

HISTORY OF THE DE LUZ AREA
for Fallbrook History book May 1974

The community of De Luz is an old and scenic settlement northwest of Fallbrook in a canyon overlooked by Rocky Peak, Tom Casey Peak and other steep foothills of the Santa Ana Mountains. It is predominantly agricultural and retains the quiet, woodsy charm and beauty that old-timers would appreciate even today. Homes are going up here and there, and the once very narrow dirt road is now wider and black-topped, and the curves less sinuous. Both of these version are probably false.

There are two versions of how De Luz got its name. A shepherd by the name of Luz is said to have herded sheep in the area, and the canyon was thus named for him. The other story is that it was originally "Corral De Luz," named for an Englishman by the name of Luce, who had horses at Judson's Mineral Springs. This property was a sort of health spa, with people coming by train to stay at the hotel, which is the present McManus home. The warm springs are still there.

A Mr. Spring is said to have lived on this same property in 1861, and he is regarded as the first settler. Quite a few people came during the 1870's and 1880's, and some of the most prominent were families by the names of Wilmot, Dicey, Riboni, Day, Garnsey, Johnson, Camp, Hill, and Heylman. Later there were the Regans, Nuthalls, Leslies, Brodes, Lenfers, Stoners, Baxters, Richmans, Pyeatts, Websters, and many others.

The early crops included grain, apricots, muscat grapes and raisins, and oak wood; products for sale were shipped by train to Los Angeles, from a station where De Luz Creek and the Santa Margarita River meet.

The Southern California Railway ran from Oceanside to De Luz to Fallbrook, but the flood of 1884 severely damaged the line. The road-bed was changed, but in 1916 another flood stopped all service through De Luz. In the 1930's some flat cars were still on the property at the intersection of De Luz Road and Rock Mountain Road, one and one-half miles out of Fallbrook; some maps still indicate this old station.

Postal service began in 1882, and the most prominent early carrier was "Gramp" Day, who hauled the mail with his buggy and horse Wanda; he even brought out groceries when necessary. For 16 years the little postoffice which became famous for being "The Smallest Complete Postoffice in the World" did business in the Garnsey yard, with Louis J. Garnsey as postmaster. Thereafter this building was moved several times, and since the closing of the office in 1955, the building has been used as a tool shed on the McManus property. Postal service now originates in Fallbrook.

The first school classes were held in a small building on the Day property, and in 1888 a regular school building was built on the Wilmot acreage, near the west fork of De Luz Creek. It was torn down when the present building was constructed in 1927. Since the closing of the school in 1968, the building is used as a community hall, and the entire 120-acre property, under the jurisdiction of the Fallbrook Elementary School District, is now a Nature Study Center, with nature trails and programs for the benefit of many busloads of students.

Some early buildings are still in evidence. The two-story hotel was taken over by the Regan family in 1910 and remodeled into a home. In 1916 Mrs. Alexander (of the Alexandria Hotel family) bought the property, and it has been in private hands ever since. The McManuses bought from Dr. and Mrs. Sam Wilson. The distinctive place is now used for Christian retreats.

One old family ranch is still in operation. Thousand Oaks Ranch is owned by Felix R. Garnsey, who is the third-generation Garnsey on this property. His grandfather, James Garnsey, had bees and an adobe house along Cottonwood Creek and shipped oak wood to Santa Ana to make charcoal for use in the brick kilns he owned. An uncle, F. Raney Garnsey, raised muscat grapes on property homesteaded by the Johnsons, and the father, Louis J. Garnsey, raised muscat grapes on that portion of the ranch first developed by Gramp Day. A part of the present home is the original cement and rock shed used for storing muscat raisins.

The Wilmot brothers had two adobe homes: one, on the Murrieta Road, owned for many years by the Bleeckers, and the other, adjacent to the school property, by the Clicks.

There are remains of other buildings in Roblar Canyon, but this area is a part of Camp Pendleton and inaccessible.

Many weekenders own property in De Luz and look forward to retirement there. Ranchers in De Luz Canyon now raise avocados and citrus, Arabian horses, citrus and avocado nursery stock, and gourds.

De Luz Heights, closer to Fallbrook and off Daily Road, was developed by Ross Daily, and in the last 13 years many homes have been built in this area and much acreage planted to avocados. The De Luz Heights Municipal Water District is constructing miles of pipe line in order to bring in Metropolitan water to the growers there and to some parts of De Luz Canyon.

Early settlers in this area were the Orvises, Mrs. Harris, the Smarrs, the Gulihurs (Jack Gulihur had a garage in Fallbrook and drove the high school bus in the 1930's), and the Dovilles, who lived in the "Robbers' Roost" area.

There is a lot of history tucked away in all those canyons and hills out De Luz way.

-----Mrs. Felix R. Garnsey