LINES ON THE EAGLE ROCK



HELEN AND FRANCIS LINE

5475 EAGLE ROCK VIEW - LOS ANGELES, 41, CALIFORNIA.

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Dear Friends:

Since sending out our annual Christmas letler of last year, the Lines have moved. During most of 1944 we have been living in a tiny home by a great rock.

It was in January of 1770- just 175 years ago- that the Eagle Rock was first sighted by white men. Spanish explorers under their leader Portola came this way and made the discovdry. Ever since then, the Eagle Rock has been something to write home about. In fact, one of the early Spaniards- Jose Verdugo- was so taken with the place that he wrote home to the king of Spain and in 1784 obtained the rock and a few thousand acres as a royal grant. It was the first land grant in California.

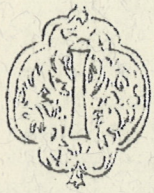
Since the days of the Verdugos the rock has changed hands several times and the acreage has shrunk from many thousands to a mere sixteen. But the rock is just as grand, the wild buckthorn on the hills is just as white, the deer are as curious, and the sky at night is as lustrous, as when the Indians camped here before the Spaniards came. It is, in short, still a place to write home about.

So that is exactly what we are up to. The 175th anniversary of the rock's discovery makes a suitable date for our annual letter to our friends everywhere. And "Life at the Eagle Rock" since we bought it will be our subject matter.

Along with this brief history and description of our new abode, go greetings and real hopes for a better year ahead. After a long lapse, our annual letter this year will go to our friends in France, in Finland, in the Philippines. We hope our future letters can go to our friends in Holland, China, Java— throughout the world.

The Lines

A YEAR AT THE EAGLE ROCK

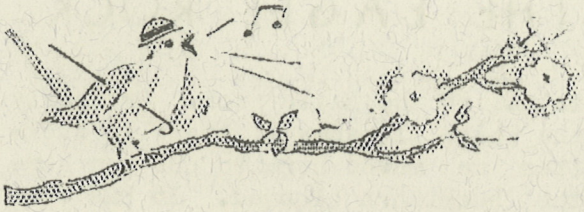


T was a white Christmas at the Eagle Rock. Or nearly so. Not snow, but the white blossoms of the wild buckthorn. Shortly after we moved here to our new home last January 26, the buckthorn bloomed. It has come early this season and the hills are already turning white again. Each of the eleven months that we have been here- save one or two- has seen wild shrubs and flowers in blossom;- buckthorn, monkey flower, buckwheat, toyon, and wild tobacco.

One type of wild tobacco was flourishing when the first Spaniards came this way in 1770- six years before the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Those first white men under Portola met some Indians down below Arroyo Seco and— using the wild tobacco- smoked with them the pipe of peace. This has been a peaceful place ever since.

We love it here. Our house is nothing; the setting everything. We are close up back of the rock itself in a large more-or-less virgin tract set directly on the line between Pasadena and L.A. Our house faces south, with the huge rock lifting 150 feet high just a pebble's-toss away. Down below a quarter mile is Colorado Blvd. leading to the center of Pasadena two miles east and to Glendale four miles west. Beyond the boulevard is the suburban city of Eagle Rock, then Los Angeles, Hollywood, Beverly Hills, and the ocean. At sunset the ocean often catches the last of the daylight and flashes it back up at us like a golden mirror. At night we look out to a sea of city lights below and to a sky of dancing stars above. But behind us is wilderness. The native California chaparral comes to our back door and extends back uninterrupted to the mountains and thence across the deserts into Nevada hundreds of miles away. We are at the edge.

Deer come down to drink from the stream in the arroyo below and are wearing a path in their almost daily trek. One day we saw a doe looking down at us from the top of the rock. Another time Adrienne and I followed a whole family (including a fawn) back into the underbrush and watched their antics as they curiously returned our stares. Weasels and possums and badgers ven-



ture out occasionally. Several skunks have lent atmosphere now and again. One night a possum nosed into our garbage can and let the lid down on himself. His scratching wakened us. We weighted the top of the can with bricks and whetted our appetites for some good movie shots next morning. But when we took off the lid next day- the animal was gone. He had clawed and eaten his way through the metal bottom of the can.

Ground squirrels do queer antics trying to balance on the fence to pick tobacco blooms. A couple of fluffy rabbits almost every morning hop out for their breakfasts in a clearing below, just as we are eating breakfast by our window above. Yes, naturally we have moved our table right over to the window.

And Birds! It will soon be time for the quail again, with their bevies of babies. Helen caught a baby quail one day last year and we made a movie actor out of it. In the summer come the swallows, which nest in holes of the rock and do circus-like acrobatic stunts in the air before our window. Humming birds at mating time are really a menace to safety. They chase one another about at speeds of several hundred miles an hour and care not at all if they nearly collide with us in their swift love flights. Eighty-eight different kinds of birds have been counted in this vicinity by ornithologists. Now that winter has arrived the birds have come down from the north and are nearly taking over the place.

This is Christmas vacation and boys from nearby towns are also taking the place over. They come out by the dozens to climb the rock, explore the Indian caves in its face, and to roam the surrounding hills.

There has never been a time in history when people weren't climbing the rock. Indians employed it for a lookout and used its caves for shelter. The rock was made a marker or cornerstone in California's first land grant to Jose Verdugo. When Jose's son and daughter divided the Rancho San Rafael, as it was known, the line of division was marked by a "round rock on a round hill."

HE bandit Vasquez used Eagle Rock, in the 1870's, as a lookout and hiding place, following his forays in the sleepy town of Los Angeles seven miles away. From the shelter of its caves he could see the dust of an approaching posse and had ample time to flee.

The Verdugo family lost their holdings due to debt and the rock came into the hands of the San Rafael Ranch Company. "Robert Lindsay, manager of the new ranch, stated that when he arrived from England in 1885 and inquired for the ranch home of the company, the only directions that could be given him in Los Angeles was to find the Eagle Rock- the only well-known landmark in that section of the country which is now covered by Pasadena." (This item appeared in the Pasadena Star-News of Dec. 18, 1925, together with an interesting history of the rock, at the time it was sold by the San Rafael Ranch Co. to Alonzo C. Mather. After the death of Mather at the age of 92, we purchased the rock from his estate in May of 1943. Alonzo Mather was a descendant of Cotton Mather; he built the first bridge across the Niagara River at Buffalo and developed the first water power at Niagara Falls. In an old shack on our property we found dozens of old letters regarding these projects, with frequent references to Theodore Roosevelt, New York's governor, who had to give final permission.)

Hiram Reed, in his "History of Pasadena" of 1895, describes an interesting journey which he and Mrs Reed once made to the rock and the difficulty they had in climbing up to the lower cave. His wife, he said, wouldn't attempt it again "for a corner lot." And he declared the UPPER cave to be completely inaccessible. Yet today, members of the rock-climbing division of the Sierra Club make an annual pilgrimage to Eagle Rock and not only climb into both the caves but scale the sheer face of the rock itself. At their last meeting here I made a movie record of the stunt. It appeared impossible but they did it.



THE ROCK AND ROMANCE

The Eagle Rock seems to be a place of pilgrimage. Dozens of boys, on their days off from school, come to the rock to play. On warm sunny weekends as many as 200 people have come up just to look around and enjoy the view from the top. The Sierra Club make their trip here an annual event. Numerous schools and colleges in this area have regularly-scheduled geology field trips to the rock and we can hear their professors lecturing the student groups up at the top, as the students themselves pound about with hammers in search of fancy Miocene specimens.

Old men walk out from town to reminisce about events which occurred here in early days. We met one interesting elderly lady from Pasadena who told us she had first climbed the rock back in 1875. A Mrs. Miller of Eagle Rock relates how her husband was instrumental in starting, years ago, Easter Sunrise services at the rock, with thousands in attendance.

One of the rock's chief interests is as a place of romance. Time and again people have confided to us that some of their very most romantic moments have been spent on its top. At least two prominent artists whom we knew long before we moved here have made that confession to us. We doubt if there is another spot in California where more lads have proposed to their ladyloves.

One evening, as we were eating supper by our window below, we saw a young woman standing on the rock for over an hour, gazing off toward the sunset and the evening sky. At last, fearing she might jump off, we went up to talk with her. Her lover had gone to sea; her fondest memories were in connection with the rock, - and she had come back up to relive them. Sermons in stones!

Among our visitors has been Robert Glass Cleland, California's outstanding historian, who was good enough to take lunch with us here one day. He told us much about the early history of this region. Mr. Buwalda, geologist at Cal Tech, at our request wrote us concerning the geological history of the rock. It becomes apparent that the one hundred and seventy five years during which white men have known this place is not very long after all. For the Eagle Rock, states Mr. Buwalda, is twelve million years old.



E shall soon round out our first twelve months in this new home of ours, and they have been full and meaningful. There have been hundreds of new friends. The poeple of the city of Eagle Rock have been grand to us and our only regret is that there has been all too little time, as yet, to become better acquainted with all the splendid people in the Kiwanis and Lions Clubs, the Woman's Club, and the schools.

We go to the Methodist Church in Pasadena and Dr. Cliff's Twigbender's Sunday School class has dozens of other interesting folks. I am close at hand now to the Los Angeles Adventurer's Club and at each meeting down there, new and interesting personalities pop up.

The Southwest Museum is close at hand and, after we had shown one of our films there a couple of weeks ago, the director and his wife had a tea for us at their home. Dr. Hodge was a noted Indian authority in 1899 when the great author Mary Austin (as related in her autobiography) made a trip to Los Angeles in the hope of meeting him and received advice which guided her whole life. And now,at 80, he is still directing a great museum. Since we plan to make many films on Indians of the Southwest, we are sure to get helpful pointers from our new friends the Hodges.

Adrienne- now eight years old and in the third grade- goes to San Rafael school (yes, named after the old Verdugo rancho which was marked by the rock) just across the boulevard. Her school affairs naturally are among our greatest interests and the teachers and parents of San Rafael have offered us some fine friendships. Adrienne is a great reader now and devours book after book. She is taking piano, too, from Miss Ingham of Monrovia and has been in a number of recitals. A couple of Christmas hymns (requiring use of the pedal for the first time) were her most recent assignments.

Though we have left our former home in Ontario, we keep three bus seats warm between here and there to visit some of the best friends we've ever had.And the Chaffey Community Art Association

is still our greatest love. Helen and I directed its annual purchase-prize exhibit this past year. We were thrilled that a new high in memberships (183) made possible the purchase of two great paintings, by Ernest Fiene and Rexford Brandt. A good share of the exhibit was borrowed by Director Reginald Poland for the opening of the new San Diego Gallery of Fine Arts.

My lecture work is more demanding than ever and if this letter weren't concerned with the Eagle Rock, I'd devote most of it to interesting episodes of recent lecture travels. I've made two lecture trips this past year to the Midwest, South, and the Atlantic seaboard, and must trek as far back as New York and Connecticut again in just a couple of months. The grand people along the way! If only there were room to tell about the friends- old and new- whom I've met on these trips-- thrilling friends all over the East.

This lecture business is getting out of hand. While I was still in the East, dates pressed in on us here in California, so Helen pinch hit for me with a film I was not using. Helen, in addition to such things and helping with Adrienne's music and school and all, has spent hours sowing wild flower seeds about our hills and laying out trees and shrubs. We have been doing much planning and planting.

Someday we want the Eagle Rock and its surroundings to be one of the beauty spots of the West. We have many other plans for it too, which must await the return of peace. This month- January, 1945- marks the 175th year since its discovery. We hope that the 180th, the 190th, and the 200th anniversaries will find the Eagle Rock an even more thrilling and interesting place. When we get it just as we want it, you must come out to visit us.

Sincerely,

Helen, Francis, and Adrienne