

Don Benito Wilson

By John C. Macfarland

IN the midst of our Centennial celebrations it seems appropriate to bring together a few facts concerning the life and accomplishments of a man who, in my opinion, has never been given the credit he deserves for the part that he took in the decisive events that occurred in this part of California during the period from 1841 to 1860. My impression, after reading and hearing a good deal about him, is that he was the strong man of that period.

Benjamin Davis Wilson was his name—the surname now being perpetuated by Mount Wilson, which name, by the way, I hope the Historical Society will protect and never permit to be changed to something more glamorous, such as Sunkissed Peak, which seems to be the fate of most of our historic names. He was familiarly known as Don Benito, because of the regard and affection in which he was held by his compatriots.

I should interpolate here that most of the information in this paper was obtained from Don Benito's own interview, which he gave to Hubert Howe Bancroft, the historian, in 1877, only a few months before his death; and when I quote, I will be quoting from that narrative. I have also obtained information concerning him from many other volumes on the history of the Southwest, particularly the works of Robert G. Cleland.

Don Benito arrived in this area in the Fall of 1841, being one of the leaders of the Rowland Workman party, of about twenty, which came over the desert, from Santa Fe, in September of that year. He was thirty years old, at the time, having been born at Nashville, Tennessee, in 1811. Half of those thirty years had been pretty tough, as he had been obliged, because of family circumstances, to strike out for himself at fifteen, so by the time he arrived here, he was a fearless, hardy, buckskin-dressed pioneer, tough as rawhide, a typical mountain man, but

withal, a fine Christian character—the “you-mind-your-business-and-I-will-mind-mine” type. His venture, at fifteen years of age, had been to go among the Choctaws and Chickasaws, in the Yazoo Valley, north of Vicksburg, as a trader, where he spent several years, but his health failed and his physician ordered him to leave that part of the country.

From there, he went all alone, through the wilderness, up the Arkansas River to Fort Smith; from there, because of delays in the outfitting of an expedition which he intended to go with, he went on to Missouri, and there he joined the Rocky Mountain Company, that legendary association of trappers and hunters whose members have since been known as the Mountain Men. With them, he crossed the plains and mountains to Santa Fe, where he arrived in the autumn of 1833. Santa Fe and neighboring Taos, in the 1830's, were practically the headquarters of the Mountain Men, the trappers who were scouring the streams of the Rocky Mountains for the beaver, whose fur went into the beaver hats of the era. These were the men who, in reality, won the West—the men who guided the Argonauts in their rush to California, and those who went further north on the Oregon trail, the Jedediah Smiths, the William Sublettes, the Jim Bridgers, and the others. Consequently, these were the men who were Wilson's friends and associates in Santa Fe. He was only twenty-two when he first arrived there from the Mississippi Valley, but having been on his own for seven years, he was as hardy as the next one.

When the young Wilson arrived at Santa Fe, he had no money, so he joined a party who were trapping in the Gila and Apache country for beaver. They were quite successful in their trapping, explored the Gila River, and returned to Santa Fe in the spring of 1835. He reoutfitted there and returned to the Gila country at the head of a small company which he had formed.

During his stay in Santa Fe, he had his share of adventures, but I will relate only one or two of these, because I want to devote most of this paper to his activities in California.

The New Mexico and Arizona Apaches, in those days, were friendly to the Americans, but not to the Mexicans, and Wilson was on very good terms with them. I presume he knew how to get along with Indians, from his earlier experiences. At any

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rate, he and the local chief, one Juan Jose, were the best of friends. An American renegade, by the name of Johnson, was bribed by the Mexican governor to capture this particular Apache chief. Johnson attempted to do so by a despicable and deceitful ruse and, in the attempt, the chief and several men, women, and children of the Apaches were killed and others seriously wounded, in cold blood. Of course, the immediate result was that the Apaches went on the war-path against all Americans. Wilson, at that particular time, was leading his outfit of Americans back to Santa Fe. The Apaches intercepted this party and they were all captured, stripped of their clothing, bound hand and foot, and told that they were going to be burned at the stake, at dawn. In the night, the chief of that band, who believed it to be the best interests of the Apaches to be friendly to the Americans, set Wilson free. In the blackness, naked as a jaybird, except for his shoes, he sneaked away from the camp, hid himself in a canyon during the first night, and by travelling at night and hiding by day, he finally got back to Santa Fe, a journey of some one hundred and fifty miles. He walked naked through the Spanish bayonet, the cholla, the prickly pear, and the sharp, rocky ledges, without a trail.

Shortly after he arrived at Santa Fe, Dr. Josiah Gregg, historian of the Santa Fe Trade who was freighting a large cargo of merchandise of all kinds to Chihuahua, unloaded a large part of it in Santa Fe and left it in charge of Wilson to sell for him, so for a considerable period of time his life at Santa Fe was that of a merchant. Eventually he bought the remainder of the goods from Gregg and became a merchant in his own right.

In 1837 one faction of the Mexicans revolted against the local government and were successful. They murdered the governor and then proceeded to massacre all the Americans they could find. Wilson and five others barricaded themselves in Wilson's store and were besieged for some time until another Indian, whom he had befriended, persuaded the attackers that the Americans were not there, causing them to give up the attempt. Thus for the second time Wilson's life was saved by an Indian.

The tension between the Americans and Mexicans in New Mexico was increasing constantly; rumors were current that an

expedition was being fitted out in Texas to go and take New Mexico as a part of Texas; that if such a move were successful, the prominent foreigners in New Mexico would probably be sacrificed. So, under the circumstances, the Americans came to the conclusion that it was not safe for them to remain in New Mexico.

Wilson, William Workman, John Rowland, the latter two living in Taos, William Gordon, William Knight (who later settled in the Sacramento Valley and after whom Knight's Ferry and Knight's Landing were named) and several others formed a party to go to California. Wilson sold his business and in the first week of September, 1841, they started from their rendezvous in northern New Mexico, a place called Abiqui. They drove a herd of sheep with them to serve as food. They had, according to Wilson, an uneventful journey and arrived in Los Angeles early in November of the same year. Rowland, Workman, Knight, Gordon, and most of the Americans in the party came to California with the intention of settling. Rowland and Workman had married Mexican women in New Mexico and consequently were entitled to grants of land which they obtained without delay, but Wilson had an itching foot. He wanted to go to China. No settled domesticity for him! He made three different journeys from Los Angeles to San Francisco in search of a ship to China, but had no luck. When you think of the lack of transportation, not to mention communication, that there was between here and San Francisco in 1841, it is easy to realize that before long he became frustrated, trying to find out when the next ship was to sail, so he decided there was no sense in the China idea and that he would do as his companions had done and settle down where he was. In his own words, "After many unsuccessful efforts to leave California, and receiving so much kindness from the native Californians, I arrived at the conclusion that there was no place in the world where I could enjoy more true happiness, and true friendship, than among them. There were no courts, no juries, no lawyers, nor any need for them. The people were honest and hospitable, and their word was as good as their bond; indeed, bonds and notes of hand were entirely unknown among the natives."

Wilson would not apply for Mexican citizenship so he never received any grant of land. He bought the Jurupa Ranch from

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Don Juan Bandini in 1843 and stocked it with cattle. Jurupa Ranch is now partly occupied by the City of Riverside. Having abandoned the idea of going to China, he settled down on the ranch and led a rancharo's life for many years.

In 1844 he married Ramona Yorba, a daughter of Don Bernardo Yorba, who was one of the large landed proprietors of Spanish blood. In the fall of that year he was desperately wounded by a grizzly bear near the present City of Riverside. The bear had killed his best milk cow. Taking an American named Evan Callaghan with him, he went on horseback into the thickets to find the bear, but the bear turned out to be the aggressor and leaped on his back from ambush, bit him on the right shoulder into the lung and once in the left hip. He was carried home and almost bled to death, but was brought back to health by some of the native Californian women. He carried the scars of the bear's tusks during the rest of his life.

As soon as he could move around he went after the bear again and trailed him into a marsh and had about given up the search when his attention was called to a hole in the mud no larger, he says, than a blackbird. Again quoting his language, "When I became satisfied it was the bear's nose, I got off my horse to give him a deadly shot in the head, when he jumped out with the rapidity of lightning, and made for me, who stood about twenty feet from him; he came very near catching me a second time; a general fight followed, when the beast was finally put to death. I have mentioned this part of the occurrence to corroborate what I have been told by others, that bears have the sagacity to seek the healing of their wounds with application of mud."

In the summer of 1845 Wilson was requested by Governor Pio Pico to lead a force of mounted men into the Mojave Desert in pursuit of a band of Indians who had been constantly raiding the ranches. Pico promised him a force of eighty well organized and well armed men. Wilson took command of the expedition in San Bernardino and sent the pack train and all of the men but twenty-two through the Cajon Pass; he and the twenty-two went up the San Bernardino River through the mountains and crossed over to what is now Bear Lake.

When he arrived there, the place was swarming with bears.

His twenty-two men divided themselves into two teams of eleven each and lassoed eleven bears. He thereupon called the place Bear Lake, which name survives to this day as Big Bear Lake.

He and his men pursued their course from the top of the mountains down the Mojave River and formed a junction with the balance of the command. Shortly thereafter he saw four Indians coming towards him, and knowing that they had not seen him, he went down into the river bed and continued his course until he was opposite where the Indians were, and then went up on the bank again. He intended not to kill these Indians but to take them prisoners, but the leading man of the four happened to be the renegade he was seeking. This was an Indian known as Joaquin who had been raised as a page of the church in San Gabriel Mission but had become an outlaw. Joaquin very soon realized that Wilson was not just a traveler, but intended to capture him. He immediately whipped an arrow from his quiver and strung it on his bow, causing Wilson to shoot from the hip, in self-defense. The arrow and the bullet left their respective weapons simultaneously, Wilson being hit in the shoulder and the Indian being mortally wounded. The arrow proved to be poisoned, but Wilson had with him a Comanche Indian, a trusted retainer, who had accompanied him from New Mexico to California, and this Indian, by sucking the wound, reduced the swelling so that it healed in three or four days, although a piece of flint was left in the flesh which Wilson carried the rest of his life. He being unable, because of his wound, to continue on the campaign, the rest of the men went forward under the command of Enrique Avila, but were unsuccessful because the Indians holed up in the rocks, with the result that the campaign was abandoned and the men returned to the Valley. On the way, however, they went by Bear Lake again, and again the same twenty-two men lassoed and brought into camp eleven more bears.

The outfit returned to the Jurupa Ranch, refitted, and then went after the Indians again. This time, they went through the San Gorgonio Pass, their object being to capture two more renegade San Gabriel Mission Indians, who had taken up their residence among the Cahuilla tribe and caused the latter to commit depredations on the ranches. The expedition went through the present Palm Springs, and near there they were met by the Chief

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of the Cahuillas, whose name was Cabezon. He had about twenty of his men with him and remonstrated against any campaign against his people, claiming that he had always been friendly to the whites. Wilson told him he had no desire to wage war on the Cahuillas, but that he was determined to capture the two renegade Christians. Cabezon continued to try to argue Wilson out of the idea, with the result that Wilson put him and all of his party under arrest and took away their arms, telling Cabezon that either he and his men had to march forward with Wilson's group and help him until they could capture the two renegades or that Cabezon would have to send out some of his own men and bring the two robbers, dead or alive, to Wilson's camp. This ultimatum worked and Cabezon sent out his brother and twelve of the Cahuillas, who, in two days, brought back with them the heads of the two culprits Wilson had started out to get.

No sooner had he returned to the Jurupa Ranch and dispersed his command than ten or twelve American trappers arrived at the ranch and Wilson related to them how his campaign down the Mojave had ended with defeat. These men immediately suggested that Wilson lead them back into the Mojave to retrieve the defeat which he had suffered before. Don Enrique Avila was anxious to have another try at them and brought ten picked men, and this time, they were successful in surrounding an Indian village and called upon it to surrender. The Indians, however, refused to give up, without a fight. Wilson's trusted retainer, Evan Callaghan, was so badly wounded that everybody thought he was going to die. The Americans kept up the firing, until all the Indian men were slain. They then returned home, bringing the women and children with them, whom they turned over to the San Gabriel Mission. It is interesting to know that some of the descendants of Evan Callaghan are still employed by Miss Anne Patton, the granddaughter of Don Benito, at the Patton place in San Marino. In fact, they have lived on the place ever since the death of Wilson.

The year 1845 was a pretty busy one in Wilson's life. The Indian campaigns I have just related occurred in July or August, but in the early part of the year, the then Governor of California, General Manuel Micheltorena, against whom a rebellion had broken out in the North, started an invasion of the South in pursuit of the rebels. Wilson says that, whilst Micheltorena and a

few of his officers were unobjectionable men, by far the larger part of his adherents were a disgrace to any civilization. Consequently, all classes in the South joined the movement with great alacrity to rid the country of what was considered a great scourge.

Wilson was then on the Jurupa Ranch and was acting as the Alcalde of the District. He says he had hesitated to accept this position, because he was not a Mexican citizen and, hence, not obliged to perform any municipal duties, but at the request of his friends and in defense of his own interests, he had finally consented to act. Abel Stearns, who was then the Prefect of the District, ordered Wilson to summon every man capable of bearing arms in his district and to bring them to Los Angeles. He obeyed right away and arrived in Los Angeles very quickly with twenty or thirty men. There, he found practically every man he knew, among them John Rowland and William Workman, armed and determined to do everything in their power to hold back the invaders. Early the next morning, they all marched out to the Cahuenga Valley. Workman had a group of Americans under him. They all joined forces regardless of who was in command, with the result that there were about fifty men in the group, determined, as Wilson says, to give the enemy a regular mountaineer reception. Jose Castro was the nominal commander of the local forces, but Governor Pio Pico and his brother, Andres Pico, were in actual command. When they arrived in the Cahuenga Valley, they heard that Micheltorena had camped the night before at the Encino Ranch.

They took their position and awaited the enemy's arrival and about noon both parties began firing their cannon at each other as soon as they were in sight. No human was killed or hurt but one horse had his head shot off.

Workman, and Wilson, knowing that there were a group of Americans in the Micheltorena party, commanded by some of their old friends, and feeling convinced that the Americans were in the group under a misapprehension and that all they would have to do to induce them to leave Micheltorena would be to get hold of them and talk the matter over, agreed that Wilson should go ahead under a white flag and get in touch with the Americans in the other group. James McKinley, of Monterey, who was down here at the time, went along with Wilson under the white flag. They were shot at on the way but soon got in touch with

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the Americans on the other side. John Bidwell and some of the others came to them and Wilson made them a little speech, which he relates as follows:

“We in the southern portion of California are settled—many of you are settled and others expect to be settled. This rabble that you are with of Micheltorena’s are unfriendly to respectable humanity, and especially to Americans. The native Californians whose side we have espoused, have ever treated us kindly. If the Micheltorena rabble hold their own in this country, that will constitute an element hostile to all enterprises, and most particularly American enterprise.”

The others remarked that so far so good, but that a lot of the young American men had been induced by Micheltorena to join him by promising to give them land, that a number of them already held grants and what would Governor Pio Pico do about these land grants if they left Micheltorena and went over to his side? Wilson had an answer ready for that, stating that he had talked with Don Pio Pico that very morning on the same subject; that Pico was close at hand and he would bring him in so that he could answer their questions personally. This he proceeded to do. Pico immediately asked the Americans how many of them were citizens of Mexico and they replied that none of them were. He then explained to them that the Micheltorena grants would be utterly void, but that if they would abandon the Micheltorena cause, he would give his word of honor as a gentleman, and that of Don Benito Wilson and Don Julian Workman, to carry out this promise:

“I will protect all and each one of you in the land that you hold now, in quiet and peaceful possession, and promise you further that if you will take the necessary steps to become citizens of Mexico, I under my authority and the laws of Mexico, will issue to your people proper titles.”

Wilson interpreted what Pico said to the men; that convinced them; they said it was all they wanted, and they promised not to fire a gun against the Southerners, provided, of course, that they were not required to fight on the Southern side. This was agreeable and thus the American contingent was eliminated from the Micheltorena horde. Micheltorena later tried to outflank the Southerners but they caught up with him on the Los

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Angeles River, in the Los Feliz Ranch, whereupon Micheltorena surrendered and was forced to march back up the Los Angeles River to the Cahuenga Pass, and from thence down to the plains west of Los Angeles and across to San Pedro, where he embarked on a vessel and was taken back to Mexico. Wilson says that after that campaign they all went home, perfectly satisfied with the result.

Nothing of great interest seems to have happened thereafter, and Wilson devoted himself to his ranch, until the declaration of war between Mexico and the United States in 1846. Commodore Sloat raised the American flag over Monterey and the excitement was intense in Los Angeles because of rumors that the Americans were on the march. Wilson was still Alcalde, or Justice of the Peace, in his district, and was summoned by the Governor Pio Pico, to cooperate in the raising of forces to repel the invaders. To this demand he declined, being, as he says, an American citizen and not a military man, the latter, I would say, being an understatement. He was then threatened with arrest if he did not comply, so he gathered around him about a dozen Americans who had left Los Angeles because of the unpleasant circumstances. He sent back word to the Governor not to try to arrest him and his group for he would resist, but that if he would consider that Wilson was not a Mexican citizen, nor a man disposed to do military duty, he would pledge his word to be peaceable and to do no act hostile to the country. That seemed satisfactory as he heard nothing more about the matter until Commodore Stockton arrived with his squadron in San Pedro Bay. Then Governor Pico sent Wilson a friendly note, asking him to come and see him, as he wanted to talk to him. In Wilson's words, this is what the Governor had to say:

“My time here as Governor is no doubt very short. You have always been a friend of mine, and are married to a daughter of one of my warmest friends. What can I do for you?”

“He asked me if there was no tract of land that I would like him to grant me whilst he had, as he thought, the power to do it. I answered laughingly, declining, as I was not a citizen, to which he remarked with a laugh, that everyone thought I was, even if I was not. Governor Pico went on to say that tomorrow would probably be his last day; that he was going to leave, for



—Photo Courtesy of Will Thrall

BENJAMIN D. WILSON AND WIFE
Grandfather and Grandmother of General George S. Patton, Jr.



—Photo Courtesy of Will Thrall

ONE OF THE SHAKE SHACKS

Erected by B. D. Wilson on the Mount Wilson trail used in his lumbering activities.



—Photo Courtesy of Will Threll

ADOBE HOUSE OF B. D. WILSON IN THE SEVENTIES
on the site of Present Oak Knoll.

B. D. Wilson stands on the porch, while George S. Patton, father of General Patton, hero of World War II, is petting the greyhound. Mrs. Patton, Don Benito's daughter, is standing behind the children near the steps.

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he gave no credence to Castro's assertions of intending to attempt repelling the American forces."

Wilson continued to have interviews with the Governor until he actually left, and on departing, the Governor told him to go to meet Stockton, wherever he might be, to give him his best regards and to tell him that he, Pico, intended to abandon the country, and that he hoped he would not mistreat the Californians. Wilson, John Rowland, and others went the next morning to meet Stockton, to whom Wilson communicated the news that Castro had broken camp and left and that Governor Pico was on his way to Sonora. On Wilson's way down to meet Stockton, one of the Dominguez family gave him his favorite saddle horse to be presented to Stockton, the horse being equipped for the Commodore's personal use. The result was that Stockton and Wilson rode together from San Pedro into Los Angeles, having a very pleasant time. Stockton's blue-jackets arrived late the same evening. Everything was quiet for everyone knew that Pico and Castro, with certain of their followers, were on their way out of the country.

Wilson remained a few days in Los Angeles, visiting the Commodore frequently, and rendering him such services as he could, but soon told him he would have to return to his ranch as he had done all that he could for him. Stockton answered with some seriousness, as Wilson says, "Laying his hand upon my shoulder (Stockton is a politician as well as a soldier), 'I don't think we ought to place too much reliance on Castro's actual leaving for Sonora, he may go to Sonora, or he may only go to the frontier, and await for a rabble of Sonorians to come back and retake the country, and it is my duty as Commander, and for the interest of this country, that I should have some one on the frontier watching events.' " He added that upon inquiring, Wilson's friends had told him that Wilson was the proper man to perform that important service. Wilson tried to get out of it but the Commodore insisted and commissioned him a Captain. Wilson then said that if Stockton would promise him that he would not be required to leave the district where his family and his interests were, he would accept the commission. That was agreeable, so the next day Wilson gathered together twenty or thirty men and left for the Jurupa Ranch with his squad.

Soon after arriving at his home ranch, Wilson reported to

Stockton that he had learned positively that General Castro had crossed the Colorado River, at Yuma, and had gone into Sonora. Thereupon, the Commodore stated that he was going to depart, as he didn't think there was any further danger and that he would leave Lt. Gillespie with a small force in charge at Los Angeles, to whom Wilson might communicate anything worthy of being reported. Having nothing much to do around his ranch, Wilson went up into the mountains and had some friendly "palavers," as he called them, with Indians that he knew and arranged for these Indians to keep a lookout and advise him, if they saw any movements of troops. Having done that, he went on a hunt in the mountains. There, after a few days of hunting and shooting, he got a message from David Alexander and John Rowland that they had fled from Los Angeles and were then at Wilson's Jurupa Ranch, that there was a general revolt of all of the Californians and Mexicans against Gillespie and all Americans and that Wilson had better return, as fast as possible. He marched all night and arrived at his ranch at daylight and found Alexander, Rowland and John Rubidoux, the man after whom Mount Rubidoux, at Riverside, is named, who told him that Gillespie had carried on a most unjustifiable course towards the Californians and Mexicans in Los Angeles and had been most despotic in his treatment of them. He also found a letter from Gillespie, asking Wilson to come, as fast as he could, to his, Gillespie's assistance. He told Alexander and Rowland and the others that he and his party had shot away most of their ammunition on their hunting trip but they handed him a letter from Isaac Williams, of the Chino ranch, which invited Wilson to bring his men to the Chino and assured him that he, Williams, had plenty of ammunition. Consequently, they all set off for the Chino ranch immediately. When they got there, they were told by Williams that an officer and some soldiers of the California Brigade had just been there and taken all the ammunition he had.

Wilson then called his men together and told them that, in his judgment, the best thing for them to do would be to ride over to the base of the mountains and make their way to Los Angeles that way, but the majority of them, being new to the country and having a very low opinion of the fighting ability of the native Californian, insisted on staying where they were. Next morning, from eighty to one hundred men on horseback appeared

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Wilson sent another one of the Callaghan brothers out to parley with them. Callaghan soon returned with a broken arm, having been fired at by the Californians and, once again, Wilson advised his group to make their getaway that night and join up with Gillespie, in Los Angeles, but these inexperienced and hot-headed Americans insisted that they could defeat any group of Californians and refused to go. At break of day, they found themselves almost surrounded by Californian horsemen, a good many of whom had taken a position on a knoll which overlooked the Williams house. The Williams house was the conventional early Californian adobe, built around a large patio, with one main entrance, and with a roof made of cane or rushes covered with brea or the natural asphalt that was obtained from seepages at various places in the country. The Californians soon set fire to the house and, of course, the asphalt burned briskly and with a terrific smoke. As soon as the Californians were satisfied that the fire would force the Americans out of the building, the Commander of the Californians, Cerbelo Varela, came to the main door and told Wilson, whom he had known for a long time, that if he and his men would surrender, no harm whatever would be done to them.

At this, Wilson's men, who had been so valiant the night before, agreed immediately that they would surrender if Varela would send his men away. The result was that all of the Americans marched out and gave up their arms, were mounted and started on their way, under guard, to Los Angeles. Varela insisted that Wilson ride along with him, while all of the others went forward in command of one Diego Sepulveda. The large group was quite a distance ahead and suddenly Varela and Wilson noticed that they had all been halted and that something seemed amiss. Varela immediately spurred his horse forward and found that Sepulveda was about to shoot the whole crowd. Varela placed himself between his command and the prisoners and declared that he would run his sword through the first man who attempted to harm the prisoners, that he had given his word as a gentleman to save the lives of the prisoners, and that if they wanted to shoot anybody, they had better shoot him. Thus, the lives of all were saved and Wilson says that although, in later years, Varela became very much dissipated and really a vagabond, the Americans always came to his assistance and, when-

ever he would be thrown in jail for breaking the peace, some American would step forward and pay his fine.

That evening, they all arrived on the mesa which we now know as Boyle Heights, and were placed in a small adobe house. Before long, General Flores, in command of the Californians, sent for Wilson and told him that he desired him to send a letter to Captain Gillespie, who was then encamped on Fort Hill, being the hill back of the present Hall of Justice, and which is now being leveled, informing him that Wilson and his men were prisoners and telling him that General Flores was a Christian, as well as a soldier, and that he wished to avoid unnecessary bloodshed, and that his men were anxious to attack Gillespie, and that one charge from them would cause the destruction of Gillespie and all his soldiers. Flores' proposition was that he would allow Gillespie and his men to march out, next morning, to San Pedro, carrying all their arms and unmolested by the Californians. Wilson sent the letter as requested, was convinced that, if Gillespie had refused the terms, Flores would have attacked that night, for the resentment against Gillespie was extreme, and that they would have overwhelmed Gillespie. Flores had demanded an immediate answer to the letter, stating that, if the answer were in the negative, he would not be responsible for the consequences. The result was that Gillespie and his men departed early the next morning.

Wilson and his associates were all marched into Los Angeles, still prisoners. The Californians were very kind to them and brought them blankets, food, clothing and tobacco and, as soon as they were satisfied that Gillespie and his men had gone, they told Wilson that if he would sign for himself and for the other men, a parole of honor that none of them would again take up arms or use their influence, in any way, during the existence of hostilities between Mexico and the United States, that they would free them, then and there. Wilson said that he would accept the offer, on condition that the obligations of their parole would not go beyond such time as they might be exchanged with the Americans for other prisoners-of-war. That was not acceptable to the Californians, so the group remained prisoners.

Before long, Captain Mervin, of the United States Navy, landed a force of men at San Pedro and, with Lt. Gillespie, took up the march to again capture Los Angeles. General Flores con-

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cocted the idea of sending the whole group of Americans to Mexico, as prisoners, thereby enhancing Flores' reputation as a great commander, but the wiser heads among the Californians rebelled against such an idea and a group of them, under the command of Ignacio Palomares, attacked the Flores' headquarters and defeated them. The next day, Palomares gave the prisoners horses and took them all out to Mission San Gabriel, where they remained for several days, enjoying the fresh air, but were soon sent back again to prison in Los Angeles, although by now, the Palomares group and the Flores group had entered into a definite agreement that Wilson and his fellow prisoners were to be treated with decency and humanity and not sent out of the country.

The Mervin expedition was forced to return to their ship by the Californians, but it was not long before Commodore Stockton, General Kearney and Colonel Fremont, with their Americans, were converging, from various directions, on the city, and Andres Pico came to Wilson and told him that all of the Californians were marching to meet Stockton and Kearney on their way up from San Diego and that Wilson must give his parole and leave prison, for his own safety, as Pico had no spare force to guard them or protect them from the rabble and that Pico would bring two of his finest horses, one for Rowland and one for Wilson, to permit them to get away safely.

The next morning, all of the prisoners were released, horses were brought, as promised, and the men went their separate ways, Wilson to his family, near Santa Ana, and Rowland to his family on the Puente ranch. Wilson passed the American forces on his way home, but avoided speaking to them, or to anyone else enroute. A day or two later, knowing that the contending forces would meet near the San Gabriel River, Wilson came back, skirting the Coyote Hills, and observed the fight. The battle was indecisive, that day; but, on the next day, as Wilson watched, he saw the Californians retreating. The next day, he heard that Flores and his Mexicans had given up the battle and were fleeing to Mexico, by way of the San Gorgonio Pass.

No sooner had this final military victory been won, than many of the old Californians came to Wilson and asked him to intercede with Commander Stockton for them. This he pro-

ceeded to do and succeeded in having the Americans forgive many of the prominent Californians, including Andres Pico.

After Stockton's departure, General Kearney summoned Wilson and urged him to stay with him, as he had to have someone who knew the people and whom he could trust. Wilson says that Kearney was also quite suspicious and fearful of Fremont, and that he wanted Wilson and some of his friends to ride with him, Kearney, back to San Diego. Wilson did as requested, and accompanied General Kearney as far as the Santa Ana River, where he bade him goodbye.

With the end of the hostilities between the United States and Mexico, Wilson returned to his civil pursuits. He was not a member of the Constitutional Convention, but took part in the selection of the best men from this end of the state to go to the Convention as delegates. After the state was organized, he was elected the first Clerk of the County of Los Angeles, on condition that he should not have to serve personally, but could designate a deputy who would run the office and have all the emoluments. When the City of Los Angeles was incorporated, he was elected its first Mayor. In 1852, he was appointed by President Fillmore, as Indian Agent for the Southern District, but was not able to work harmoniously with Lt. (later General) Beale, and resigned the Indian agency, after a short time. In 1855, he was elected State Senator, and served two other terms in 1869 and 1870.

His first wife, Ramona Yorba, died in March of 1849, leaving one daughter; and, in February of 1853, he married Margaret S. Hereford. Two more daughters were the result of this marriage, Ruth and Annie. Annie never married, but Ruth became the wife of George S. Patton and the mother of General George S. Patton, Jr.

I will not go into too great detail as to Wilson's business activities, other than to say that, for many years, he operated a sizable mercantile establishment at the corner of Alameda and Macy Streets. At one time or another, he was the owner of all or part of the territory now covered by Westwood and the University of California at Los Angeles, and of practically all of what is now Pasadena. He subdivided and laid out the City of Alhambra. He and some of his associates acquired a great deal of the present Wilmington and sold it to Phineas Banning, who

Don Benito Wilson

established the town of Wilmington. He and Banning, together, erected a barracks, known as Drum Barracks, at Wilmington, during the Civil War; and when the war was over, Wilson founded the Wilson College for Women, at Wilmington, in a part of the old Drum Barracks Building. He dug the first ditch bringing water from Eaton Canyon into what is now Pasadena. He built the first trail to the top of Mt. Wilson, in search of timber, with which to make casks for wine. He established one of the first, if not the first, successful vineyards and wine-making operations, at what was then called Lake Vineyard, now a part of San Marino. He was sent to Washington to assist in securing appropriations for Los Angeles Harbor and was so successful that he was given an enormous public reception on his return.

He finally established his home place on property which he bought from Dona Victoria Reid, the Indian widow of the Scotchman, Hugo Reid, who lived in San Gabriel, and who was the first owner of the Rancho Santa Anita. This property consisted of what Wilson then called his Lake Vineyard Estate, comprising a substantial part of the present Cities of San Marino and Pasadena, and particularly the attractive portion on the mesa, now known as Oak Knoll. Wilson erected a large adobe house at the foot of the hill, just below the present Patton residence. The George S. Pattons lived in this adobe until the erection of the present Patton house. In 1911 or 1912, the adobe walls began to crumble, the place was deemed unsafe, and after the erection of the present Patton house, it was demolished. That part of the Oak Knoll property upon which the Huntington Library is now built, was inherited by the daughter of Wilson's first marriage. This daughter had married J. De Barth Shorb. The more westerly part of the property was inherited by the daughters, Ruth and Annie.

The Wilson household at Lake Vineyard was one of the centers of social life during the period. Wilson died there, in 1878.

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When one considers the fact that Don Benito, as a comparative youngster, had the confidence of not only the Californians, but also of the Americans, that he was the trusted advisor of Commodore Sloat and also General Kearney, that his leadership was sought in all of the early emergencies, that he was trusted, time after time, with important civic and military responsibilities and that he never failed in any of these responsibilities, I believe, as I said at the beginning, that he was the strong American of that formative period. Perhaps the greatest contribution he made to the country was the fact that he was the grandfather of General George S. Patton, Jr., and I like to believe that much of the General's fearlessness, initiative, dash, and strength of character came from his maternal grandfather.