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Ranch Once Covered Huge Portion of East L.A.

Pioneer Esperanza Batz, 93, Dies

By BURT A. FOLKART, *Times Staff Writer*

Esperanza Batz, the last of two sisters who were born, lived and died on a sheep and cattle ranch that today houses Cal State Los Angeles and a stretch of the San Bernardino Freeway, is dead.

The diminutive city pioneer was 93 and as recently as 1982 had been able to wield a shovel at a ground-breaking ceremony at Cal State Los Angeles, where a rose garden was dedicated to her home and family.

That home was Rancho de Castilla, once a 3,300-acre ranch that covered Alhambra, Monterey Park, El Sereno and other sections of East Los Angeles. While its central portion today is home for the 20,968 students and 1,322 faculty members at Cal State Los Angeles, when Miss Batz and her late sister, Marguerite, were born there in an adobe built by Franciscan missionaries in 1776, it was a working ranch occupied primarily by cattle and sheep.

In a 1976 interview with *The Times*, both sisters told how they had lived together in three different homes, all three on property originally part of their family's

ranch, since their birth.

Their Basque grandparents, Juan Batista and Catalina Batz, left their home in the Pyrenees Mountains that separate France and Spain in 1850 to sail around the Horn. They settled in the San Gabriel area of Los Angeles and in a few years had accumulated the land that became Rancho de Castilla.

The sisters recalled how the hills and flatlands they strolled on as girls had given way to tract homes and shopping centers while the thousands of cattle, ducks, geese, sheep and road runners have been replaced by even more thousands of people.

Their home in 1976 was a small stucco house near one of the many tracts that dotted those hills, and on the outside it looked like most 20th-Century construction. Inside, however, were redwood inlaid chests, old china plates, daguerreotypes and tintypes on a hallway wall and an intricately carved walking stick used by their father when he was tending his sheep.

They told of passing a bordello while riding their horse to Sacred Heart School as youngsters and

being amazed that "the girls were so beautiful."

The family (there were two brothers who died several years ago) moved from the adobe in 1906 and into a new 12-room ranch house on what is now Endicott Street in El Sereno, near Alhambra.

But when their father died in the 1930s and the brothers moved away to marry, the sisters found the ranch home too difficult to maintain and moved into their third house on ranch property.

Esperanza remembered her brothers asking her over the years why she and Marguerite did not move closer to them in West Los Angeles.

"I don't know," she said rather wistfully in 1976. "Somehow we just don't want to leave the ranch."

And she never did. In 1979 the two sisters were forced by their advancing years to settle in the Alhambra Lutheran Home on Fremont Avenue where Marguerite died in March, 1981, and Esperanza died Wednesday night. It too was once a portion of Rancho de Castilla.

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