



Esperanza Batz, 89, and Dr. James Rosser, Cal State Los Angeles president, bow their heads in prayer as the new Batz Memorial Rose Garden is dedicated to her pioneer Basque family.

LOUI BAKER / Los Angeles Times

Woman, 89, Grew Up on Rancho de Castilla

Pioneer Returns Rose to Family Home

By WILLIAM McPHILLIPS, Times Staff Writer

"I'm almost 90," confided the spry little woman, "but I can still handle a shovel."

With gusto, Esperanza Batz proved her point, briskly removing a great clod of earth and then supervising as others knelt to plant a small rosebush on the manicured campus of Cal State Los Angeles.

The Rose of Castilla had come home, to the new Batz Memorial Rose Garden and perhaps the exact spot where Esperanza and her sister, the late Marguerite Batz, had plucked its blooms when they were children growing up on the historic Rancho de Castilla.

Cal State now occupies the central part of that sprawling rancho, once owned by Esperanza's pioneer Basque family, and it was there that officials found the plant growing several years ago.

Specimens Sent to Gardens

A specimen was sent to the Huntington Library and Botanical Gardens for propagation and the garden was finally dedicated last week in ceremonies attended by Cal State President James M. Rosser and other officials.

All made appropriate remarks, but it was Esperanza who captured the small audience with her reminiscences of the 5,300-acre ranch that covered Alhambra, Monterey Park and Montebello, plus El Sereno and other portions of eastern Los Angeles.

Leaning on a cane intricately carved from native toyon wood by her paternal grandfather, she described how she and Marguerite would roam the rancho at will.

Their grandparents, Juan Batista and Catalina Batz, left their Pyrenees homeland in 1850 to sail around the Horn to the San Gabriel area and 16 years later began acquiring the properties that eventually became their cattle ranch. The sisters were born in an adobe built in 1776 by Franciscan missionaries.

Fluent in Several Languages

Esperanza said they were both fluent in Spanish, French and Basque ("My father made us speak Spanish at home, he said we'd learn English at school") and eventually became social workers for the city of Los Angeles, where their knowledge of other languages was a "great asset."

Neither of the sisters married, and they retired in 1954. In 1979, they finally settled in the Alhambra Lutheran Home on Fremont Avenue where Marguerite died in March of 1981.

And although they changed residences many times throughout the years, Esperanza noted that they never left home. She said every house in which they ever

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