

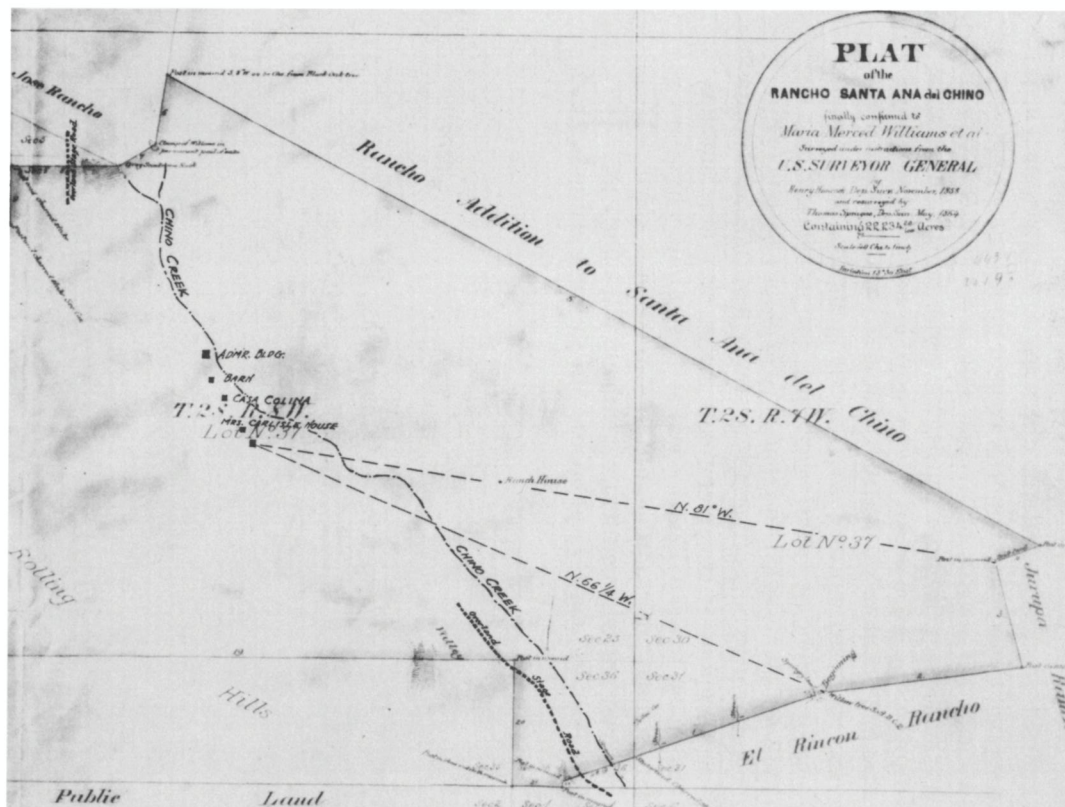
Where was the Battle of Chino Fought?



By GEORGE WILLIAM BEATTIE

THE LOCATION of the precise place where the so-called Battle of Chino was fought is a question that has puzzled a good many students of California history, and opinions regarding it vary. All authorities agree that it centered about the home of Isaac Williams, but just where this home was is another matter. One group maintains that it was on the north side of the *colina*, or hill, on which Mrs. Eldredge M. Fowler built her home, La Casa Colina, on the grounds of the California Junior Republic; another has it southeast of this knoll; another has it on the very top; still another has it a part of what is now Los Serranos Country Clubhouse; while a Government map of 1868, thanks to the error of a draftsman who entered data from a surveyor's field notes on the wrong angle, has the Williams home a mile and a half east of the point where it should have been indicated. In weighing such contradictions as these, one may well fortify himself in advance with a few pertinent facts.

The Chino Rancho was well known during and even before the American occupation of California. Antonio María Lugo, that energetic land-getter, obtained a grant of it in March, 1841, from Governor Juan B. Alvarado. It comprised five square leagues of what



PORTION OF GOVERNMENT MAP OF RANCHO SANTA ANA DEL CHINO
 Additions showing certain buildings on California Junior Republic grounds, Chino Creek, and bearings on "Ranch House." Intersection of these bearings, correctly plotted, shows approximate location of Isaac Williams' home. Site of adobe structure identified by Señor Véjar is between barn and Casa Colina. Government surveyors indicated Overland Stage Road where it crossed northern and southern bounds of rancho. It ran just west of Junior Republic buildings here shown.

Where was the Battle of Chino Fought?

had been one of Mission San Gabriel's best food-producing ranchos. Within a short time after receiving the grant, Don Antonio María had built a roomy adobe house on the property and moved his family, servants, and at least some of his livestock there. With him were two of his sons, José del Carmen and Vicente, and his son-in-law, Isaac Williams, who had wedded his daughter, María de Jesus. Lugo was still an active man, and he and his two sons looked after the livestock while Williams looked after the buildings and the general improvement of the property.¹

It was evidently intended that Isaac Williams should become a part owner in this rancho—Lugo was in the process of securing the San Bernardino Rancho for his sons—for before the first year ended, Lugo acknowledged a deed to Williams for “one half of the tract of land of the Rancho called Santa Ana del Chino.”² Even before the deed was executed, Williams had been arranging to build a separate adobe for himself and his family half a mile or more from that of his father-in-law, and appears to have engaged one Daniel Sexton to collect timber for it. Sexton selected and cut the timbers partly in Lytle Creek Canyon, in the San Gabriel Mountains, and partly on the south slope of Mount San Gorgonio, at the east end of the San Bernardino Range.³

Thus was begun the famous Chino Ranch House, in which Williams lived until his death, in 1856, and about which the Battle of Chino centered. The house was characterized by his brother-in-law, Stephen C. Foster, as being, in 1846, “perhaps the largest and best arranged private one in California.” According to Foster, “It formed a quadrangle of about 250 feet with an open courtyard within, the walls of adobe, but the roof covered with asphaltum.”⁴ In it Williams dispensed the hospitality for which he became famous. During the years 1849, 1850, and 1851, hundreds of Americans on their way to the gold fields by the Southern Route replaced their travel-worn outfits with new ones purchased in Williams' store, exchanged their jaded animals for fresh ones from the Chino ranges, and left their entries in the Williams register, a record book that is now one of the treasures of the Huntington Library. Prominent California business men like William Heath Davis,⁵ and army officers

Historical Society of Southern California

like Colonel J. B. Magruder, later of Civil War fame, were entertained by him.⁶

We see, then, that two large adobe dwellings were erected on the rancho not long after it was granted to Lugo, the one occupied by Don Antonio and his sons, and the one built by Williams for himself and family. But we have not located either of them. Indeed, there comes the rub. However, in the pages that follow we hope to convince the open-minded reader that the Lugo adobe was on the north side of the knoll on which stands Mrs. Fowler's Casa Colina, and that the Williams house was south of this hill, near the spot where now stand the dairy buildings of the California Junior Republic.

Each of these adobes had been put forward as the one about which the Battle of Chino raged and in which the Americans were besieged, and each has been called the Williams home. But the more weighty evidence points to the Williams home as being south of the *colina*. The two structures were the only dwellings on the Chino Rancho that were mentioned by Abel Stearns, Isaac Williams, and J. J. Warner in their testimony before the United States Land Commission in 1852-54, when the title to this property was up for confirmation. There could hardly have been others. There was a grist mill, for which soldiers of the Mormon Battalion had dug the mill race, in 1847.⁷ The mill must have been on Chino Creek, as that was the only stream that would have furnished a dependable supply of water. It flowed along the east side of the Fowler hill on its way to the Santa Ana River, and may still be seen.

The position of the Lugo home is pretty well established if we take into consideration statements made recently by our esteemed Californian, Don José Véjar, who says that he remembers a large adobe on the north side of the Fowler hill, and that he was in it several times as a young boy when it was occupied by a foreman employed on the rancho under Joseph Bridger. This would have been in the second half of the 1860's, as Bridger managed the rancho after the death of Robert Carlisle, in 1865. Señor Véjar assumed that this house was the Lugo home and afterwards the home of Williams, and that the Battle of Chino was therefore fought around it, being

Where was the Battle of Chino Fought?

unaware of the fact that there were two dwellings on the rancho at the time.⁸

Benjamin W. Wilson and Stephen C. Foster give descriptions of the Battle of Chino, as do José del Carmen Lugo, Michael White, and José F. Palomares.⁹ Of these the narratives of Wilson and Foster supply information that would be invaluable in determining the location of the Williams home were it not that in one all-important point they contradict each other. Wilson was in the fight, acting as leader of the Americans. He says, "We were in the house, which was an old adobe built in the usual Mexican style, with a patio inside entirely enclosed by rooms. . . . There was a knoll on the *west* side on which the Californians were arranging their plan of attack." (Italics are ours.)

Foster arrived in Los Angeles about six months after the affair, but gathered his information regarding it from participants. He says, ". . . about fifty yards *east* of the house rose an elevation higher than the top of the house." (Italics again are ours.) This elevation would have been the above-mentioned knoll, but the "fifty yards" are not supported by other reliable evidence that we have.

Instead of "west" and "east" in these two accounts we maintain that Wilson and Foster should have said "north, or west of north." It should be borne in mind that the statements of these two men were dictated more than thirty years after the events they were describing, when they were very old, and when their senses of distance and direction could easily have become vague.

The earliest really definite clue to the location of Williams' home that the writer has been able to unearth is in the diary of Benjamin Hayes, who for about twelve years was a district court judge in Los Angeles. He came from Missouri to California by the Southern Route in the winter of 1849-50, and stopped over night on the Chino Rancho. After crossing the Santa Ana River near what is now the town of Prado, then called Rincón, he wrote, "At length the Rancho of Chino is in sight." From the point on the road where he caught this view, he says that the mill, which we have referred to as being on Chino Creek, was on his right hand while the Williams house was on the left. He tells how he found lodging in a large

Historical Society of Southern California

house, a "hotel," managed by J. D. Grewell. This hotel must have been the old Lugo adobe. Lugo had ceased to live in it five or six years before. Later, Hayes says, "We did not go over to make the acquaintance of Col. Williams, whose house is full of strangers now."¹⁰ The two places were something more than half a mile apart, as we have already said, and there was evidently enough travel through the region to tax the resources of both establishments.

In the fall of 1849, stock men south of the San Gabriel and San Bernardino Mountains were appealing to the United States Government for military protection from marauding Indians from the Mojave Desert and beyond. General Bennett Riley, then military governor of California, sent Lieutenant E. O. C. Ord down from Monterey to look over the country and recommend a site for a military post. Ord went to San Diego by steamer, and then worked back overland. In his report, of October 31, 1849, he says, "I turned up the Santa Ana, and proceeded at once to the rancho of Colonel Williams, examined its houses and grounds. . . . Found the buildings ample for one company, the position facing the Cajón, eighteen miles off; no intervening hills, and no time to put up quarters on the Indian side of the Pass [that is, on the Mojave River]. I contracted for quarters there." These would naturally have been the Lugo dwellings and outbuildings, and not the Williams house, since Williams continued to entertain guests in his home after the post was established.

Although Lieutenant Ord was planning for a site to be occupied before the winter rains of 1849-50 should begin, no troops were stationed at Chino for nearly a year, or in September, 1850.¹¹ Various plausible reasons may be offered for this delay, but what the real one was we do not know. We do know that the Government had but few troops available on the Pacific coast at this time, and the need for soldiers at other points may have been greater. Also, travel by the Southern Route was at its height in 1850, and the demands for accommodations on the Chino Rancho were heavy, as we know. The needs of the hordes of gold seekers, if nothing else, would have been sufficient to delay any move to house soldiers in either of the rancho dwellings.

Where was the Battle of Chino Fought?

In 1851, one of the volunteers that had been enlisted to put down a revolt headed by the Indian renegade, Garra, wrote from Chino after the post had finally been located there, saying, "The military post at this place consists of twenty men exclusive of officers. . . . The buildings occupied as a garrison are well adapted to the purposes to which they are applied, *though originally erected for dwellings.*"¹² [Italics ours.] These structures must have been the Lugo buildings formerly used for the hotel, since Williams was still occupying his own.

A more definite clue to the location of the Williams home may be found in the two surveys of the Chino Rancho made by the United States Government.¹³ The first was made by Henry Hancock, in 1858. In the field notes he says he ran his first course " . . . to a willow tree standing alone in the valley, and marked same for Station No. 2." Farther on, he ran " . . . to Station 4, at the first sand bank of the plain . . . from which the dwelling of the Chino Rancho bears N. 81° W."

In 1864, Thomas Sprague made a resurvey of the rancho, and begins his notes as follows: "Not being able to find any post or mound where Course No. 4 [of the Hancock survey] ends and Course No. 5 begins, I went to the willow tree at the end of Course No. 1, and ran thence N. 82° E. . . ." He carried the survey on around the rancho, and his last note reads, " . . . to willow tree and place of beginning. Rancho house bears N. 66 ¼° W."

"Rancho House," in 1864 would naturally have referred to what had been the Williams home. Williams had died in 1856, but the place was occupied by his successor. When the bearings from Stations 2 and 4 given above are plotted correctly, as they were *not* in the Government map of 1868, the lines intersect southeast of the Fowler knoll, thereby locating the Williams house in the near vicinity of the present California Junior Republic dairy buildings where we believe that it was. The improper plotting of these bearings may easily be responsible for some of the variant beliefs that are held.

Just one more point. In 1851, Antonio María Lugo had transferred to Isaac Williams all of his remaining interest in the Chino Rancho. For a number of years he had been living away from the

Historical Society of Southern California

property, and visiting it only at infrequent intervals. When, in 1856, Williams died, the entire rancho was left to his two daughters, María Merced and Francisca. Shortly after, María Merced married John Rains, and Francisca became the wife of Robert Carlisle. Both families lived in the ranch house for a time, certain changes and improvements being made to render it more convenient and attractive.¹⁴ It became a station of the Butterfield Overland Stage Line. In 1859, Carlisle purchased the Rains interest in the rancho, and the Rains family moved onto Rancho Cucamonga. Carlisle died in 1865, and two years later his widow leveled a part, at least, of the old structure and erected a frame dwelling on or very near the spot.

Mrs. Laura Brodrick, daughter of Robert Carlisle and granddaughter of Isaac Williams, says in speaking of her grandfather's old home, ". . . the house built by my mother after my father's death was built on the same spot—you can probably locate it, as it was afterwards the first home of the George Junior Republic."¹⁵ Later correspondence and an interview with Mrs. Brodrick showed that she was entirely familiar with the Williams ranch house, in its later days, for she described several details of its structure, and drew a map showing its position with reference to the stage road that ran between Spadra and the Rincón Rancho. This first home of what is now the California Junior Republic is known definitely to have been close to the present dairy buildings of this institution. Some of the old foundation stones may still be seen.

Bearing these things in mind, it is evident that one can determine with much confidence where the Williams ranch house stood and where it did not stand, and as a consequence, where the Battle of Chino was and was not fought.

Where was the Battle of Chino Fought?

NOTES

- ¹California Land Commission, Case 433, Affidavits of Isaac Williams and J. J. Warner.
- ²*Ibid.*, Deed December 22, 1841.
- ³Daniel Sexton, Testimony in *Cave vs. Crafts*, District Court, San Bernardino, Case No. 323; Sexton, Testimony in *U. S. vs. Hancock*, U. S. District Court, San Francisco.
- ⁴Stephen C. Foster, "Angeles from '47 to '49," Mss. Bancroft Library.
- ⁵William Heath Davis, *Seventy-five Years in California*, 219-220.
- ⁶Lindley Bynum, editor, "The Record Book of Rancho Santa Ana del Chino," *Hist. Soc. Sou. Cal., Ann. Pub.*, 1934.
- ⁷Frank Alfred Golder, *The March of the Mormon Battalion . . .*, quoting "Journal of Henry Standage," 225.
- ⁸Roy M. Fryer, "The Butterfield Stage Route," *Hist. Soc. Sou. Cal., Quarterly*, March, 1935; Véjar-Beattie, Interview, May 14, 1939; Véjar-Fryer, Interview, March 5, 1940.
- ⁹Mss. Memoirs in Bancroft Library. The Wilson Narrative, Arthur Woodward, editor, was printed in *Hist. Soc. Sou. Cal., Ann. Pub.*, 1934.
- ¹⁰Benjamin Hayes, *Pioneer Notes*, Marjorie Tisdale Wolcott, editor, 67-68; *Cal. Land Com., Case 433, Affidavits J. J. Warner and John Forster.*
- ¹¹U. S. Adjutant General to Beattie, May 22, 1939.
- ¹²*Los Angeles Star*, May 31, 1862.
- ¹³See Map.
- ¹⁴State Agricultural Society *Annual Report*, 1858; Hayes, *Pioneer Notes*, 217.
- ¹⁵Brodrick to Beattie, Feb. 20, 1925.