

Chatsworth Nature Preserve / Chatsworth Reservoir Timeline

(with references)

The Chatsworth Nature Preserve is a 1,325 acre parcel of land owned by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, previously known as the Chatsworth Reservoir. Today it is a seasonal wetlands.

Native American Period –

There was a village site in the reservoir area near the Limekiln (La Calera), at the confluence of Woolsey and Box Canyons. Other local sites included Dayton Canyon, Bell Canyon, and Burro Flats Painted Cave. These 4 sites operated as a single dispersed village system.

(reference: personal communication with Albert Knight)

Mission Period –

The area was known as El Escorpion de las Salinas (salt marshes).

In 1836, Odón Chihuya, a Chumash born in 1797 in Malibu and raised at the San Fernando Mission, moved to El Escorpion at Bell Canyon and managed ranching operations (primarily cattle and sheep) for the San Fernando Mission. The 9,000 acre area included lands reaching north to the Chatsworth Reservoir and east to Topanga Canyon, and south to today's Ventura Freeway.

In 1845 three Chumash Native Americans, Odón, Urbano and Manuel were granted the lands of Rancho El Escorpion. Up to 1870, Odón and future partners of El Escorpion dispute the boundaries, occupying and using all 9,000 acres of land at various times. (reference: chatsworthhistory.com, Presentations, Chatsworth Lake Manor)

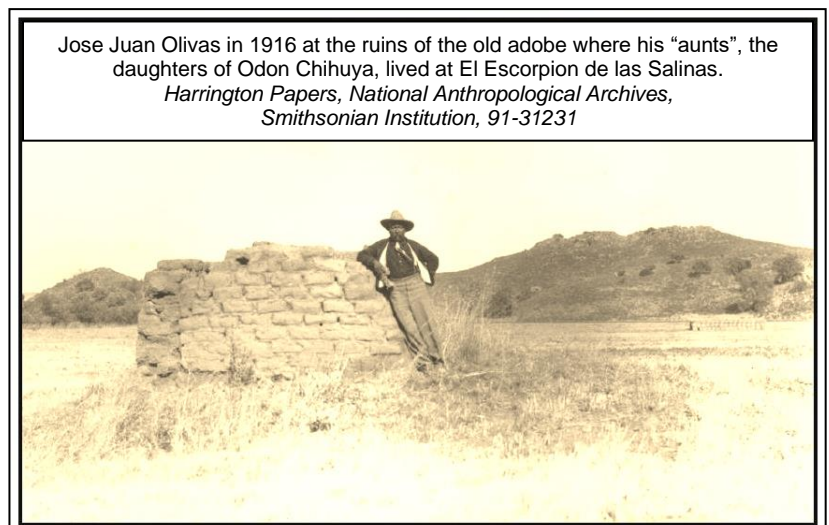
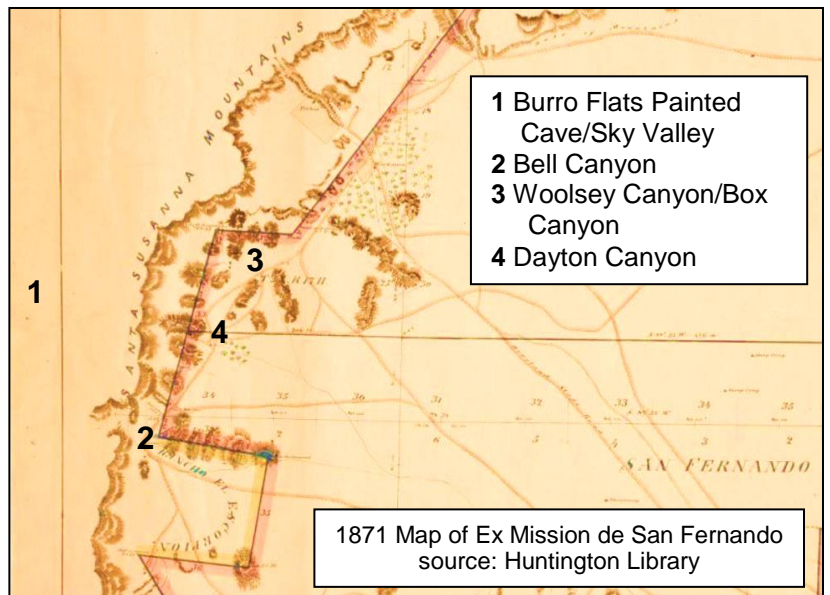
Homesteading Period –

By 1849, Frenchman Pierre Domec was living at the Limekiln site with Odón's second daughter, Maria Dolores. They would have three daughters, Francesca, Celedonia, and Maria Antonia. It is well documented that Domec and other Frenchmen operated limekilns at the site in the 1850's and 1860's.

In 1861, Domec made a sketch map of a 160 acre homesteading parcel at the Limekiln site. It included three adobes, one for the Domec family, and two others for Odón Chihuya's adult children Bernabel and Marcelina.

1901 - Domec's homesteading parcel was not approved as it was partially on private property. His daughter, Francesca Domec, granddaughter of Odón Chihuya, was granted a 148 acre homestead in 1901 in what is today Chatsworth Lake Manor.

1916-17 – John P Harrington, ethnologist and linguist at the Smithsonian, visited La Calera. His notes state that the "Lime pits of the Missions were there".

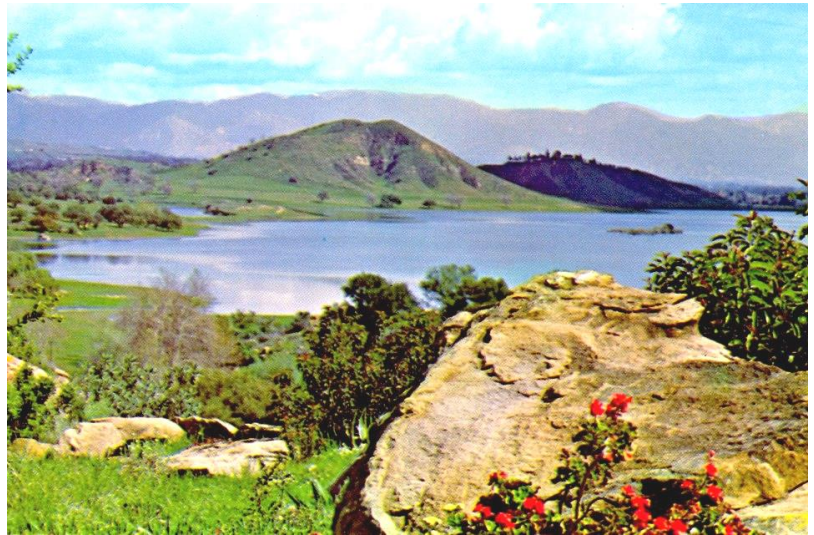


(references: chatsworthhistory.com, Presentations, Chatsworth Lake Manor and The West San Fernando Valley Lime Industry and Native American History)

Chatsworth Reservoir Era (1918-1969)

1913 - The Los Angeles Aqueduct opening day celebration Nov. 5, 1913. It is 233 miles long and diverts water from the Owens Valley to the San Fernando Reservoir.

1918 – The Chatsworth Reservoir is built, fed from the San Fernando Reservoir by a conduit called the “Chatsworth Hi-Line” that runs along the northern edge of the San Fernando Valley. The reservoir dam is built using the hydraulic fill method, i.e. there was no mechanical compaction of the soil forming the dam. It is placed in service in 1919.



Many movies were filmed at the Chatsworth Reservoir/Lake, including 1922 Mary Pickford “Tess of the Storm Country”, 1930 “Hells Angels” and many westerns.

1969 – The reservoir was drained to deepen shallow areas and construct a storm flow bypass system. At that time the Ecology Pond was created as a detention basin at the north side of the reservoir.

1971 – The Sylmar earthquake damages two other hydraulic fill dams at the San Fernando Upper and Lower Van Norman reservoirs. As a result, a decision was made to not store water in the Chatsworth Reservoir unless the dam was rebuilt.

(reference: chatsworthhistory.com, Presentations, Chatsworth Lake Manor)

Modern Period since the drainage of the Reservoir (1969-)

1974 - The Ecology Pond was established as mitigation for waterfowl habitat lost as a result of the draining of residual water from Chatsworth Reservoir following the 1971 Sylmar earthquake. It is located at the northern end of the reservoir. Ecology Pond water was routinely replenished during the dry season with potable water from a nearby pipeline. (*CNPC_Letter_Ecology_Pond_Proposal Mark Osokow 2015.pdf*)

1975 – The Chatsworth Calera Limekiln Site is designated Los Angeles Cultural Monument 141. The kiln can be seen today looking east at the intersection of Woolsey Canyon and Valley Circle.

1997 – The City Council renamed the Chatsworth Reservoir the Chatsworth Nature Preserve/Reservoir, and as such it is the only nature preserve in the City of Los Angeles.

2012 – The DWP instituted water conservation measures, and cut off the potable water supply to the Ecology Pond.

2015 – The DWP dredged the Ecology Pond, and created two connected retention basins. It cleaned drainage channels from upstream areas to encourage water flow to the basins. “Water guzzlers” (supplied by potable water) were installed on the east and west ends of the ponds to sustain wildlife during the dry summer months. Today, it is considered a “seasonal wetlands”, consistent with its historic past.