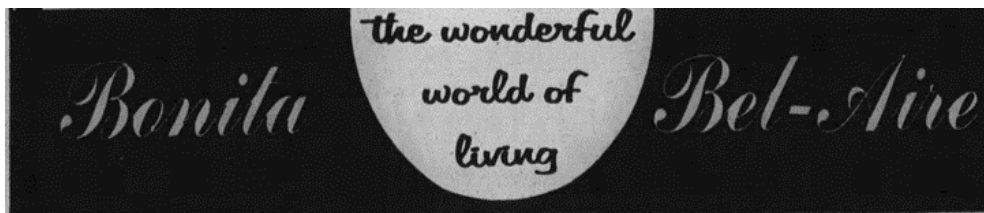


# Bonita Bel-Aire History

## Part I



By George Gillow  
November 2021, Revision 1 July 2023



# Early History

- Bonita was very rural until major developments began in the 1960s.
- The area where the Bonita Bel-Aire subdivision was built was annexed by the City of Chula Vista in 1962.
- The first Bonita Bel-Aire homes were built in 1963.



**Bonita Road in the late 1950s near where Wells Fargo Bank is today.**



# Rural Sweetwater/Bonita Valley in 1954

The valley was mostly dairies, lemon groves and orange groves.

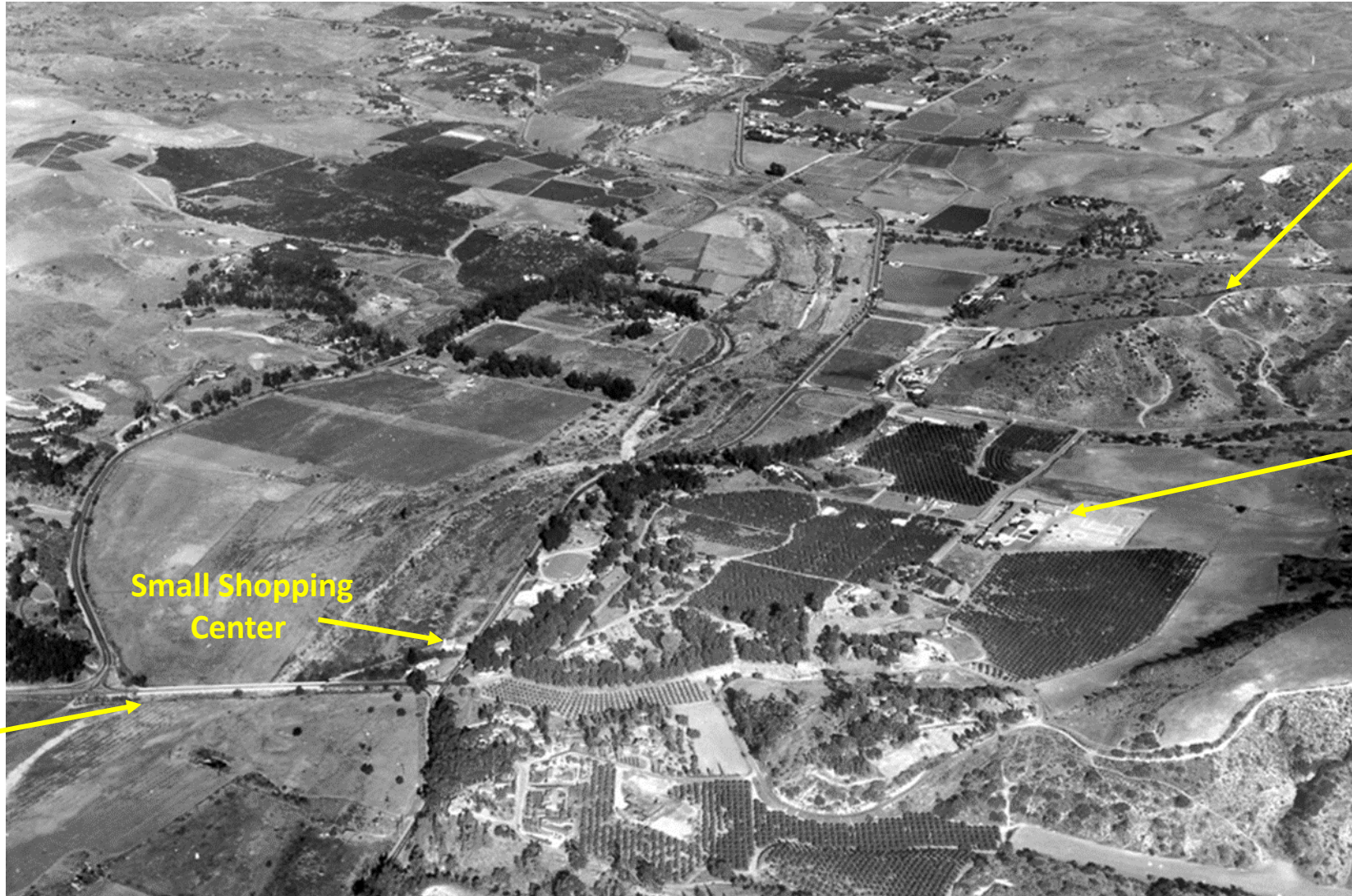
Aerial picture looking east.

Not many homes in Bonita.

Small shopping Center:

1. There was one gasoline station.
2. La Tienda store sold everything from cosmetics to hardware.
3. Bonita Store sold groceries.

Willow Street Bridge



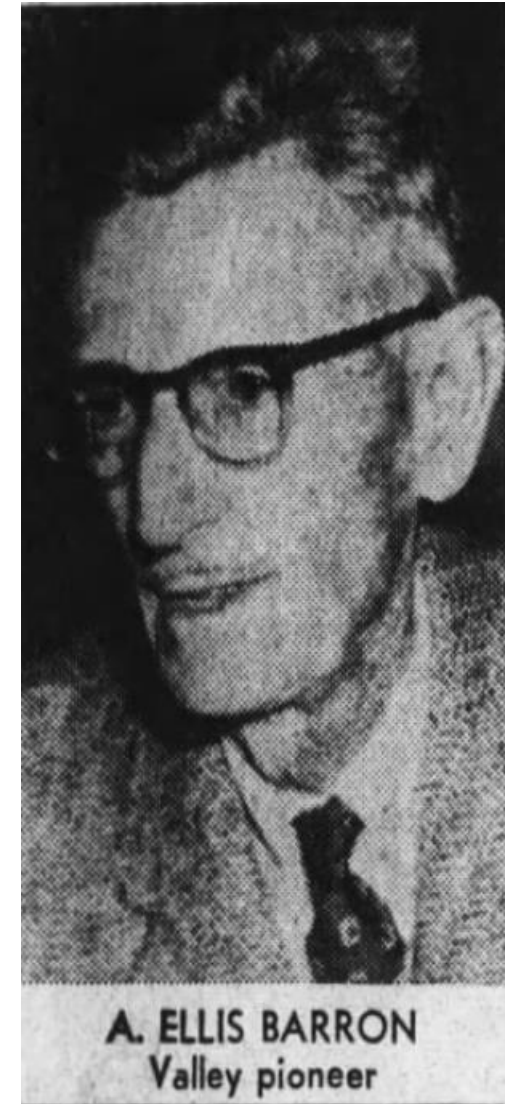
Future location of Bonita Bel-Aire

Allen School

Small Shopping Center

# Early History

- All of the hillside that would become Bonita Bel-Aire was owned by A. Ellis Barron.
- Barron was a rancher who owned a lot of property in the Sweetwater Valley.
  - He had sheep that grazed on the hills that became Bonita Bel-Aire.





# Comment on Ellis Barron's Sheep

**Here is a comment from Bud Wilson:** *My recollection is they were herded by Frank Etchenique. He had a home on Otoy lakes Road just west of the current intersection. It was just a dirt road as I recall. He would graze them from the area around Bonita Vista HS down, northerly to the dairy. In the spring we too grazed the hill in search of wildflowers known as shooting stars and chocolate bells.*



—Mr. Etchinique, the sheep raiser, has driven a large herd of sheep to the grazing ground on Otoy ranch.



Shooting Stars



Chocolate Bells

# Early History

- **A. Ellis Barron sold the property to a group of Italian/Portuguese tuna fishermen in 1957.**
  - This group included John B. Vattuone, Salvatore S. Alioto, Manuel Serpa and Mathew Olivera.
  - **Mathew Olivera** was the largest landowner and leader of the group.
- The purchase price was \$69,000. *“That was quite a catch for the fishermen.”*
  - We paid \$68,500 for our house in 1974.
- The property was annexed to the City in 1962.
  - That year it was sold to **Hart and Sons** who developed the property.

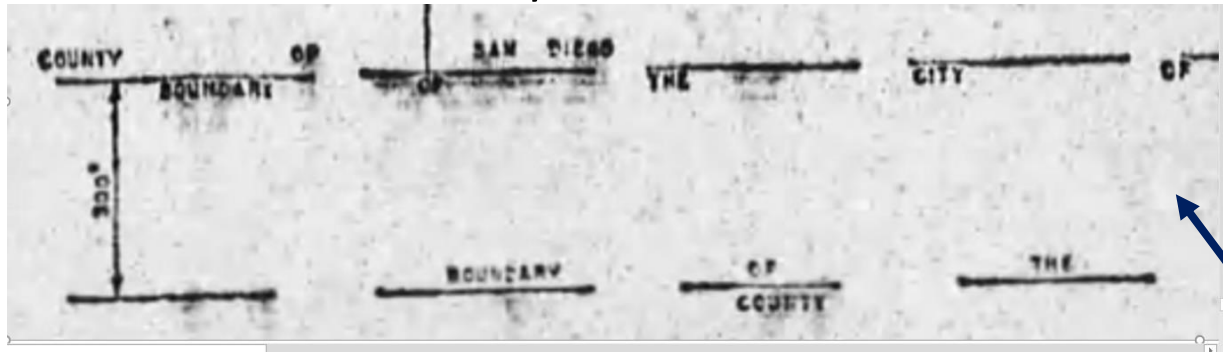


Emily and Mathew Olivera



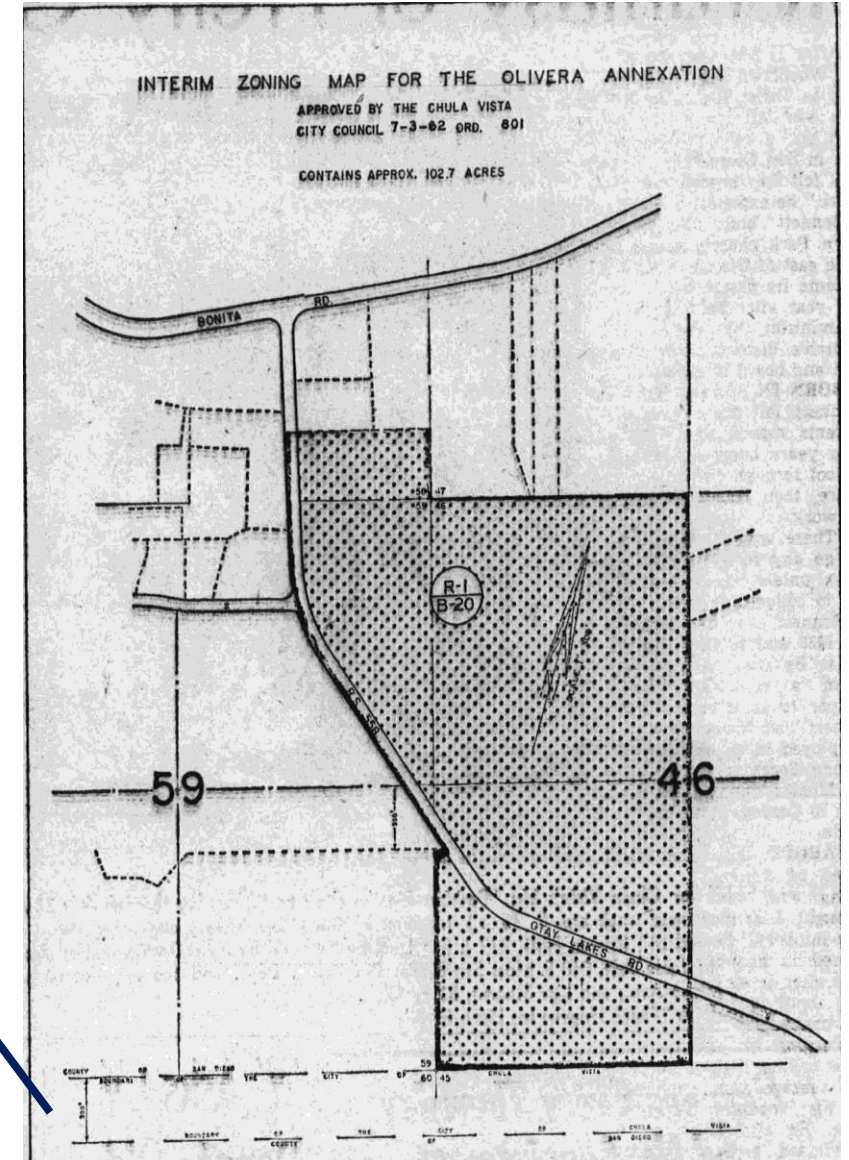
# Annexation by the City of Chula Vista on July 3, 1962.

- The Bonita Bel-Aire subdivision area was annexed by the City of Chula in July 1962.
  - Called the Olivera Annexation (**Named for Mathew Olivera.**)
- At the time, the western boundary of the City was just west of where the I-805 freeway is today.
- The State requires city limits to be contiguous.
  - Therefore, the City did a corridor annexation.



## 300' corridor:

It extended straight to the west about where I-805 is today. The corridor then turned 90° toward the south and connected to the city limit line near Hilltop High School.

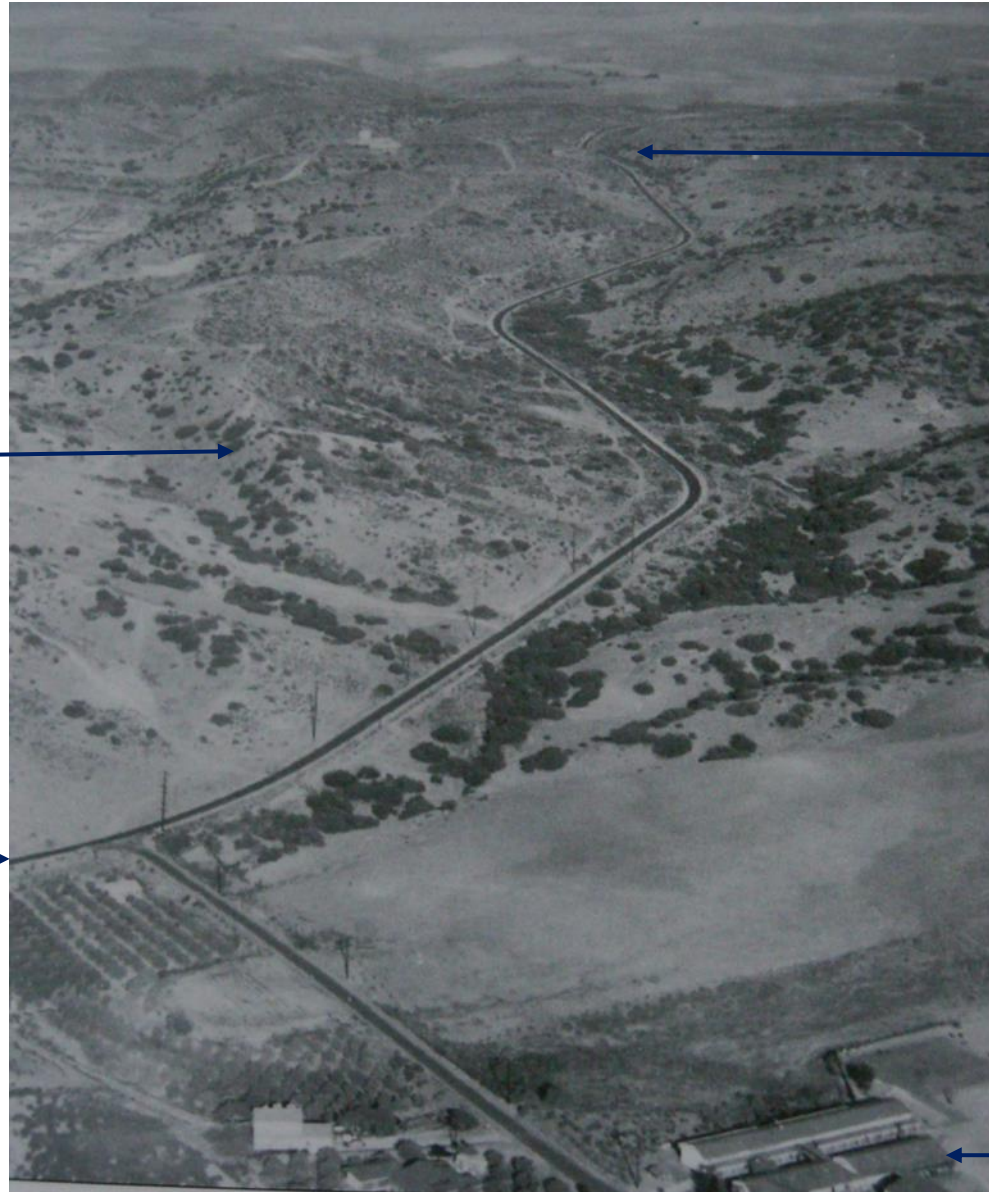


## Aerial view about the time the property was purchased by Hart and Sons.

Future location of  
Bonita Bel-Aire.

Otay Lakes Road

This aerial view, taken in 1961, is on page 19 of the book "**Images of America Bonita**" (available at the Bonita Museum and on Amazon.com).



Future Southwestern  
College about here.

According to Bud Wilson, long time Bonita resident, people would walk on trails at the top of the hill where Greenwood Pl. is now located.

People would hunt for quail and rabbits on the hill. They called the hill "Barron's hill."

Allen School



# Developers Hart and Sons

- Developers, Hart and Sons, planned on constructing 127 homes.
  - Ground-breaking was in Sept. 1962.
  - Construction began in Jan. 1963.

Clipping from  
Chula Vista Star  
News, May 5<sup>th</sup>,  
1963.

I wonder how  
many homes still  
have mirrored  
bathroom walls?

Each home will have two and a half baths many of which will have mirrored walls.

Homes will have three, four and five bedrooms; all-electric built-in kitchens; terrazzo entry floors.

The homes will be fully carpeted throughout with nylon.

Hart said since they will be located within city limits, the homes will be in the Chula Vista Elementary School District and the Sweetwater Union High School District.



INSPECTING the construction site of their Bonita Bel-Aire subdivision are builder Pat Hart (r.) brother Jerry (l.) and Roger Lindemann, sales manager of Hart and Sons. The Harts plan to develop 127 luxury homes on

(Star-News Photo)

Otay Lakes road south of Bonita road, overlooking the Bonita Valley Country Club and the ocean. Ground was broken this week for the first 50 lots.

# Why does the *Aire* have an “e” instead of just *Air* like many others?

- **Bel Air is French for beautiful air.**
- **Bel Aire is French for beautiful area.**
- In the 1960s, the air quality in Southern California was much worse than today.
  - I remember seeing thick purple smog here in San Diego.
- The Bel-Air neighborhood in LA where celebrities live was established in 1923 by Alphonzo Bel. If it had been named in the 1960s, it may have been called Bel-Aire because of the reduced air pollution at the time.
- Calling our neighborhood a beautiful area rather than beautiful air made more sense in 1962.



**Los Angeles smog in the 1960s.**

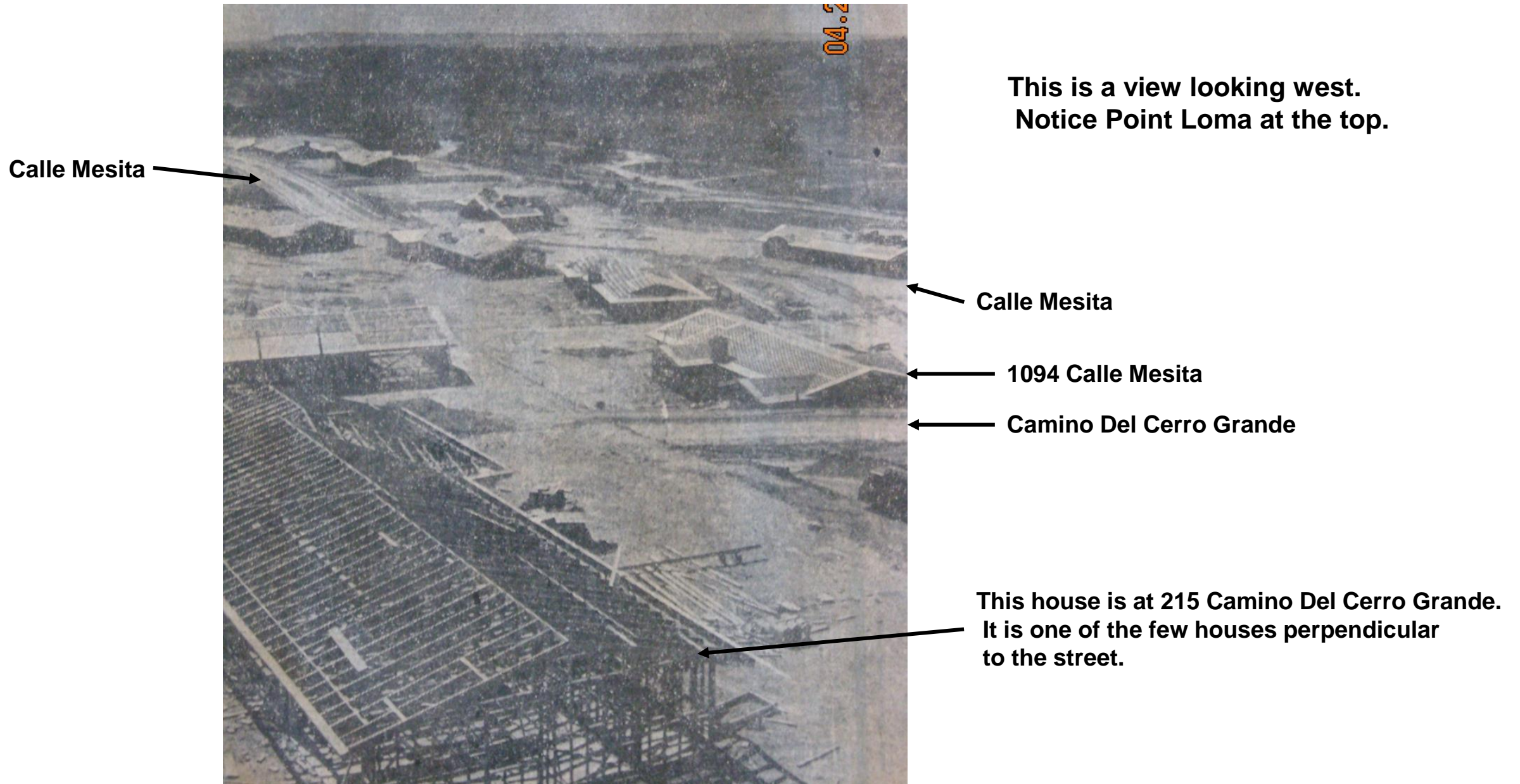
**On a 1960s *Tonight* show, Johnny Carson joked that flights into LA airport were delayed because the airplanes were stuck in the smog.**

**Also, this was going around:  
*Red in the morning sailors take warning.  
Red at night sailor's delight.  
Brown all day.  
You're docked in LA.***





# Homes under construction in 1963.

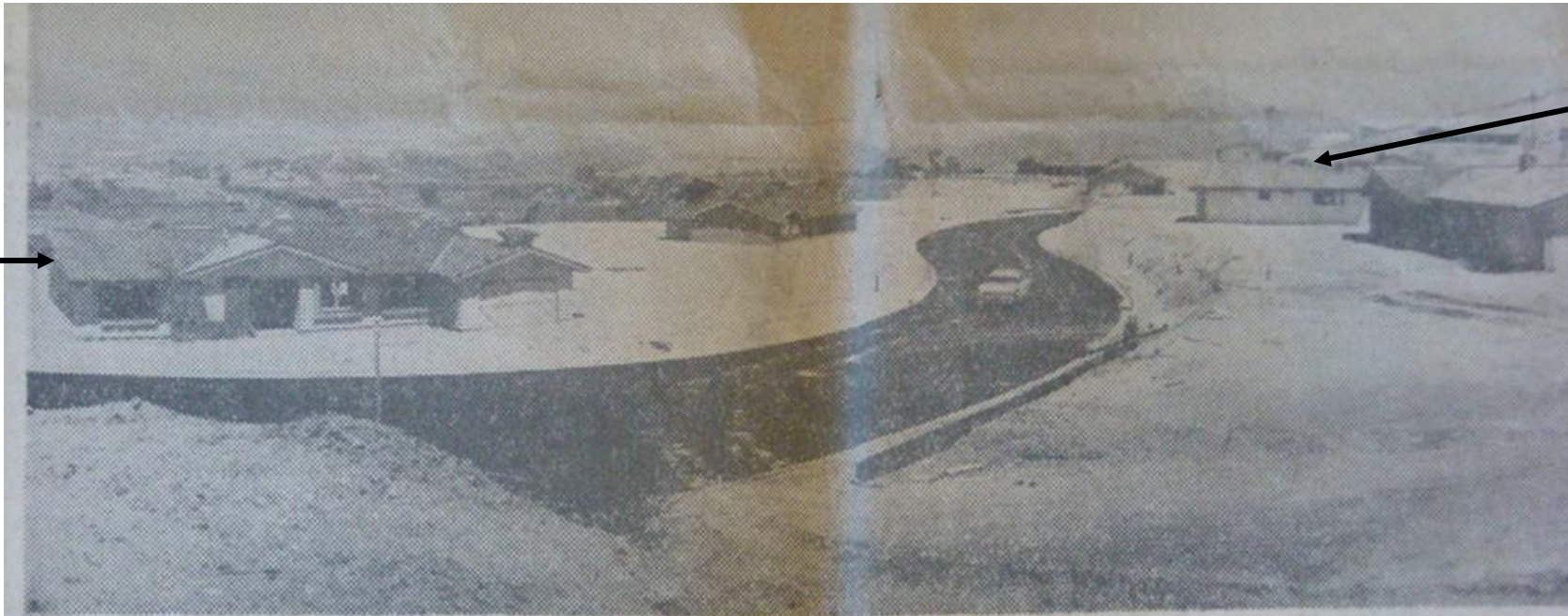




# Finished houses ready for sale on Calle Mesita.

This is a clipping from the San Diego Union-Tribune dated September 22, 1963.

1065 Calle Mesita →



1078 Calle Mesita  
The house is not parallel to the street. This is the west side of the house.

BONITA BEL-AIR is one of the luxury residential projects now under way, with 100 homes planned on this plateau overlooking Bonita Valley. Each home is on a half-acre site, priced up to \$42,000. Landscaping will change the barren look.

The street today





## Aerial View in 1964

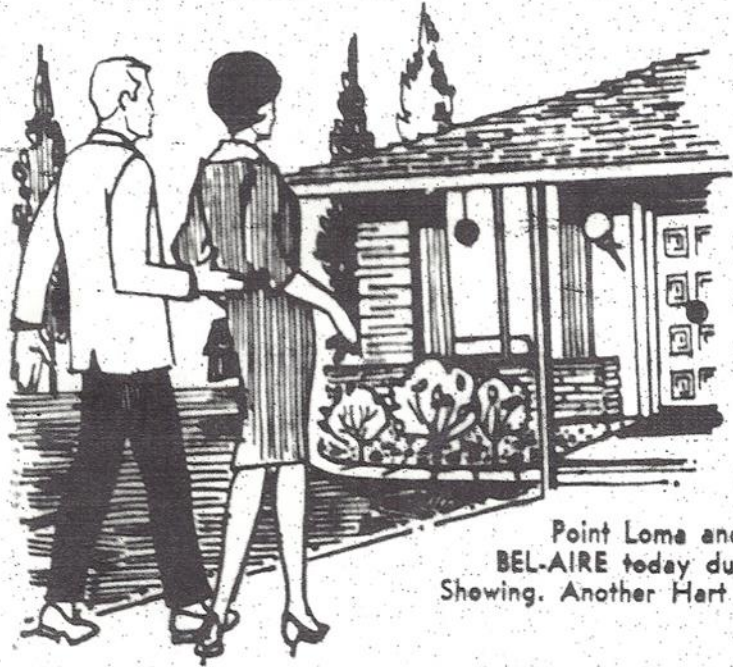
- **Top to bottom streets going East to West:**
  - Calle Mesita.
  - Calle Escarpada.
  - Part of Camino Elevado.
  - Otay Lakes Road.
- **Right to left streets going North to South:**
  - Camino Del Cerro Grande (CDCG).
  - Calle La Mirada.
  - Part of Camino Elevado.
- **The City chose the street names.** The Harts wanted them **changed** to names of their daughters and one to Bonita Bel Aire Ave.
  - Camino Del Cerro Grande to **Jennifer**.
  - Camino Elevado to **Bonita Bel Aire**.
  - Calle Mesita to **Sandra**.
  - Calle La Mirada to **Carol**.
  - Calle Escarpada to **Linda**.
  - **The city rejected the changes.**





# Ads from July 1963

## PREVIEW SHOWING!



Bonita's spectacular new hilltop residential community BONITA BEL-AIRE invites your inspection of its spacious three, four, and five bedroom, 2 1/2 bath homes. These quality 1,800 to 2,600 square foot homes are competitively priced from \$29,000 to \$40,000. BONITA BEL-AIRE looks down on the Bonita Valley Country Club and offers sweeping views of

Point Loma and Mexico. Visit BONITA BEL-AIRE today during this Special Preview Showing. Another Hart and Sons development.

Sales Office  
Phone 477-1194

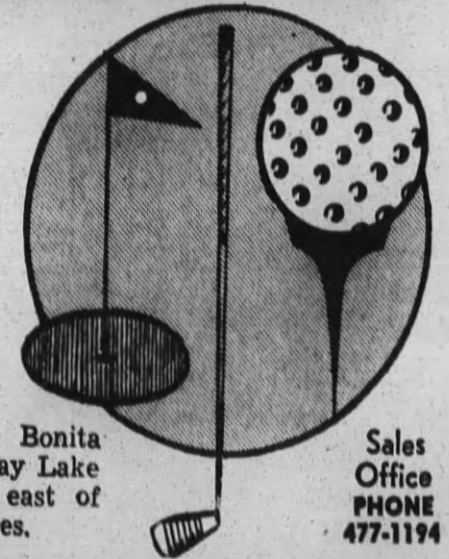
Located on Bonita Road at  
Otay Lake Road just East  
of Bonita stores.

*Bonita Bel-Aire*

## PREVIEW SHOWING

Bonita's spectacular new hilltop residential community BONITA BEL-AIRE invites your inspection of its spacious three, four, and five bedroom, 2 1/2 bath homes. These quality 1,800 to 2,600 square foot homes are competitively priced from \$29,000 to \$40,000. BONITA BEL-AIRE looks down on the Bonita Valley Country Club and offers sweeping views of Point Loma and Mexico. Visit BONITA BEL-AIRE during this Special Preview Showing. Another Hart and Sons development.

Located on Bonita  
Road at Otay Lake  
Road just east of  
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Sales  
Office  
PHONE  
477-1194

*Bonita Bel-Aire*



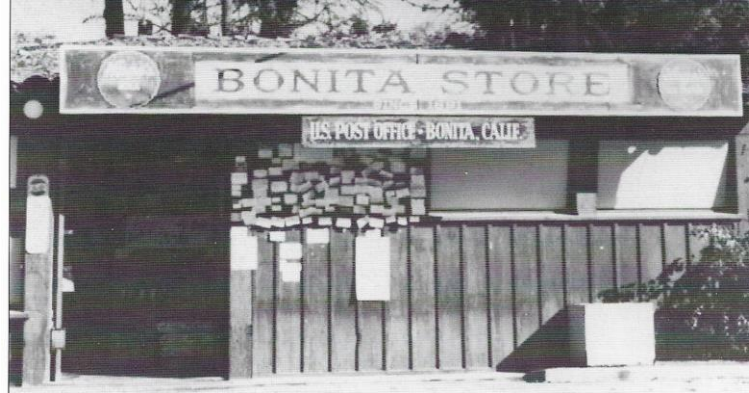
# Northern part of Camino Elevado in 1967.

- Otay Lakes Road is the two-lane road at the bottom.
- Calle Escarpada is on the upper left.
- Calle La Mirada is on the upper right.
- Note construction is still going on and swimming pools are not filled.



# Shopping near Bonita Bel-Aire was limited in early days.

- **For the first four years, the only grocery store was the small Bonita Store.**
  - It had a deli that made good sandwiches.
  - The building is still there. It has been used as restaurants for decades.
- **A Big Bear Market was opened in 1967 at the location of the current Dollar Tree Store.**
  - It was not a large supermarket.
  - Residents still did most of their grocery shopping in downtown Chula Vista.
- **Bonita Centre (a.k.a. Vons Shopping Center) opened in 1978.**
  - Besides Vons, there were many stores including an ACE Hardware, Roundtable Pizza, Harvey's Bakery and Hallmark.



Bonita Store in 1964.



Bonita Centre under construction, 1977.



- Big Bear Market opened on December 27<sup>th</sup>, 1967.
- There was a telephone booth outside.



# Shopping near Bonita Bel-Aire was limited in early days.

- **The Ralphs Shopping Center, near Southwestern College, was not built until 1989.**
- **Plaza Bonita was completed in 1983.**
  - The closest shopping malls were the Chula Vista Shopping Center in west Chula Vista and the smaller South Bay Plaza in National City.
- **I-805 was completed in 1975.**
  - Before that, Bonita Bel-Aire residents had to drive down E street to I-5 if they worked in San Diego or wanted to go to the zoo or shopping at the mall in Mission Valley.



**Chula Vista Shopping Center in 1965**  
**Marston's was located where Macy's is today.**



# Name Changed to Country Club Heights

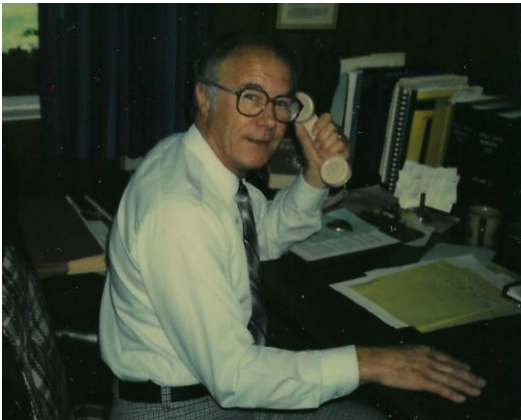
- In 1968, **Silvergate Savings** acquired the empty lots and unsold houses in the Bonita Bel-Aire neighborhood from Hart and Sons.
- The name of the neighborhood was changed to **Country Club Heights**.
- Initially, Silvergate Savings wanted to change the zoning to make smaller lots so they could build more houses. This was rejected by the City of Chula Vista.
  - Had this plan been approved, there could have been about **60 more homes** in the neighborhood.





# All the house numbers were changed in 1971.

- The original house numbers were mostly 4000s on all streets. Some were in the high 3000s.
- They were changed in 1971 to today's numbers.
- I can still see the impression of number 4120 on my house which is now 250:



Lane Cole, Public Works Director, later became City Manager.



Star-News Photo

Easier to find  
that street name

Chula Vista employee R. E. Downing installs new, larger style street sign in Country Club Heights in Bonita. Traffic Engineer Bruce Murray said the easier-to-read signs are being installed wherever replacements are needed or, as in the case of Country Club Heights, when the blocks are renumbered.

## 1,100 homes, 58 businesses set for street number changes

Some 1,100 homeowners and 58 businessmen will have to take down their old street numbers and nail new, smaller numbers as Chula Vista starts a move for a uniform numbering system throughout the city.

The City Council accepted a report from Public Works Director Lane Cole on the change in addresses, thus giving the go-ahead for the project.

Cole explained in his memorandum that the numbering systems in Southwestern College Estates, Country Club Heights and the Bonita Valley don't conform to numbers in other areas of the city.

For example, the same numbers appear in the same geographic locations on all north-south avenues and east-west streets.

In the outlying areas, however, the numbers were originally applied according to the county's numbering system.

Cole gave as some examples of the changes, Southwestern College's address at 5400 Otay Lakes Rd. will change to 900. Addresses in the 5900 and 6000 blocks of Gotham St. will become 1600 and 1700 blocks.

All persons effected will be individually notified next month, with the change to become effective July 1.

Cole has recommended that the Bonita area changes be held off pending the outcome of the proposed annexation of the total valley.

He explained that while the numbering is not a serious problem now it could become a problem as the city annexes the area between the central city and the outlying areas.

He also said there has been some confusion in billing the city's utility tax because of the difficulty in differentiating between city and county residences and businesses.



# Custom Houses Built 1968-1985

- Custom houses were built on all the vacant lots.
  - Some were built by Silvergate Savings and others by owners who purchased empty lots.
  - **The last homes on the original lots were completed in 1975.**
- Three additional lots were created at the north end of Camino Del Cerro Grande.
  - Homes were built there in 1975 (two houses), 1977 and 1985.
- Two additional lots were created at the east end of Calle Mesita.
  - Homes were built there in 1975 and 1976.

Roll out the welcome mat to new residents in the Country Club Heights area. Mr. and Mrs. Neil Korkis with their daughter, Cindy, have just moved into their custom-built home at 4610 Calle Mesita and it is a beautiful place.

This clipping from the CV Star News in 1969, shows a house number of 4610. Today it is 1073.

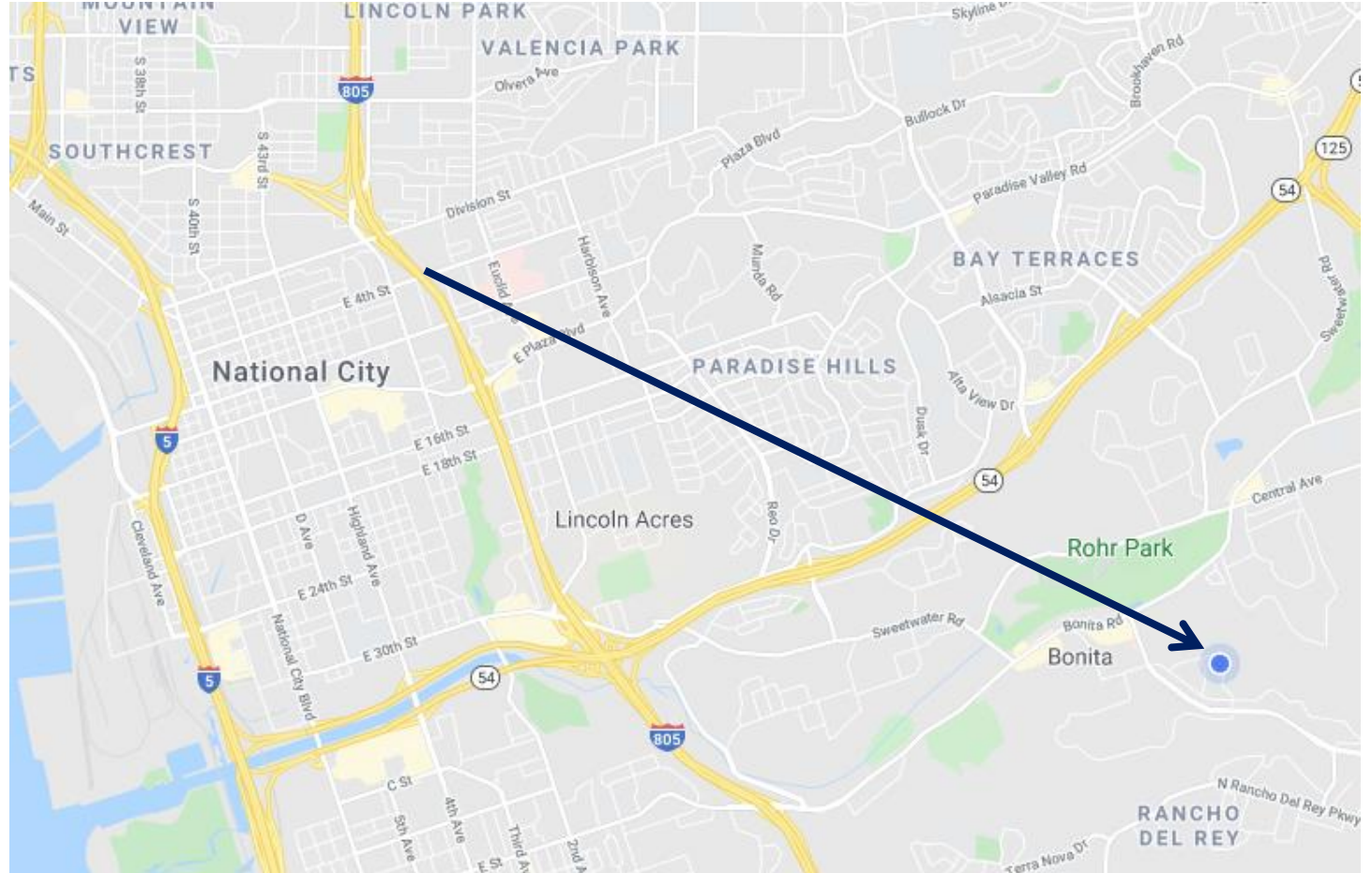


**Notice the newly completed Bonita Ridge Estates and southern part of Surrey Drive being developed.**



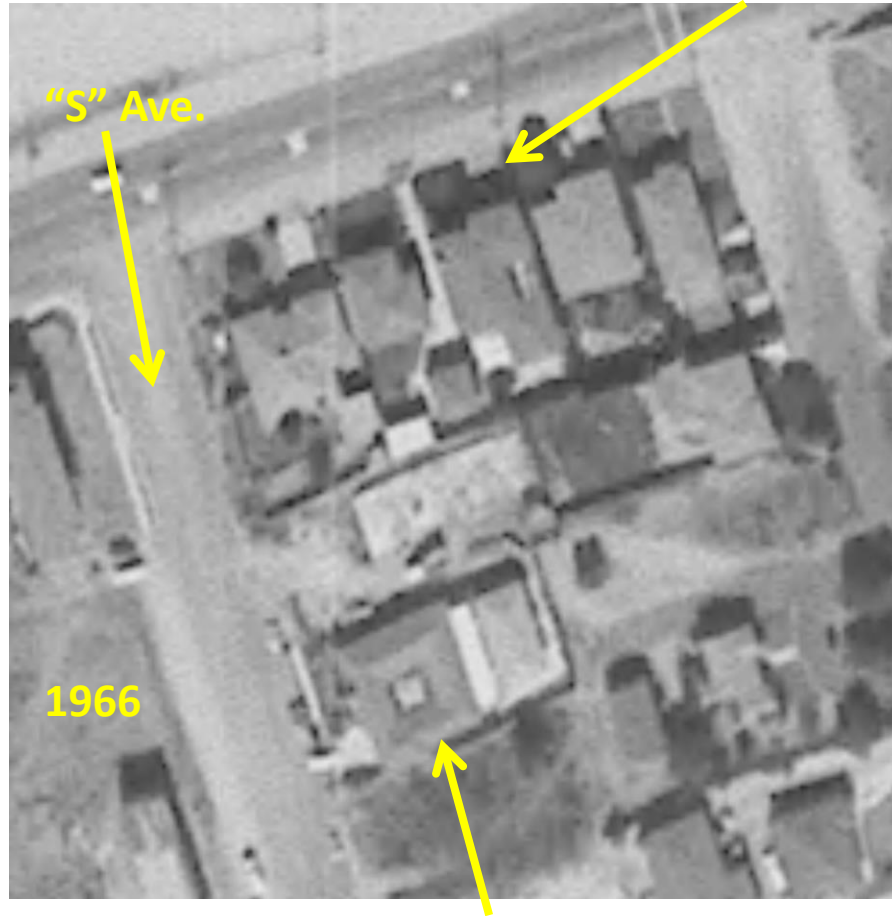
# One house was moved to Calle La Mirada.

- When I-805 was being built in the early 1970s, some houses in National City had to be moved or demolished.
- One house was moved from 439 “S” Avenue in National City to 250 (then 4140) Calle La Mirada.



# Original Location in NC

These four houses did not  
need to be removed.



Aerial view from 1966 shows the house  
at 439 "S" Avenue in National City.



Same NC location in 1971 shows that  
the house that was moved is gone.

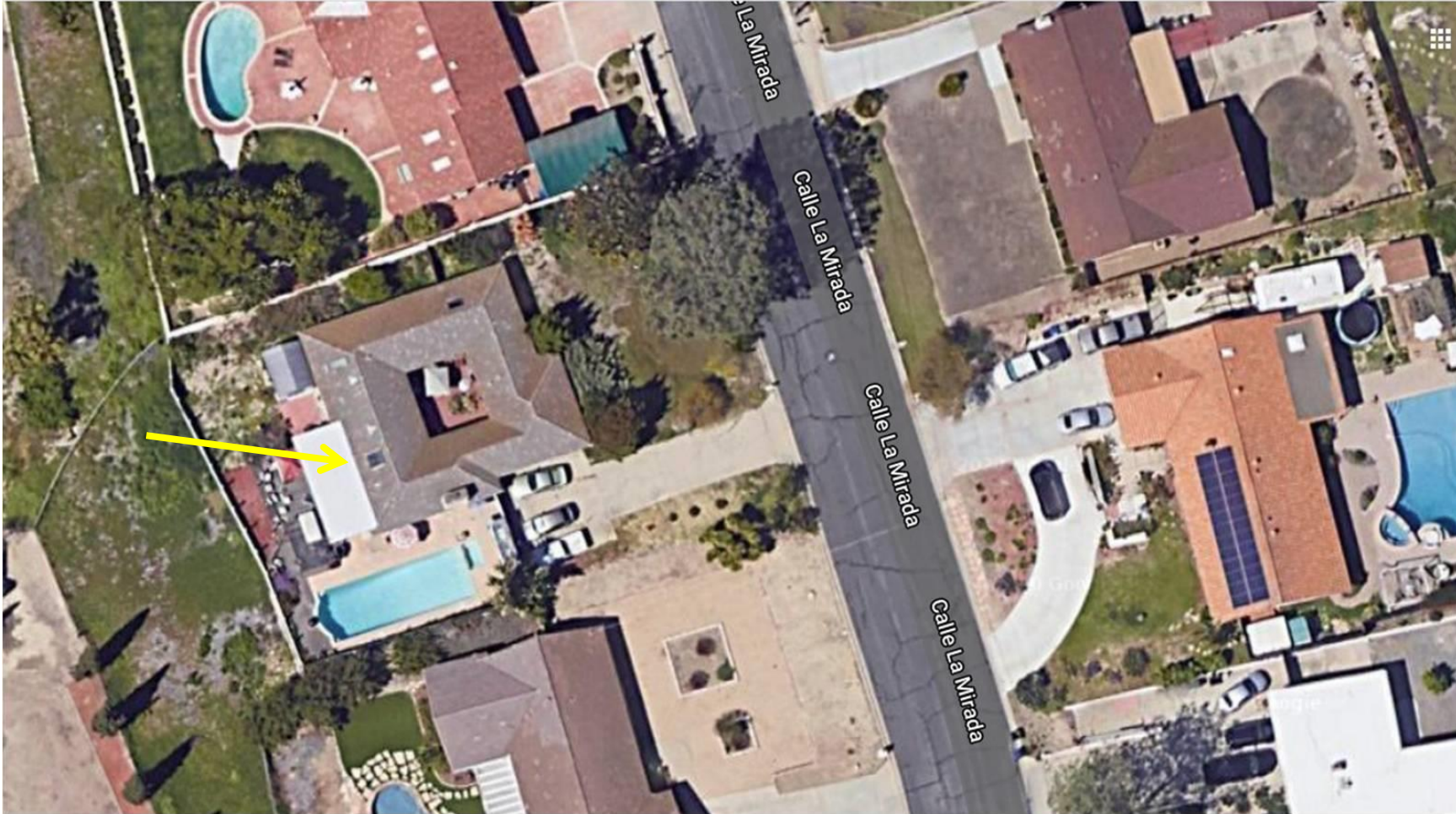


# Location in National City today.





# The relocated house on Calle La Mirada today.



There was considerable opposition to the move of the house. Some longtime neighbors, who still live here, remember the controversy.

## Move-in has Bonitans up in arms

Residents of Country Club Heights in Bonita were up in arms this week about a proposal to move-in a house to 4140 Calle La Mirada.

But most objections were dropped when the Chula Vista City Council indicated its intention of requiring a bond sufficiently large to insure completion of all required improvements.

Frederick Tindall plans to move in a 2,200 square-foot house from 439 S Ave. in National City.

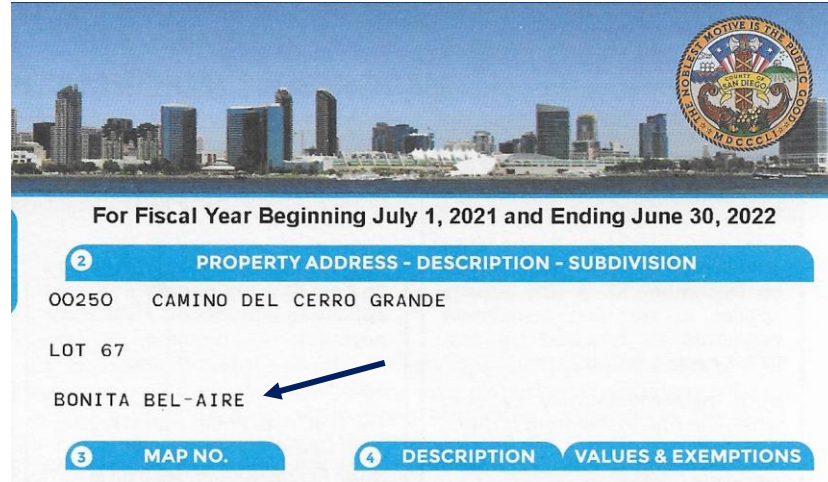
The Planning Commission, in reviewing the move-in, required that there be greater use of wood and-or masonry on the front and the installation of a shake shingle roof to be compatible with the neighborhood.

CV Star News Oct 15, 1970



# Name Changed Back to Bonita Bel-Aire in 1972

- The name of the neighborhood was changed back to Bonita Bel-Aire in 1972.
- The renaming to Country Club Heights caused a lot of confusion.
  - County and City records showed the subdivision as Bonita Bel-Aire.
  - This was a problem when houses were sold or there were property legal issues.

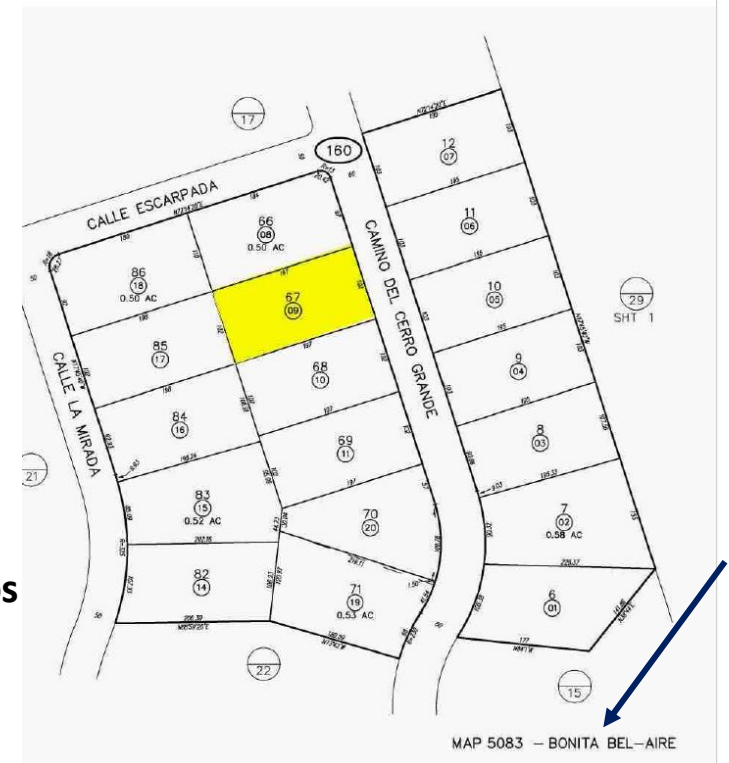


For Fiscal Year Beginning July 1, 2021 and Ending June 30, 2022

2	PROPERTY ADDRESS - DESCRIPTION - SUBDIVISION
00250	CAMINO DEL CERRO GRANDE
LOT 67	
	BONITA BEL-AIRE

3 MAP NO. 4 DESCRIPTION 5 VALUES & EXEMPTIONS

Property tax records and City and County maps have always shown Bonita Bel-Aire. They had not been changed to Country Club Heights.



the real property situated in the County of SAN DIEGO, State of California, more particularly described as follows: LOT XX OF BONITA BEL-AIRE, CITY OF CHULA VISTA, COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO CALIFORNIA, ACCORDING TO MAP THEREOF NO. 5083, FILED IN THE OFFICE OF THE COUNTY RECORDER OF SAN DIEGO COUNTY.

This is an example of the way deeds are filed with the San Diego County Recorder's office. It only shows Bonita Bel-Aire and no street name or number.

# Dairy on Hill Below Calle Mesita

- Bonita Bel-Aire residents had milk delivered to their homes from the Eaton, Golden Arrow and Dari-Fresh Dairies.
- Residents who lived on the north side of Calle Mesita recall seeing dairy cows on the hill below their back yards.
  - Some homeowners who saw the cows still live on Calle Mesita.
- The Dairy was called the **Eaton Dairy**. It was closed 1975 when the property was sold for development.
  - The original dairy was the Few Acres Dairy which was started about 1920 by Francis M. Brown.
    - Mr. Brown was the maternal grandfather of Bud Wilson.
  - F. M. Brown sold the Dairy to Thomas Eaton in 1943. The Dairy was renamed **Eaton Dairy**.



Milk  
was in  
bottles



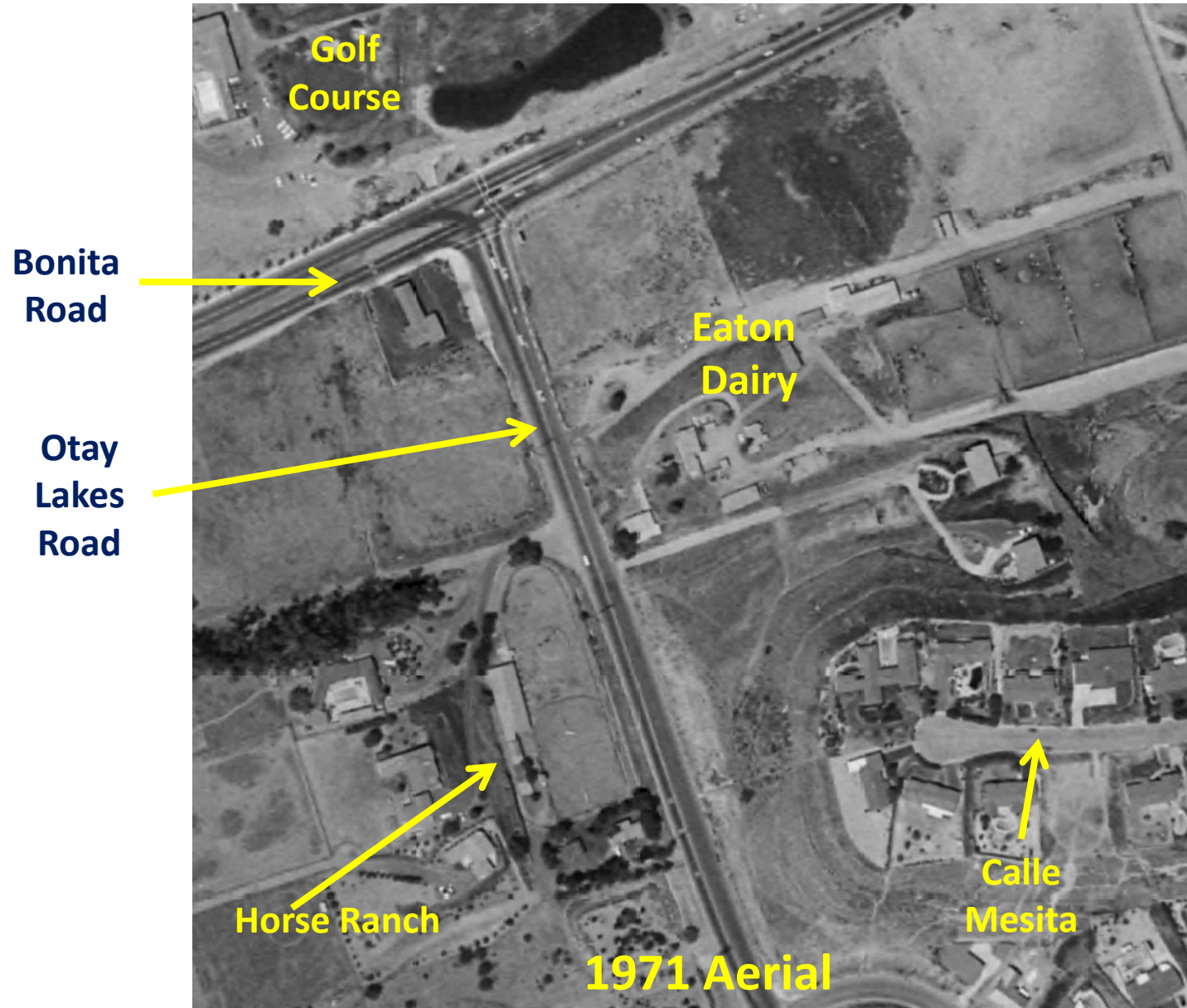
Bottle top from  
the Few Acres  
dairy.



**Tokens** were  
purchased by  
customers and left  
on doorsteps for  
payment when  
milk was delivered.



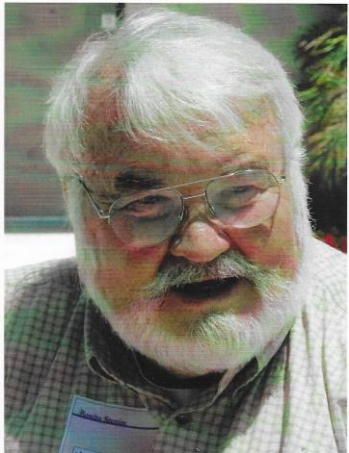
## Few Acres Dairy 1920-1943 Eaton Dairy 1943-1975



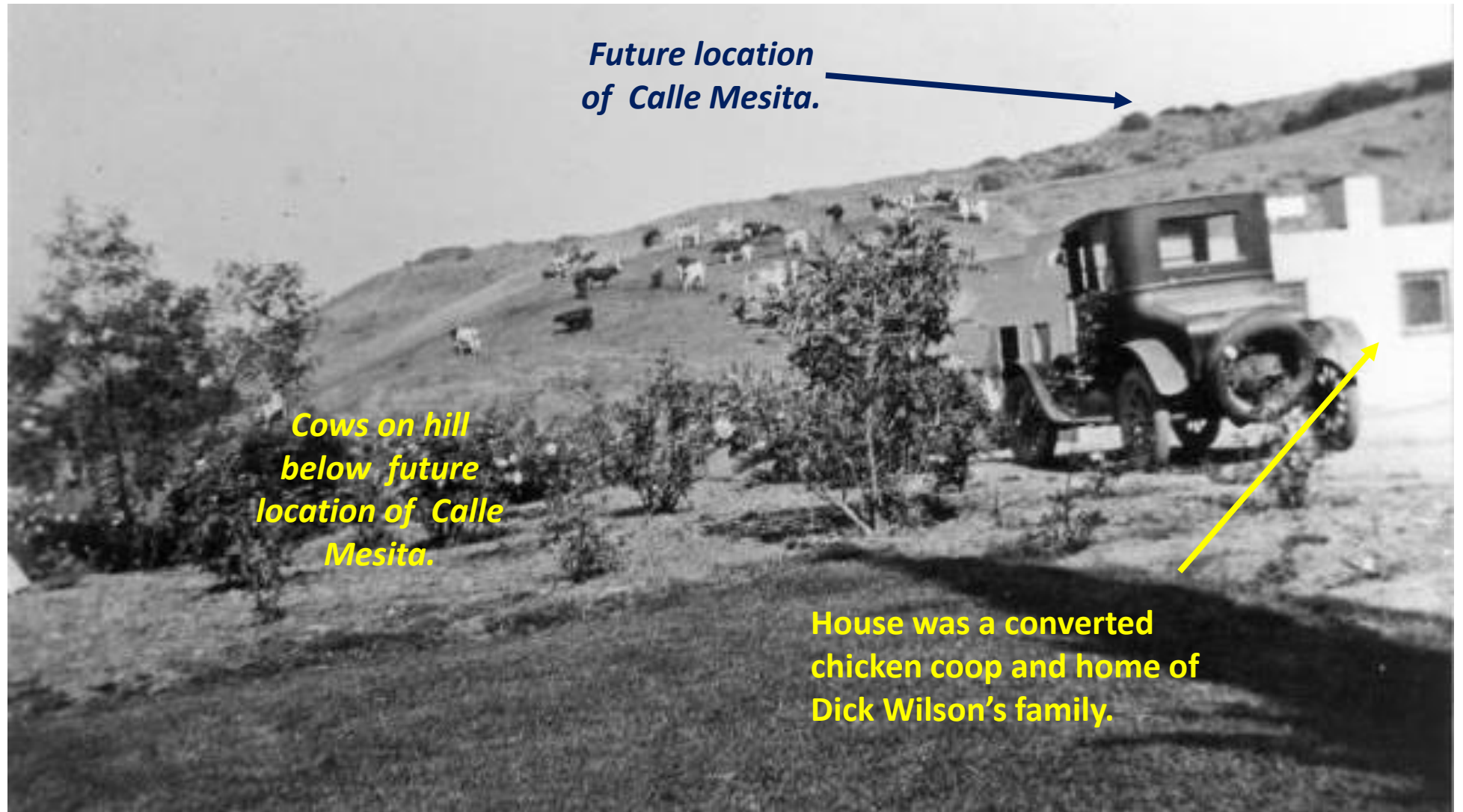
This aerial from 1971 shows homes on Calle Mesita. Until 1975, the dairy's property extended up the hill.

There is an empty lot where the Vons Shopping Center would eventually be located.

## Few Acres Dairy (Later Eaton Dairy)



**Bud Wilson**



**Dick Wilson was Bud Wilson's father. Bud lived in the converted chicken coop home as a child. Dick Wilson worked at the dairy, owned by his father-in-law F. M. Brown.**



# Neighborhood Watch 2012

- The neighborhood watch program began in 2012 when **Angela Gaines**, Community Affairs CVPD, suggested that we start a neighborhood watch.
- Initially, there were 80 households on the neighborhood watch email list.
- Today there are 146 households in Bonita Bel-Aire and Bonita Ridge Estates.
  - Many households have two or more members. There are now 175 email addresses on the NW list.
- There are fewer crimes reported in our neighborhoods than in 2012.
  - More homes have become “hardened targets” as described by the CVPD.
  - More people have been watching out for their neighbors.



---

**Take a stand against crime.**



# Neighborhood Watch, The Entryway Walls

- At the first meeting with the CVPD, neighbors raised the issue of the ugly entryway walls.
  - Police told us that it indicated a run-down neighborhood which is more susceptible to crime.
  - 42 neighbors donated a total of \$5600 for a contractor to repair the walls.
- The walls needed repair and painting again in 2017.
  - Neighbors volunteered to work on the walls and clean up the area.



Walls looked like this for decades.



After repair, paint and lettering in 2012.



2017

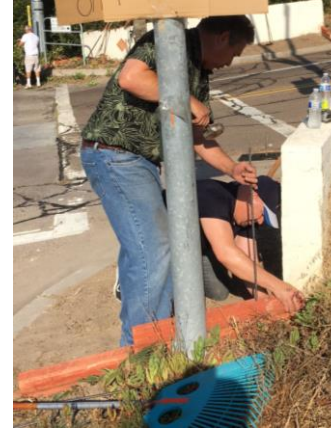


2017 after volunteer work.



# Neighborhood Watch, The Entryway Walls

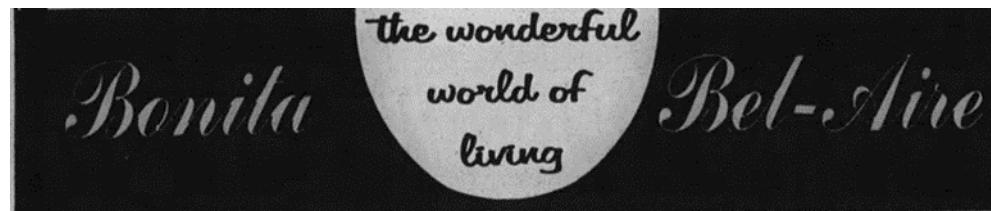
## ■ Volunteers 2017:



## ■ Volunteers 2023—General Cleanup:



# APPENDICES





# Chula Vista Star News clipping from July 21<sup>st</sup> 1963.

## Bonita Bel-Aire to Debut Today

There will be a special preview showing, today, of Bonita Bel-Aire, a new residential development overlooking Bonita Valley Country Club and Golf Course.

Jerry Hart of Hart and Sons, developers, said that five model homes offering three, four and five bedroom floor plans will be open for public viewing. Each model is available in three exterior designs and provides 1,800 to 2,600 square feet of living area.

The 50-unit community offers half-acre home sites presenting sweeping views of Bonita Valley, Point Loma, and the mountains of Mexico, Hart said.

Hart said Bonita Bel-Aire offers home buyers the latest in modern living appointments.

All residences have two-and-a-half baths, wall-to-wall carpeting, walk-in pantries, and spacious family rooms.

The homes also have built-in kitchen appliances, including dishwashers, raised hearth fireplaces, shake

shingle roofs, oversized garages, copper plumbing throughout, lath and plaster construction, and telephone outlets in every room.

The hilltop Bonita Bel-Aire home are situated on Bonita Road at Otay Lake Road just east of the Bonita stores, Hart said.

# City of Chula Vista inspection record for our house, February to June 1963

**RECORD**  
CHULA VISTA  
BUILDING INSPECTION DIVISION  
UNIFORM BUILDING CODE

Work requiring a building permit shall be inspected by the Building Official or his agent. The inspection shall be made at the front premises and the building shall be maintained in such position as to permit the Certificate of Occupancy to be issued.

Lot No. 7 Date 1-8-63

Art. & Sec. Construction  
General Contractor Same

INSPECTIONS			
TYPE	DISPENSATION	DATE	INSPECTOR
Footings and Forms			
Plumbing			
Ground Work			
Plumb. Vents			
Conn.		5-14-63	
Rough		5/2/63	C.M.
Roofing			
Reinf. Steel			
Masonry			
Ext. Lath		4/19/63	
Int. Lath			
Ele. Fix.			
Final Insp.			

**UNIFORM BUILDING CODE**

(d) CALLED INSPECTIONS. No reinforcing steel or structural framework of any part of any building or structure shall be covered or concealed in any manner whatever without first obtaining the approval of the Building Official.

1. FOUNDATION INSPECTION: To be made after trenches are excavated and forms erected and when all materials for foundation are delivered on the job. Where concrete from a central mixing plant (commonly termed "transit mixed") is to be used, materials need not be on the job.

2. WIRING AND PLUMBING INSPECTION: To be made before frame inspection.

3. FRAME INSPECTION: To be made after the roof, all framing, fireblocking, logs in place and all pipes, chimneys and vents are complete.

4. PLASTER INSPECTION: To be made after all lathing, interior and exterior, is applied and plastering materials are delivered on the job, but before any plaster is applied.

5. ELECTRICAL FIXTURE INSPECTION: To be made with final inspection.

6. FINAL INSPECTION: To be made after building is completed and ready for occupancy.

**IMPORTANT:—BUILDER & INSPECTOR SHALL HAVE 24 HOURS NOTICE PRIOR TO INSPECTION**



# Some Bel-Air and Bel-Aire names in USA and Canada



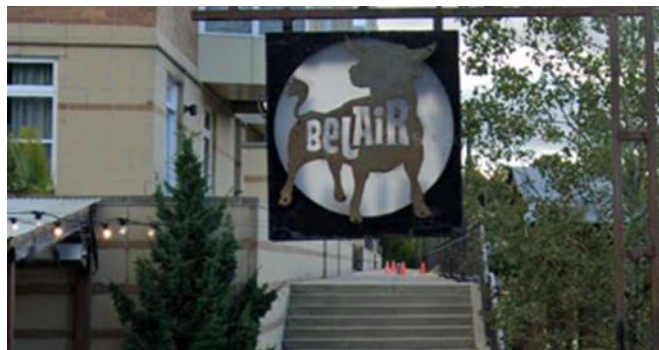
Neighborhood in  
Calgary Canada



Bel-Air Bowling Alley, Belleville Illinois



1957 Chevrolet Bel-Air



BelAir Cantina, Milwaukee WI  
(Mexican Restaurant)



Bel Air Restaurant in 1960s  
Greenville Illinois



Bel-Air Grill, Knoxville TN



A scenic view of a residential neighborhood. In the foreground, there are several houses with tiled roofs. A large tree with purple blossoms is in the center. In the background, there is a swimming pool and a red car. The text "Bonita Bel-Aire 60 years July 2023!" is overlaid in yellow.

**Bonita Bel-Aire 60 years  
July 2023!**



A photograph of a sunset looking west. The sky is a vibrant mix of orange, yellow, and pink, with scattered clouds catching the low light. In the foreground, the dark, silhouetted branches of a tree hang from the top left, and a line of trees runs across the bottom right. The horizon is visible in the distance, showing a faint outline of land and a utility pole. The overall mood is peaceful and scenic.

**Sunset Looking West**