

The Rise of Agriculture (Late 1800s - Early 1900s)

After Rancho San Lorenzo was divided into smaller parcels, agriculture became the primary industry in Castro Valley. The fertile land was ideal for **chicken ranching, orchards, and dairy farming**, with families like the **Lundgrens, Rowells, Alcorns, and Lorges** leading the charge. The poultry industry was especially dominant, earning Castro Valley the nickname "**When Chicken Was King.**"

At one point, Castro Valley housed **hundreds of thousands of chickens**, with hatcheries shipping chicks worldwide. Families built long brooder houses and sold fresh eggs across the Bay Area. But as urbanization increased, the industry eventually faded.

Impactful Families in Castro Valley

Castro Valley in the early 1900s was a small, tight-knit community with a strong agricultural focus. Many families contributed to its development, particularly through ranching and farming. Here are some notable families and their contributions:

1. **The Jensen Family:** They established a 1,000-acre ranch and orchard, playing a significant role in the area's agricultural economy. Their legacy lives on through landmarks like Jensen Road and Jensen Ranch Elementary School.
2. **The Lundgren Family:** Known for their chicken ranch on Stanton Avenue, they were part of the thriving poultry farming industry that defined Castro Valley during the 1920s.
3. **The Alcorn Family:** They managed a ranch with 3,000 chickens and a cow, contributing to the local economy. George Alcorn, a member of the family, was also a professor at UC Berkeley and made significant contributions to national agricultural policy.
4. **The Lorge Family:** They established their own hatchery which produced over 8,000 chicks a week in 1920s. Over the years their family owned multiple businesses from 1890 to today.
5. **The Rowell Family:** Harry Rowell, known as the "Rodeo King of the West," established the Rowell Ranch, which became a hub for rodeo culture and community gatherings.

These families, among others, helped shape Castro Valley's identity as a farming and ranching community. Over time, as suburbanization took hold, the area transitioned from its agricultural roots to a more residential and commercial landscape.

The Lorge Family

The Lorge family has deep roots in Castro Valley's history, contributing significantly to the community's growth and development. Ray and Lucille Lorge were prominent figures whose families were integral to the area's agricultural and civic life.

- **Lucille Lorge's Family:** Her great-grandfather, Henry Thomford, opened one of the first businesses in the area, known as "The Exchange," in the mid-19th century. Located where Grove Way and Redwood Road now meet, it served as a stop for ranchers herding cattle toward San Francisco, offering a place to water horses and enjoy a drink.
- **Ray Lorge's Family:** Ray's father, Cyril Lorge, co-owned the Rio-Linda Hatchery in the 1920s, during the height of Castro Valley's poultry farming boom. The hatchery was later renamed the California State Hatchery. Cyril was also an active member of Castro Valley's volunteer fire department.

Ray and Lucille Lorge continued their families' legacies by contributing to the community in various ways. They worked in the family hatchery and later opened R. & J. Quik Clean. Ray was a past president of the Castro Valley Rotary Club and served on the Municipal Advisory Committee to Alameda County. Lucille has been an active volunteer and docent with the Hayward Historical Society, sharing the area's rich history with others.

The Lorge family's story reflects the pioneering spirit and dedication that helped shape Castro Valley into the vibrant community it is today.