



The Birth of Orange County - 1889

The Orange County Archives

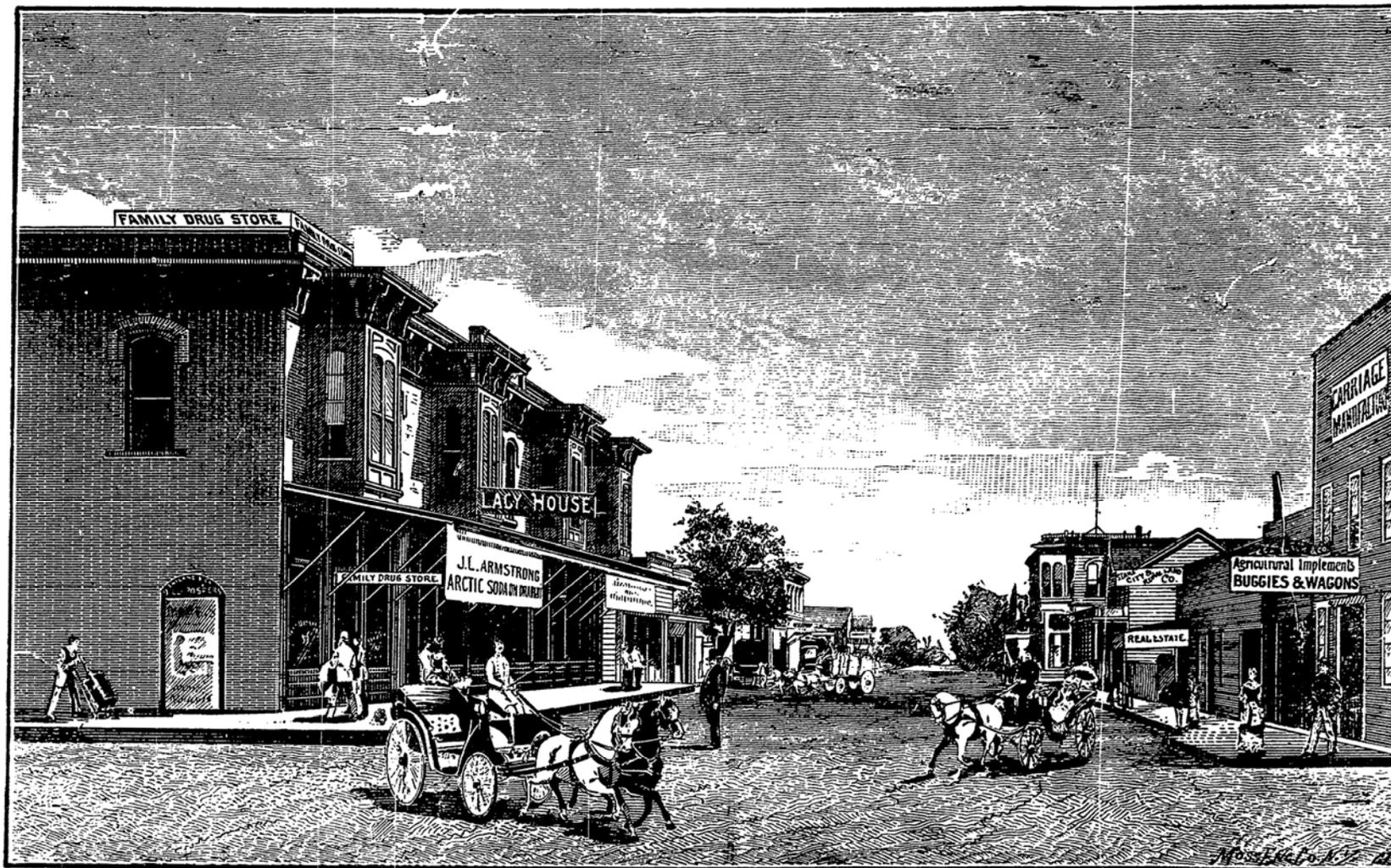
**Presented by Archivist Phil Brigandi
to the Orange County Board of Supervisors**

Aug. 9, 2005

The Orange County Archives

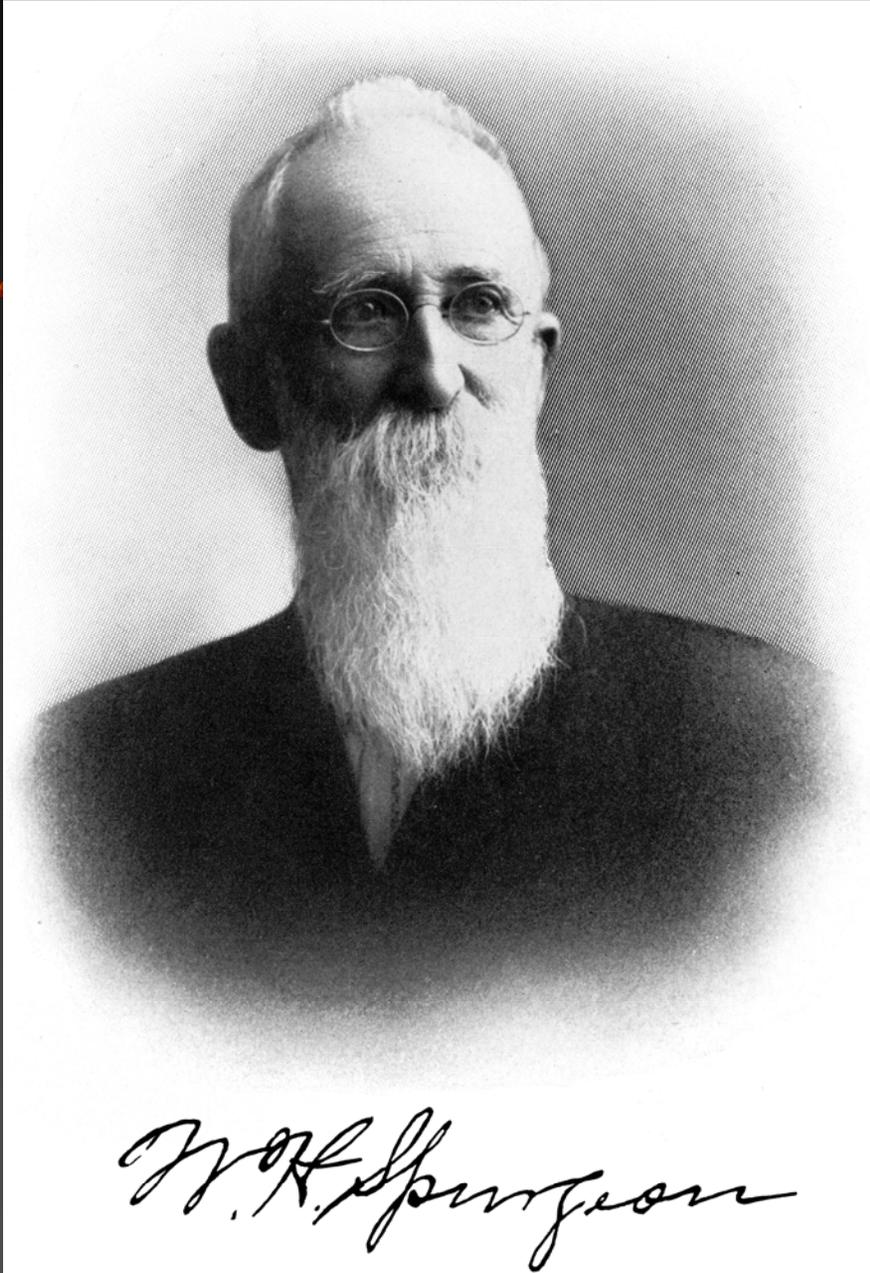
- It took nearly 20 years of struggle by local business and civic leaders for us to break away from Los Angeles County.
 - The story starts in 1870. Max Strobel, the first mayor of Anaheim, led the charge. He helped push a bill through the State Assembly to form Anaheim County – with Anaheim as the county seat, of course. Unfortunately, the bill failed in the Senate.
 - Anaheim County would have taken in everything south of the San Gabriel River. So what is now Downey and Norwalk and Whittier and a lot of others areas would have been part of the new county.
 - In 1872, a second bill was introduced in Sacramento to create a new county. But it never even made it to a vote. Still, the supporters did come up with a new name for the county. Now they were going to call it “Orange County.”
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- There has been a lot of confusion over the years about where the name Orange County comes from. You often hear that we were named for all the orange groves around here – but there was not a single orange grove here at that time. The big crop in those days was grapes.
- You'll also hear that we were named to pacify the City of Orange, which lost out for the county seat. But what is now the City of Orange was less than six months old then, and was still known as Richland.
- The truth is, we were named Orange County because it sounded good. It was an attractive name, with a tropical flare to it. That's how Southern California was being promoted back then, as a semi-tropical paradise.
- One of the early promoters of Orange County said, "The name 'Orange' emblazoned upon the map of our state would in my opinion have more effect in drawing settlers to this section than all the promotional pamphlets, and real estate agents put together!"

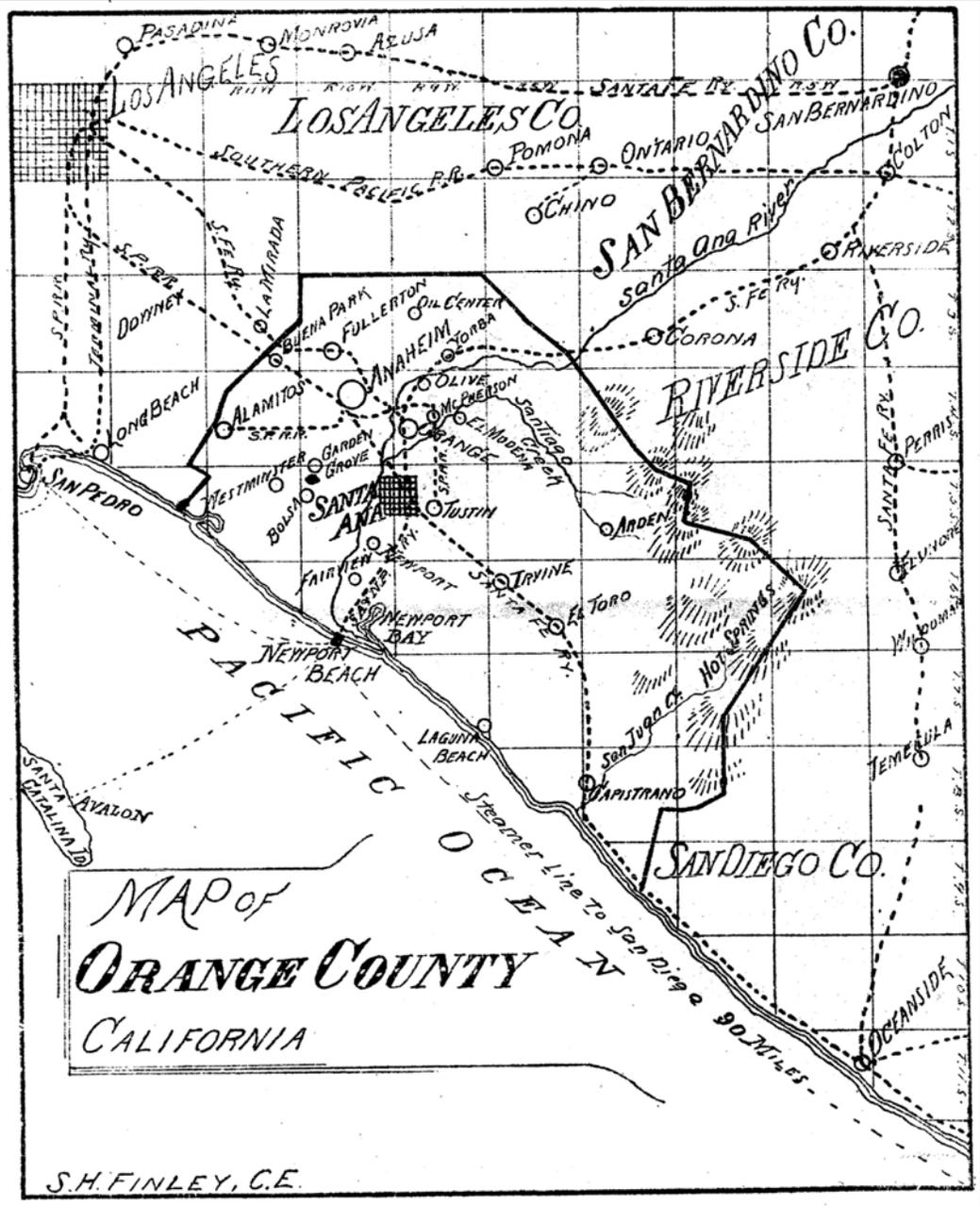


SANTA ANA—VIEW ON FIFTH AND MAIN STREETS, LOOKING SOUTH.

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- The attempts to form a new county continued all through the 1870s and '80s. Not all of the proposals were for an Orange County. The Anaheim folks made another big push in 1876, but this time they called the proposed county Santa Ana County, in hopes of gaining support from the city of Santa Ana. It didn't work.
 - The other big issue was which city would be the County Seat. A bill in 1881 – they had gone back to the name Orange County by then – tried to compromise by naming Anaheim the county seat, but only for the first two years. After that, an election would be held. But that bill never even came to a vote.
 - The last failed attempt was in 1885, when the Assemblyman from Truckee introduced an Orange County bill. It made it through the Assembly, but died in the Senate. One of the supporters of that bill was our lone Assemblyman – Col. E.E. Edwards of Santa Ana.
 - Four years later, Col. Edwards introduced his own bill to create Orange County.
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- Santa Ana's founder, William H. Spurgeon – a former Assemblyman and a prominent Democrat – joined Republican leader James McFadden in helping Col. Edwards lobby the Legislature. They had a war chest of perhaps as much as \$30,000 put up by the businessmen of Santa Ana.
 - Los Angeles, of course, was not pleased to see a third of their county cut away. So one of the smart things our lobbyists did was to enlist the support of the San Francisco delegation, who were more than happy to see Los Angeles County lose some of its population and power.
 - The Santa Ana folks also agreed to trim the northern boundary down to Coyote Creek, where the county line is today, so they took even less of LA's assessed valuation with them.
 - The bill passed both houses, and was signed by Gov. Waterman on March 11, 1889.
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- Now the Edwards bill did not create Orange County – it only allowed for a vote of the local residents – and it required a two-thirds majority vote to pass.
 - It was not all smooth sailing. Anaheim was upset over the boundary shift, which left them in the north end of the county, rather than in the center, where they would have been a natural choice for the County Seat. So they turned against the idea, and fought against the creation of a new county. Fullerton, Buena Park, and some of the other communities up north soon joined in.
 - But support was so strong in the rest of the area that when the vote was held on June 4, 1889, the measure passed easily – 2,500 to 500.
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- But the L.A. people weren't ready to give up yet. They launched a series of legal challenges to prevent the creation of Orange County. The most important was cleared up a few weeks later, but the last of the cases wasn't settled by the State Supreme Court until almost nine months later.
 - L.A.'s big argument was that the local voters didn't have the right to create a new county – only the Legislature could do that. Well, the courts took care of that one pretty quickly. The Legislature *did* have the right to create a new county, and they also had the right to include voters in that process.
 - Anyway, once Orange County was formed, they needed a second election to choose a county seat and elect a full compliment of county officers – an assessor, a county clerk, a coroner, a district attorney, a recorder and auditor, a sheriff and tax collector, a superintendent of school, a surveyor, and a treasurer.
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- With Anaheim on the wrong side of the county formation vote, Orange decided to make a run for county seat.
 - Orange even offered the Rochester Hotel – shown in the earlier slide – which at the time was a big boom-time hotel downtown. Problem was, it still wasn't quite finished when the boom went bust, so it was offered as a ready-made courthouse. But it was pretty obvious to everyone other than the folks in Orange that Santa Ana was going to be the winner.
 - The second election was held on July 17, 1889. It was not as big a deal as the first vote – only about half as many votes were cast. And Santa Ana was selected as the County Seat. With everything in place, Orange County was officially born on August 1, 1889.
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Record of the Proceedings of the
Board of Supervisors of Orange County }

Santa Ana, Aug. 5th 1889

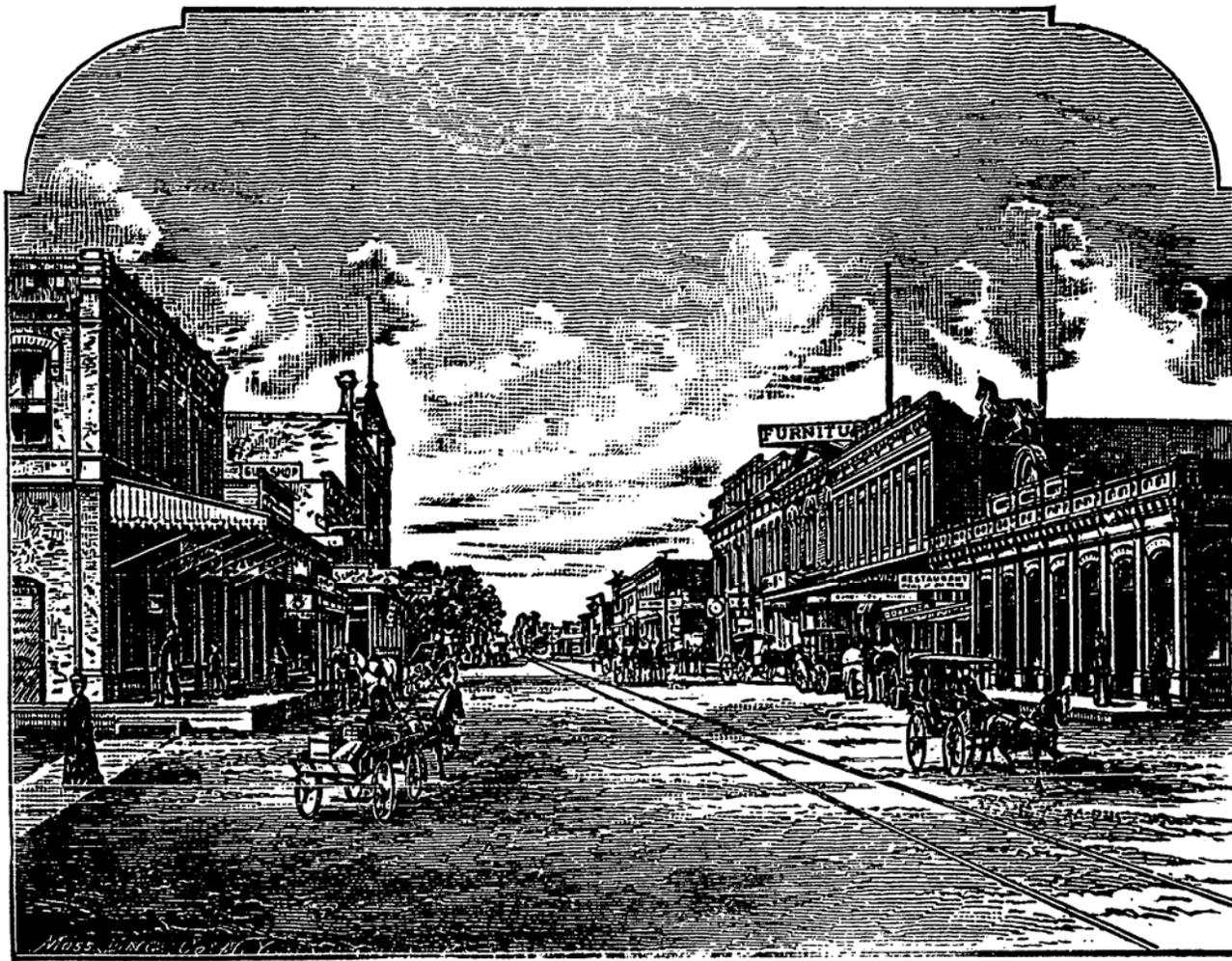
In accordance with Sec. 7 of the act entitled "An Act to Create the County of Orange" approved March 11th 1889, the Supervisors elected under the provisions of said act, met in the Hall over Beatty Bro's store at 10 o'clock A.M. There were present, W. H. Spurgeon of the 1st District, Jacob Ross of the 2nd District, S. Littlefield of the 3rd District, S. Amvor of the 4th District and A. Guy Smith of the 5th District.

It appearing that each member was duly qualified, organization was effected by the making of W. H. Spurgeon Chairman, by virtue of his representing the 1st District,

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- On the morning of Aug. 1, 1889, Judge J.W. Towner – our one and only Superior Court judge at the time – opened court in his law office by having Sheriff R.T. Harris stand outside the door and proclaim that court was now in session.
 - The Board of Supervisors met for the first time on August 5, 1889 – the previous slide shows the first minutes.
 - William H. Spurgeon represented District 1, and was the first Chairman of the Board. The other members were Jacob Ross from District 2, Sheldon Littlefield from District 3, A. Guy Smith of Tustin from District 5, and Sam Armor from District 4 – who won by just four votes.
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- The whole question of letting the voters decide on forming a new county is interesting. There was a little burst of new counties being formed for a few years after Orange County was created. However, not too many years later, state law was changed so that all the voters in both the existing county and the new county had to approve the split. It was one of those Progressive Era, expand-the-power-of-voters moves. It's also a big part of the reason why there hasn't been a new county created in California since 1907.
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- When Orange County was formed, there were just three incorporated cities here – Anaheim, Santa Ana, and Orange – and a population of about 15,000.
 - 116 years later, there are 34 incorporated cities, and a population of more than 3,000,000. We're now the second largest county in the state – and we're still growing.
 - It took a lot of effort to create Orange County, but I think you'll agree, it was all worth it!
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SANTA ANA—VIEW OF FOURTH STREET.



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Orange County Clerk-Recorder Dept.
Tom Daly, Clerk-Recorder

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