



County of Los Angeles Board of Supervisors



SUPERVISOR GABRIEL ALLEN

Term: 1860-61, 1874-77
District: First District
Date of Birth: ~ 1818
Death: March 28, 1899

Gabriel Allen was elected county supervisor in 1860 for one year and elected again in 1874 and 1876. He resigned on December 12, 1877, and was replaced by Charles Prager.

Allen was born in New York about 1818. His parents are unknown. Family lore was that he was related to the patriot Ethan Allen of the Green Mountain Boys, but that link has not been established.

The first known written mention of Allen was in the book *Wild Life in the Far West 1834-1870*, by James Hobbs. The setting is a fandango (dance) in Santa Fe, N.M., 1841. Hobbs wrote: "We amused ourselves here attending several dances, or fandangos, with Mexican ladies. The last fandango was a terribly exciting affair. There was a wicked joker in the American party, named Gabe Allen, who, when the governor of N.M. fell asleep, had him carried to an adjoining room, and laid on a bed between two women, who were also passed out. About nine o'clock, the governor's wife, accompanied by two soldiers, went in search of him, fearing he might have been hurt at the hands of the revelers. When her anxiety was at the highest pitch, Allen directed her to the room where her husband lay in his drunken stupor. On seeing him and his female companions, her anxiety turned to rage, and she "went for" him in a manner that was very pleasing to Allen, in his half-tipsy condition. After some words between the governor and his wife, Allen and I escorted him to his residence, where we left him to the tender mercies of his wife, who would listen to no explanations by Allen, trying to establish the innocence of her husband. Gabe Allen, the perpetrator of this practical joke on the governor, was a tall, slim, light-complexioned man, always ready for a joke or a perilous adventure."

In 1846 Allen fought in the Mexican-American War. Allen served under Colonel Doniphan as a wagonmaster in the quartermaster department of the 1st Regiment of Missouri Mounted Volunteers. A lawyer with no military experience, Doniphan led his men, without supplies or pay, on a 2,000 mile trek through Mexican territory. During his tour of duty, Allen is credited with rescuing a woman who had been kidnapped and her family killed by the Hickory Indian tribe. Allen was honorably discharged in New Orleans in June 1847.

In 1852 Allen headed West and arrived in Placerville, Calif. Soon thereafter he moved to Los Angeles. With a reputation as a rough, hardened frontiersman and former Indian fighter with a sense of humor, Allen and his gang of 20 was hired to build the "Tejon Road", a wagon road, between the San Fernando Mission and San Francisco. The work included cutting down a hill the distance of 950 yards, 130 of which were through solid rock.

Allen married Maria Cleofa Martinez in 1856. He was 38 and she was 14.

In 1858 Allen was awarded a \$3,000 contract by the Board of Supervisors to repair and improve the Tejon Road to help relieve congestion and expedite the transportation of goods within Los Angeles County.

Allen's successful public works projects and subsequent public exposure helped him get elected to the county Board of Supervisors in 1860. He served a one-year term, and then left public service and began farming and raising cattle.

By 1866 Allen had several thousand head of cattle and horses.

On May 18, 1868, Allen's wife of 12 years died. At the time of her death, she and Allen had three kids -- John, 12, Frances, 10 and Carlola, 6.

In the 1870's Allen purchased the Diego Sepulveda house overlooking the Pacific Ocean. He purchased the estate from Eduardo Pollereno. Allen's brother, Jesse, came to live with the family and stayed with them for 17 years. During this time Allen opened and operated a meat market on Main Street in Los Angeles.

Allen continued to get public works contracts. He was hired to build roads into the new frontiers in Central California. During this period, Allen founded the town of Caliente in Kern County, where merchandise was transferred from wagons to pack teams to be carried up trails to the Kern River gold camps. Later a railroad was built and in 1875 the first train arrived. Soon some 2,000 residents found work here as the railroad work stalled at Caliente. The town was named after the nearby Agua Caliente Creek. In 1877 the railroad finally was finished over Tehachapi Pass and Caliente became just a small peaceful town.

On September 1, 1874, Allen returned to public service. He was elected to again serve on the county Board of Supervisors, replacing John M. Griffith. He was re-elected to another term in 1876, and played a major role in orchestrating the First Centennial Celebration of the Declaration of Independence in Los Angeles on July 4, 1876.

In July 1877 Allen married Vacenta Manriquez. He was 58 and she was 26. In December 1877 Allen resigned his seat as county supervisor and was replaced by Charles Prager. During the next three years, Allen's cattle and real estate businesses thrived.

Allen's son John was shot and killed by a horse thief in January 1879 while working on his father's property in Arizona. He was 20.

Allen continued to diversify his business holdings by buying some mining property in Pima Co., Ariz. In October 1880, he sold 1,762 acres of land near the city of Santa Ana to speculators for \$298,500. The syndicate went bankrupt, and bit-by-bit the land reverted back to Allen. The land is the present site of Orange Coast College.

In March 1895 Allen's wife Vacenta died at their home in Los Angeles. She was 43. Four years later, Allen died in Chatsworth. He was 80

Allen and his wife were buried in Angelus-Rosedale Cemetery in West Los Angeles.

Source: Life in the Far West 1834-1870; National Archives, Bounty Land Files; California Wagon Train Lists; The Hayden Pioneer Biographical Files; Historic Newspapers of Southern California; Chancery Office, Archdiocese of Southern Calif.; Historical Society of Calif.; Adobe Days; Historical Sketch of Los Angeles County, Calif.; Vital Records, Los Angeles Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk; Tumbleweeds to Roses, The History of Orange Coast College.