

## **The Mission Cactus of the San Gabriel Country Club**

by John Jones - April, 2011



*Children posing with the Mission Cactus in their Lord Fauntleroy suits - circa 1890's*

Before the **San Gabriel Country Club** opened its course in 1904, the land had been a part of the San Gabriel Mission that was founded in 1771. According to the early records of the mission, in 1809 Padre Zalvidea planted an unbroken cactus hedge around 500 acres of orchard and livestock fields. The cactus hedge grew as high as 20 feet and protected the crops and animals from wild beasts and hostile natives. This indigenous cacti once filled the San Gabriel valley and was known for its prickly pear fruit, which had been a staple of the local native's diet for ten thousand years. The native's had also defended their villages with cactus hedges.

The Spanish called cactus **las tunas**. And when the mission lands were broken up in the 1830s, 675 acres of them became the Rancho Las Tunas.

Gervais Purcell bought the Rancho in 1880 and began selling off lots for houses during the great land boom. His family lived in the original Las Tunas Adobe, the oldest building in Los Angeles County. It is still lived in today.

Purcell was a founder and the first secretary of the San Gabriel Country Club in 1904. The club's land had been a part of his Rancho Las Tunas.

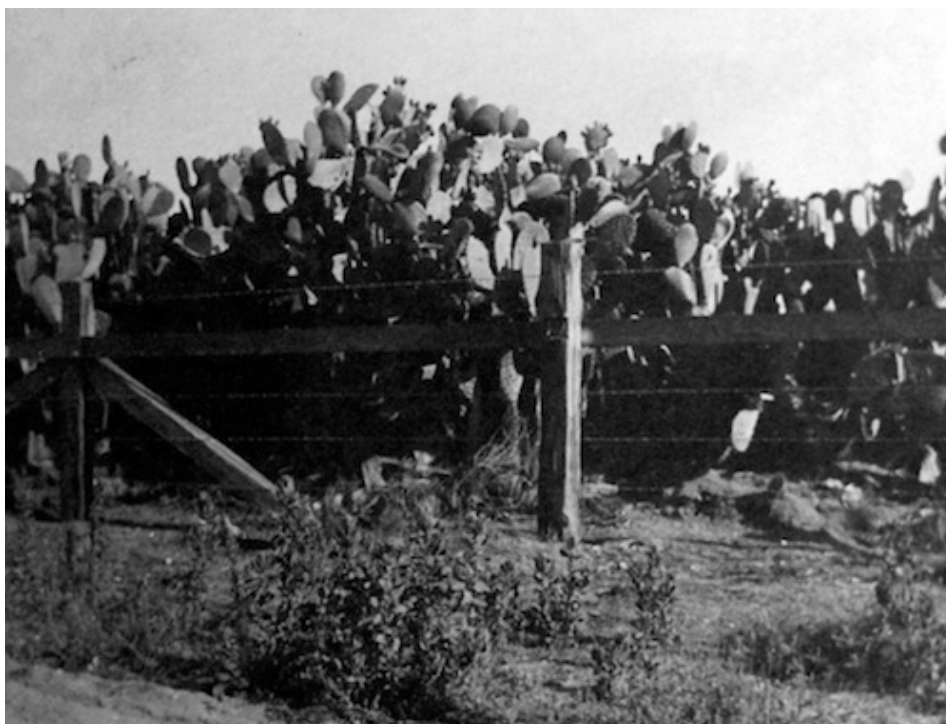


*Mission Cactus with horse and carriage for scale - circa 1860's.*

When the father of California professional golf, Scotchman William Robertson, arrived in 1904 to lay out the golf course, one of the cactus hedges was thirty to forty feet thick and crossed the property about 150 yards from the first tee. With great difficulty Robertson cut through the cacti, knowing full well it's historic significance.

According to Alma Whitaker of the LA Times, although many members regarded the hedge as a luminous link with the past, it was removed in 1915 to improve the view of the course. San Gabriel Country Club champion Bill Bacon was seen *"superintending the vandal demolition of the sacred cactus for all the world as though it was weeds."*

There are still remnants of the historic cactus fence around San Gabriel and the Country Club today.



*Mission Cactus*

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