

Brief History of the Tesla Area

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Thousands of years ago, the Yokuts, Ohlones, and probably other Native American tribes inhabited the Tesla area. They came for the abundant game and plant food, and established seasonal villages along stream courses.

In 1776, Spanish explorer Juan Bautista de Anza passed through the Corral Hollow region while on his return trip to Monterey. De Anza camp number 102 was designated at Tesla by a plaque erected in 1976 during the Bicentennial Celebration of that famous trek. Because of the strong winds prevalent in the canyon, de Anza named it "El Arroyo de los Buenos Aires," or Creek of the Good Winds.

Early Mexican vaqueros later established a well-known trail called "El Camino Viejo" through Corral Hollow which was to connect San Antonio (Oakland) with San Pedro (Los Angeles). It was along this trail that the vaqueros ran cattle and wild mustangs and held them in temporary corrals before being herded down the trail to Mexico.

In 1846, Captain Charles Imus and his party of emigrants, who parted from the Donner party at Fort Bridger, made a winter camp in the mouth of Corral Hollow. Like the Mexican vaqueros, Captain Imus also captured wild horses and built corrals until he was ordered by landowner Antonio Pico to leave for trespassing. These abandoned horse corrals were noticed by the Argonauts traveling over El Camino Viejo on their way to the gold fields, and the canyon soon became known as "Corral Hollow."



In 1850, Horatio Wright, John Stockholm, William Breyton, and Edward B. Carrell established a small tavern in the mouth of Corral Hollow to serve the passing Argonauts food, drinks, and a place to rest. This place was known as the Zink House because its roof was made of zinc sheets. Among them, only Carrell was to remain as a permanent settler later embarking upon the sheep business. Another frequent visitor was the famous Grizzly Adams, who hunted and captured grizzlies and lions for his wild animal museum in San Francisco. Legend says that members of the Joaquin Murietta gang used Castle Rock as a hideout.

The discovery of coal in 1855 at Tesla changed the face of the canyon from a ranch setting to an industrial complex. The first commercial coal mine in California started here by selling 60 tons of the lignite in Stockton in 1856. This culminated in a coal rush to Corral Hollow in the 1860s. Five coal companies attempted to market the coal only to be wiped out by the flood of 1862. Carrell teamed up with another sheepherder John O'Brien, living at the future site of Tesla, and opened the Eureka mine. A few thousand tons of coal was sent to the San Francisco market. At the Ladd mine, Aurelius Ladd mined manganese in 1863. This mine was operated on and off up through World War II.

In 1868, the Commercial coal mine was also reopened when the Stockton Company learned of the



coming of the Central Pacific Railroad. The Commercial coal was just what the railroad needed to pull its trains over the Livermore hills. A four-mile spur was extended from Ellis Station to the mouth of Corral Hollow to receive this coal, and the Central Pacific converted all of its wood-burning locomotives to coal-burners. This went well until the Commercial mine caught fire in 1870 and was forced to close.

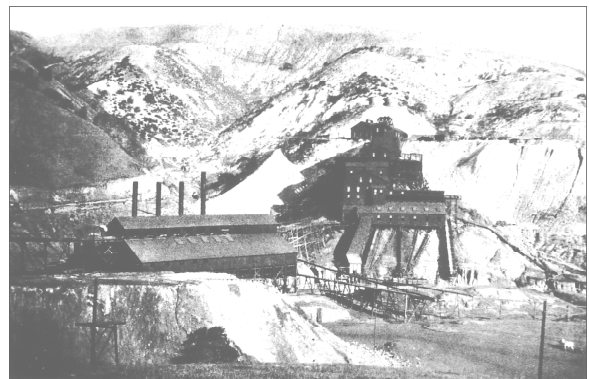
Along Arroyo Seco Creek, one mile west of Tesla, a Welsh coal mining camp known as Harrisville was started by Thomas Harris and Jenkin Richards, when they opened the Livermore coal mine in 1874. This camp grew to some 300 with a store, saloon, two hotels, and a school. The Lion of the Vigilantes William T. Coleman of San Francisco was owner of the Summit coal mine. Coal from these mines supplied fuel for the Livermore Valley.

The 1870s and 1880s saw an influx of sheep and cattle ranchers establishing themselves in the area. These included such families as the Callaghans, Connollys, Petersons, Millers, Taylors, Smiths, and others. Wool and livestock became a permanent economic base for the area.

In 1889, John Treadwell arrived and opened the Tesla coal mines. He formed the San Francisco and San Joaquin Coal Company and built a modern company town with blocks of family homes, five boardinghouses, a hotel, store, school, hall, and many shops. The Tesla coal mines, named for Nikola Tesla, became the largest coal producer in California from 1896 to 1906. Tesla briquettes was a nationally known product, when Tesla was the first to produce it in the U.S. Treadwell built a railroad to Stockton and then extended it to Oakland, which became part of the transcontinental Western Pacific Railway Company of 1902. Tesla grew to a population of over 1200 during the late 1890s. Rich clay seams were discovered in the coal mine, and in 1902 was born the Carnegie Brick and Pottery Company, built four miles east of Tesla, to make brick and terra cotta. Two years later, the Pottery sewer pipe plant was built between Carnegie and Tesla. Carnegie itself became a town of its own with a population of about 300 of mostly Italian artisans.

The Tesla industrial complex all came to an end in 1911 when a flood destroyed the railroad and workings. The financially strapped company could not rebuild and was forced to close the plants and lay off workers. Families left, leaving the ghost towns of Tesla and Carnegie. Eventually the buildings were razed or removed. Once again, Corral Hollow returned to the pastoral scene of cattle, sheep, and horses. 1930-1934, the Hetch Hetchy Water Project dug tunnels in the mountains to the south. Mitchell Shaft, located at the head of Mitchell Ravine, was the scene of a fatal explosion.

By 1922, the railroad was removed to the River Rock gravel works at the mouth of the canyon, and the railroad bed was turned into an auto road. Several attempts to reopen the Tesla clay and sand mines had failed. During the 1950s, Lawrence Livermore Laboratories established Site 300 on the north side of Corral Hollow Road for an explosive test site, and later other research firms set up field laboratories here. A fire station was also established near Castle Rock.



By the 1960s, the hills at Carnegie had attracted dirt bike riders. This eventually turned into a commercial riding park called the Carnegie Motorcycle Park. In 1961, Carrell's home site was designated a California Historic Landmark No. 755, and Carnegie was designated California Historic Landmark No. 740. But by 1970, both markers were brutally vandalized and the bronze plaques were stolen. In 1979, the Carnegie Motorcycle Park was sold to the Carnegie State Vehicular Recreation Area, which developed the property for motor-cross and hill-climbing events, supported by a concession store and campgrounds. In 1981, California Parks & Recreation Commission approved the Carnegie General Plan. In the 1980s, developers' plan to build a new town of Carnegie in the mouth of Corral Hollow had failed. In 1987, local ranchers attempted to revive Tesla out of their frustrations in dealing with Livermore and the local water problems, but this effort also failed. From 1998 to 2003, Carnegie SVRA purchased over 3000 acres of land as part of the Alameda-Tesla Expansion Project. Private residences in Corral Hollow were converted to Carnegie staff homes and offices. The Draft EIR on the expansion project in 2000 was rejected and a new one was initiated.

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