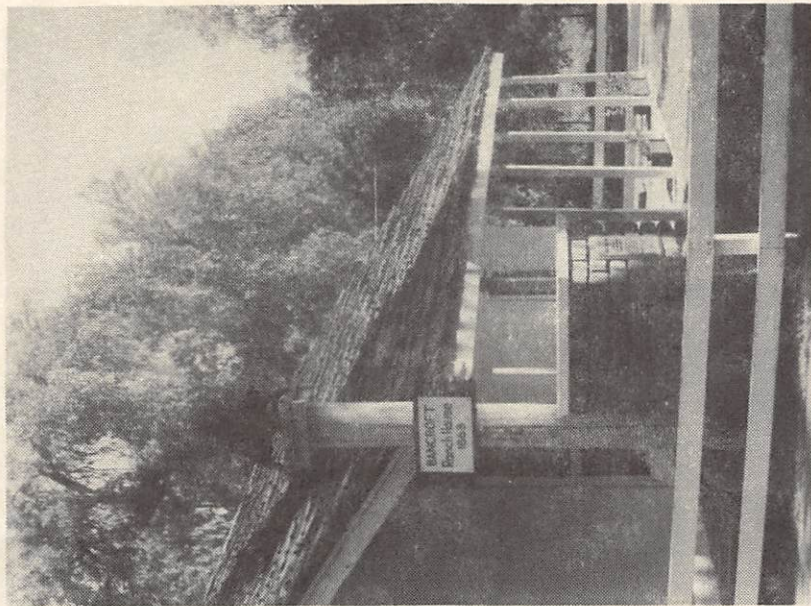


SPRING VALLEY'S TREASURE THE OLD ADOBE



BANCROFT RANCH HOUSE MUSEUM

Built in 1863
9050 Memory Lane — Spring Valley, CA 91977
County of San Diego
California

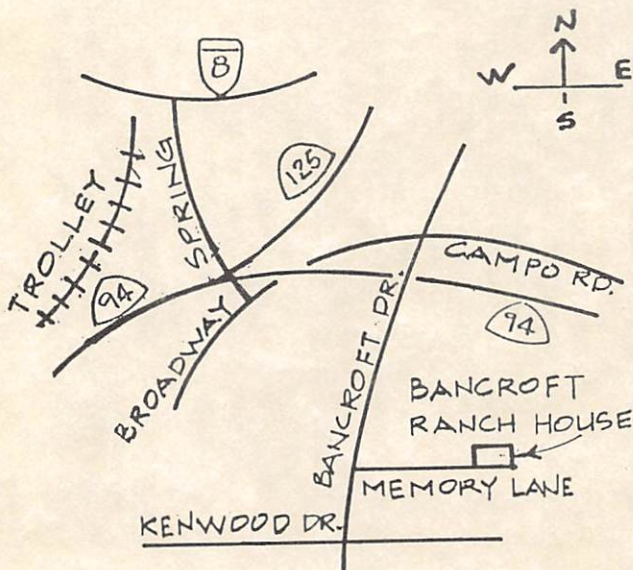
SPRING VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P. O. Box 142
Spring Valley, CA 91976



H.H. BANCROFT LIBRARY 39 VOLUMES
PUBLISHED 1875-1890





MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

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Spring Valley Historical Society
P. O. Box 142
Spring Valley, CA 91976

ANNUAL DUES

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Organizations	\$15.00
Sustaining	\$25.00
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Name

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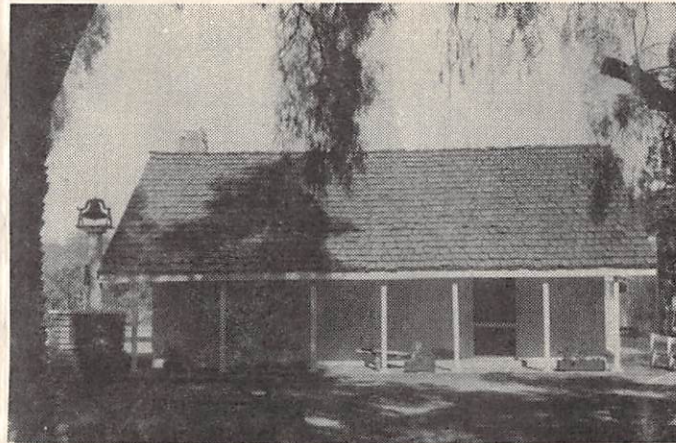
THE BANCROFT RANCH HOUSE

In 1964, the Bancroft Ranch House became a Registered National Historic Landmark in recognition of the work Hubert Howe Bancroft, the famous historian, who owned the adobe home from 1885 until his death in 1918. Bancroft was the monumental historian of the western half of the North American continent. Working over a thirty year period in the last half of the nineteenth century, he described the history of a civilization that was then rapidly disappearing. His 39 volumes, published at San Francisco between 1882 and 1890, still maintain their pre-eminence as the basic authority on the history of Alaska, and the western portions of Canada, Central America, Mexico and the United States. In conceiving, directing, and completing this prodigious project, Bancroft accomplished what is probably the greatest feat of historiography since Thucydides.

The Bancroft Ranch House itself and the area around it has a fascinating history and pre-history that precedes Bancroft's ownership. More than a thousand years ago, the Kumeyaay Indians began to use the place where the ranch house stands and the nearby springs as a campsite. As the centuries passed, the site became a semi-permanent village or rancharia the Indians called "Meti" or "Neti". In October, 1775, the Spanish padres baptized the first Indians from the village and renamed the site "San Jorge". The springs became known as "El Aguaje de San Jorge". By the late 1830s, the village had been abandoned, and herds of sheep and cattle grazed in the valley.

On May 28, 1863, Judge Augustus S. Ensworth of San Diego filed a pre-emption claim on 160 acres of land which included the springs and the former site of Meti. On this property he built a two room adobe, the first house erected by a white man in the valley. All of the wood for the structure, except the shingles, was salvaged from the **Clarissa Andrews**, a sailing ship that had gone aground in San Diego Harbor.

In San Diego, Judge Ensworth had served as Justice of the Peace in 1856, and in 1859, had represented San Diego in the State Assembly. After failing to be re-elected by only a few votes, he carried on an active law practice in San Diego and managed Thomas Whaley's business affairs. After injuries from a fall in the Whaley House in Old Town resulted in blood poisoning, Ensworth went to a hospital in Los Angeles where he died many months later on September 13, 1865. Before his death, mounting hospital bills forced Ensworth to



sell his San Jorge ranch to Rufus King Porter of San Pedro for \$400. Porter, his wife, Sophia, and daughter, Rufina, moved to the ranch on July 31, 1865.

Rufus King Porter had led a colorful life as a clockmaker, peddler, railroad worker, deputy sheriff, school teacher, postal employee, salt miner, and innkeeper and as the son of Rufus Porter, the founder of the **Scientific American** magazine. He became well known through his letters and columns which appeared in San Diego, San Francisco and other newspapers. At the urging of his daughter, he named the area Spring Valley in 1866. Rufus Porter built a kitchen and dining room on the west end of the adobe and two bedrooms on the east end.

In August 1872, Rufus Porter is believed to have named Mt. Helix, the mountain at the north end of Spring Valley for the **Helix aspersa** snail found there by a scientist who had come to San Diego on the coastal survey ship **Hassler**.

Porter became Spring Valley's first postmaster in 1885. When the United States Post Office Department refused to approve the name Spring Valley, the first post office, located in Porter's home, was called the Helix Post Office.

In 1885, Hubert Howe Bancroft came to Spring Valley in search of a place to retire. After staying with the Porters for a few days, he purchased their ranch. In the next few months he also acquired neighboring ranches bringing the total amount to more than 500 acres. He called the entire property "Helix Farms"

Bancroft became the Helix Postmaster on July 26, 1886 and served two years. During this period, he was completing his 39 volume history of the West. Although he spent considerable time at his publishing house and home in San

Francisco, his ranch at Walnut Creek, and another house in San Diego, it appears likely that he also did part of the work on his histories at the adobe ranch house in Spring Valley.

In the late 1880s and 1890s Bancroft developed Helix Farms. He put in experimental plantings of guavas, palms, olives, citrus, almonds, raspberries, blackberries, currants, and other shrubs and trees. Carpenters constructed a magnificent barn, hen houses, bunkhouses, a blacksmith shop, and a cookhouse. In 1889, "Cactus Cottage", a summer house for the Bancroft family, was built on the top of a nearby hill. In the same year, masons constructed the "Rock House" near the springs. In the 1890s, "The Olla", a unique water storage tank and filter, was built on the hillside above the Rock House. By the 1910s, Helix Farms had become one of the largest olive ranches in Southern California.

During his last years, H.H. Bancroft lived in San Francisco, and his son, Griffing Bancroft, managed Helix Farms. After H.H. Bancroft died in 1918, his heirs owned the property a few more years until the ranch was subdivided as La Mesa Country Club Estates.

Three-and-a-half acres of the land, including the adobe ranch house, were purchased by the Spring Valley Chamber of Commerce in 1940. The organization used the building as a community meeting place and constructed a wooden addition on the north side. Members of the Chamber were able to have the adobe designated California State Historic Landmark No. 626 in 1958. By 1962, the deteriorating condition of the building required a major overhaul. The cellar was filled in and a concrete floor laid in addition to steel bracing of the walls. Shake shingles were placed over the existing roof.

On March 24, 1963, the Bancroft House was opened as a museum and storehouse for artifacts and relics of Spring Valley under the management of the Spring Valley Historical Society, which was officially founded on April 3, 1963. The Society purchased the ranch house in 1967 and has continued to operate it as a free museum dedicated to preservation of the history of the area.

The museum is open from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m., Friday through Sunday. Guided group tours may be arranged by telephoning the caretaker at 469-1480.

The Spring Valley Historical Society is an all volunteer organization, funded entirely by membership dues, contributions, and fund raising events. Monthly membership meetings are held at the museum. The Society is a non-profit, tax exempt, public benefit, educational California corporation; it is exempt from federal income tax under Sec. 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Memberships and donations are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.