

A QUEST TO SAVE NAN'S HOUSE

An important piece of Kern County History



Top: Lopez house built on the corner of Chester & California in 1909.

Left: Wedding portrait of Jose Jesus Lopez & Mary Winter, 1885.

My sister, Dianne, and I anxiously await the outcome of a decision to be made by the Kern County Museum Authority Board on January 10th. They will vote that day on whether to accept the donation of the Lopez-Hill House to be a part of the historical homes displayed in Pioneer Village.

We began researching the history of our mom's home after her death in July of 2005. Our mother, Lavern Hill, lived in this house for 40 years, and went through many hardships to retain ownership. During the last few years of her life, she suffered from Alzheimer Disease, but she never forgot how much she loved her home. For years because of its location on Rosedale Highway and Calloway, a month rarely passed that a realtor didn't contact her to see if she wanted to sell her property. Right up to the end, her answer was always the same, "My house is not for sale." "Nan," as our mother was affectionately known to her family and friends, loved visiting Pioneer Village, and would always say, "Wouldn't it be great if my house could be out here for everyone to enjoy." She always quickly added, "Of course, after I'm gone."

When we approached the Kern County Museum, the assistant director, Jeff Nickell, told us the house would have to have some historical significance to be considered since the museum already had several houses from that era. He didn't say "NO," so that was a "green light" for us, and we began our journey.

Our mother and father purchased this little Victorian house in 1966 because it had a shop building on the property. They opened Hill's Upholstery shortly afterwards, and Nan worked long hours, but she always said it was worth it. She had fallen in love with the house at first sight. What caught her eye initially was the wooden mantle with the beveled mirror in the parlor. It didn't bother her at all that the fireplace was not operable. At the time of her death, the only thing that we knew about the history of the house was that it had been moved from downtown Bakersfield sometime in the 50s. Be it coincidence, or fate, this information came from a gentleman by the name of Otis Coppock. He was the owner of the Mill End Shop on Nile Street where our mother bought upholstery fabric. One day, he asked her where her shop was located, and they were both surprised to learn that our family owned the house that he had purchased and moved to Rosedale in 1953. That was all we knew, but it was enough.

We went from the assessor's office to the Hall of Records, to the assessor's office, to the library, and back to the Hall of Records, only to be sent to the planning department, and then back to the library. It seemed as though we were looking for a needle in a haystack, but after our third visit to the assessor's office, we found a very small hand written note on the Rosedale Highway property papers that said, "*Res moved from Calif. Ave & Chester 1953.*" Patty Beard at the Bakersfield Planning Department then showed us old city maps, and "bingo," we recognized the floor plan of the house on the northwest corner of Chester and California right away. We spent hours looking through the Polk Directories at the library, and finally narrowed it down to a Joseph Lopez living at 1203 Chester Avenue from 1909 to 1937. It's a long story, with lots of twists and turns, but no one could ever imagine our excitement when we heard Jeff Nickell say, "If this is J.J. Lopez of Tejon Ranch, this could be the thing that could get your mom's house into the museum. On our next visit to the library, it was confirmed. Margaret Pelz, the librarian in the history room found an entry in Morgan's *History of Kern County* about Jose J. Lopez.... "Meanwhile his success with his flock attracted the attention of others and led to his selection as manager of the sheep industry for General Beale at Rancho el Tejon."....."Finally twenty-eight years after he had become identified with the ranch, he was chosen its manager, at the same time being appointed manager of Rancho Costec, la Liebrae and Los Alamos, by Truxtun Beale, with whom he continued for four years or until 1909, when he retired, after an identification of thirty-two years with the Beale interests, and removed to Bakersfield, erecting a residence at No. 1203 Chester Avenue." Try as we might, this discovery caused our voices to reach a level that was not exactly acceptable in a library. We were thrilled. We had found "significant historical information" about our mother's home.

We look forward to meeting with the museum board again in a few days. Once the house is accepted, the real work begins. Monies will have to be raised for the moving

expenses and the restoration, but we know it can be done. We met so many nice people during our research, and we renewed many old friendships. At this time, we'd like to wish all of them a very "Happy New Year" and a sincere "Thanks" for the help each of them gave as our paths crossed during this journey – the Lopez family, Joe Davis, grandson of J.J. Lopez, and his daughter Nancy Tinnin; our friends at the Kern County Museum – Carola Enriquez, Jeff Nickell, Lori Wear, Scott Fieber, and Heather Fowler; our friends at the Bakersfield Californian – Stacy Shepard, Kay Flores, and Henry Barrios; Margaret Pelz from the Kern County Library; Patty Beard from the Bakersfield Planning Department; Ron Coppock, son of Otis Coppock; Bonnie Kane from the Ridge Route Museum; Barry Zoeller and Donald Geivet of Tejon Ranch; Randy from Public Works; JoAnn Brown owner of the historic Spencer House; Peggy Darling; Beverly Stanton; Rosie (Dewar) Anderson; Donna (Smith) James; Nan's friends Jewel Ellis, JoAnn Spanger, Cora Levingston, Mildred Criner, and Vicky Duggan; and we especially enjoyed renewing an "old family friendship" with Chris Brewer, great grandson of Colonel Baker, founder of Bakersfield.

Our mother's dream became our dream....and it is now in God's hands. Mother Teresa once said, "*We can do no great things, only small things with great love.*"

We love you Nan...Dianne Sharman and Glenda Rankin



J.J. Lopez - 1933 - on the old Overland Stage Road. Lopez was born in Los Angeles on October 22, 1853. In 1872 he came to Kern County from San Fernando Valley, and eventually became the "Majordomo" of Tejon Ranch where he worked until his death in 1939. He built a home for his family in Bakersfield in 1909. Prior to that time, they lived on the Tejon Ranch. His house in town sat across the street from Dewar's Candy Shop (established in 1909) and Ralph Smith's house to the south.



Lavern Hill - 2001 - in front of her home on Rosedale Highway dressed for a historical fashion show at the Shafter Women's Club. She worked as a manager of the Salvation Army Store for 17 years before she retired in 1988. She loved gardening, and sewing costumes for the "dress up" dances at the Greenacre's Senior Center.



Otis Coppock - 1953 - just days after the Lopez house was moved to Rosedale (Rosedale Highway in background). Otis was a volunteer for the Kern County Sheriff's Department, and served on the Bakersfield Board of Trade.

Recently the *Saga Of Rancho El Tejon*, a biography of J.J. Lopez, written by Frank F. Latta, was reprinted by Bear State Books of Exeter. Owner of Bear State Books and historical editor of the *Bakersfield Magazine*, Chris Brewer, said, "Not only did (Lopez) have a good education, he was one of the most able and intelligent Californios of his time."

Three determined Kern County residents BUILT...MOVED...& SAVED this old Victorian house. If it is accepted by the Kern County Museum, you can help preserve this piece of history for future generations to enjoy.