

The Irvine Ranch History

Irvine, California

The Irvine Historical Society is dedicated to preserving the rich heritage of the Irvine Ranch, once one of the largest private ranches in the United States

IRVINE - A LAND AND A FAMILY

Legacy of James Irvine, Sr.

“Often the Best Way to Show Warm Sympathy is With Cold Cash”

James Harvey Irvine, Sr.'s father, James Irvine I, who had immigrated to America from Ireland during the potato famine, once wrote, "I tell you a boy cast upon the world with not a dollar in his pocket, with none within reach ... but absolute strangers and without ... a claim upon any of them, is in a position to appreciate the value of a helping hand."

Though the first James Irvine did indeed start out "without a dollar in his pocket," he accumulated and passed on to his son the vast acreage of the Irvine Ranch, and also left a fortune in San Francisco real estate to his wife and son. James Harvey Irvine, Sr. then developed the Southern California property into an agricultural empire which, along with the San Francisco properties, enabled him to become one of the wealthiest men in California. Hanging over a door in his office, perhaps a reflection of Irvine's understanding of his family's humble beginnings, was a large red sign that stated: "Often the best way to show warm sympathy is with cold cash."

James Harvey Irvine, Sr. was in a position to lend a helping hand to many - and many held their hands out to him. Deserving men and ideas were helped without hesitation - and without fanfare. What he did for the local good, he didn't want the public to know about. Remembering his father's considerable suffering over bad press, Irvine refused to have any conversations with newspaper reporters. Whether they intended to say something nice or bad, he wanted no publicity.

James Harvey Irvine, Sr. is remembered for many things: his agricultural genius, his love for the land and his careful planning of its development, his business acumen, his honesty and integrity, his love for his country, his love for his family, his concern for those who worked on the land. Three men who were close to him remember him best as a man of few words who responded to the needs of others with action - and often with "cold cash."

As Remembered by Eddie Martin

Eddie Martin, a young man who had fallen in love with aviation as a child, bought his first airplane in June, 1923. He needed a place for a home base, and his desire was to start an airport.

Before his death in March, 1990 Martin recounted the events that led to the establishment of the Eddie Martin Airport on the Irvine Ranch.

"There was a lot of Irvine land that wasn't being used out on South Main Street and Newport Boulevard. It was just salt grass, it wasn't even good pasture ground. So I landed down there and was really poaching on the Irvine Ranch, which I knew was wrong, but nobody said anything about it. I went along with my [plans for] starting the airport for two or three months before I got up enough courage to go out to the Irvine Ranch and talk to them about a lease. One day I went out there and went into the office and the bookkeeper was sitting up on a high stool at a high bench. He asked if he could help me, and I said, 'I'd like to see Mr. Irvine.' He said, 'Well, Mr. Irvine, Sr. isn't here. He's in San Francisco for a few days, but James Irvine, Jr. is here. Would you like to talk to him?'

"I thought for a minute and didn't think I would; however, since I had gone out to the Irvine Ranch, I said, 'Well, let me talk to him.' As I went in the door, there was a big red sign up over the door leading in to Jim Irvine's office and on that sign it said: 'Often the best way to show warm sympathy is with cold cash.' I read that sign and I thought, 'now what in the Sam Hill can that mean?' On a man's office door and here's a person who's got all the land in the world and probably most of the money, and he's not going to do anything to show warm sympathy to anybody! I talked to Jim, and he said, 'I'm tickled to death that my Dad wasn't here today when you came out, because he is really opposed to aviation. He knows you're out there, I know you're out there, you haven't done us any harm, so we're just not kicking about it. I'm going to ask you to do me a favor. Don't come out to see my Dad and talk to him about it, because he just might take the attitude and tell you to take your airplanes off the ranch and don't bring them back. But I'm working on him real hard to convince him that aviation is here to stay and trying to get him to look at a happier side of it, and as soon as I can convince him that he should talk to you about a lease, I'll send for you.'

"So that just suited me real well. Three or four months after that I received a note that Mr. Irvine wanted to see me. When I went out there to talk to him, he was real congenial and gave me a five-year lease on the property starting at \$35 a month. Each year the cost raised \$5 a month - the second year it would be \$40 a month, then \$45 a month, \$50 and so forth.



James Irvine, Sr.: 'Noblesse Oblige',

"Few Americans of this generation born into an estate of such magnitude as fell to James Harvey Irvine ... came into it realizing its duties and responsibilities as he seems to have done, and exercising a rare judgment and modest in regard to it that is seldom witnessed."



Irvine Bowl

In 1941, Irvine provided land for this 2,662-seat amphitheatre for the "Pageant of the Masters," a part of the "Festival of the Arts" which has been an annual event since 1932 except for four years during World War II. (Photo courtesy of First American Title Insurance Company.)

"That was fine, and when the five years were up I went out and got a renewal on the lease. The rents kept on going up by the month every year. Then we hit this big Depression in 1929 and it was really a depression! I got behind in my rent \$700 and I wasn't able to pay all of the rent every month, but I continued to do what I could and the company never once billed me or asked me why I was behind on my rent or anything. One day a friend came by the airport and asked me why I didn't come up and go to work for Western Air Express - they paid good money.

"I went up there the following Monday morning, and they hired me immediately. That was a wonderful opportunity for me, because the wages at that time were \$700 a month, just the amount of the note I owed to Irvine. I hired my brother, Floyd, to manage my airport. After I got my first month's check, I went out to The Irvine Company and saw Brad Hellis. I said, 'Brad, I'm ashamed of myself for being so far behind in my rent, and I have been doing what I could, but I just couldn't make it all up. I'm working now, flying for Western Air Express, and I'll be able to pay that rent every month and I'll be able to make up the back payment shortly. What I want to do today is give a note for the \$700 to The Irvine Company, and pay the month's rent, and then after this I will pay the month's rent every month when it's due and part of the note.' Hellis said, 'That sounds very fair to me, and I'm sure it will be satisfactory with Mr. Irvine.' So that's the way we settled that thing.



Eddie Martin photos

Eddie Martin is shown above with his favorite ship, a Nieuport 28. The ship, with wings cut short due to an accident with the previous owner, was reputed to be the fastest ship on the West Coast. Martin was accused of waiting until church got out on Sundays and then starting up the ship's radial engine, which could be heard for miles. People would go directly to the airport and pay for rides. An excellent exhibition pilot, Martin thrilled thousands with his acrobatic skills. (Left) Spraying orange trees was a major job. Ralph Mitchell was the first to spray his groves using an airplane. (Photos courtesy of the late Eddie Martin.)

"About a month and a half, two months went by, and I paid a little on the note the second time and paid the second month's rent and then I had a note on my desk that Mr. Irvine wanted to see me at my convenience. I went out to see what Mr. Irvine had on his mind, and when I got in the house, Brad Hellis was in the front office. He said, 'Oh, Eddie, come in the other room and visit with Roy Browning and me until Mr. Irvine is finished with the fellow he's with and then he will come in.'

"I went in and talked to those two fellows for about 15 minutes and then here came Mr. Irvine in. I started to get on my feet to shake hands with him and he said, 'Don't get up. Don't get up. Sit down.' That's the kind of fellow he was. Mr. Irvine said, 'You know, I've been out by your airport

several times lately, and I would be way down the street or out in the field just sitting there quite some time watching. Aviation isn't good business. I don't see how you can make any money and stay in it. I know you like to fly, and I'd hate to do anything to keep you from it, but you know what I'm going to do?'

"I was scared by that time, and I didn't even say a word. He walked back and forth a couple of times and then he came up again, and he said, 'I'll tell you what I'm going to do. First thing I'm going to do is cancel your lease.' I thought to myself, 'How can he cancel my lease when he just gave me a new lease and he's accepted my note and my rent payments and I had guaranteed to pay them on time from then on, which I was doing.' But I didn't say anything, because I was very timid to begin with and I just listened and probably my face got red.

"Mr. Irvine came back by me in a minute or two and he said, 'Another thing that I'm going to do, I'm going to cancel that note. You don't owe me anything. I know that business is rough and all. I like the way you do business. From now on, you and I don't need a written lease, we'll just do business by handshake. Furthermore, we're going to go back to where you started several years ago, and your rent will go back to \$35 a month until such time you feel you can pay a higher rent than that, and then you come back and tell us what you can pay and we will accept it.'

"The first thing that went through my mind was that big red sign that I had seen over that door. 'Often the best way to show warm sympathy is with cold cash.'

"A couple of years later when Mr. Irvine built the Irvine Dam, I had a little chance to get even with him. Mr. Irvine planned for that reservoir and dam years ahead and had the money laid aside for it. He built it with the state of California and the dam was paid for in cash. I had an aerial camera and was doing a lot of picture work, besides teaching students and flying passengers. Mr. Irvine had Brad Hellis call me and ask me if I would go up and take progressive pictures of that dam at least every two weeks or so while it was being built. There was quite a lot of flying involved in that, but pictures weren't really expensive to take in those years because we were in times when a dollar was worth a dollar.

"About a year after they had the dam finished and I got through taking those pictures, Brad Hellis called up and said, 'Eddie, Mr. Irvine just told me that he didn't think he had ever had a bill from you for taking all those pictures up at the dam.' And I said, 'Mr. Irvine will never get a bill. They were paid for a long time ago.' I never could forget what Mr. Irvine had done for me.

"I could recite other things that Mr. Irvine did for his farmers. There was one farmer who was a dry farmer and a good friend of mine. This man got in the hole with The Irvine Company for about \$17,500 and my friend told me this himself, so I know every word of it is true. He was as good as his word every time - his word was his bond. Now \$17,500 may not seem like a lot of money, but it was. In the twenties and during the Depression, it was a terrible debt.



Brad Hellis ,

Brad Hellis had lived in the same neighborhood as the Irvine family in San Francisco and knew Jase Irvine. He began working for the ranch at the "bottom of the ladder" and rose to the top as Irvine Ranch manager. He was one of the few employees who arrived penniless and left a wealthy man (Photo courtesy of First American

Title Insurance Company).



Ernie Lagier with D-7 Cat

This 1947 advertisement photo for Caterpillar Tractor Company features Ernie Lagier with his new D-7 Cat. Lagier is pulling a Post Brother's Plow, digging 30 inches deep. (Photo courtesy of Ernie and Anna Lagier.)

"My friend went to The Irvine Company and talked to Brad Hellis. He said, 'I don't see how I'll ever get out of this debt with you but I'll do the best I can as long as you don't get too impatient with me. But I have an idea. The Caterpillar Company has just brought out a big tractor they call a D-7 and if I could get a hold of one of those, I could build a root cutter to cut all the roots on the blue gum eucalyptus trees about six feet deep.' The blue gums were used as wind breaks, but they were ruining the first two rows of oranges on all the orchards because the blue gum roots go way out and take all the fertilization and moisture. He said, 'If I could borrow - I know this is asking a big question - but if I could get The Irvine Company to loan me another \$17,500, I would buy one of those tractors, build a root cutter, and run that thing all day and all night. I've talked to all the growers and they all want their roots cut if there was a machine in the county to do it.'

"Well, that was in the afternoon, and Hellis said, 'Well, that doesn't sound like too bad a deal - I think that's possible. I'll get with Mr. Irvine on that and then I'll call you back and let you know what he said.'

"As my friend came in the house the next day at 11:30 for lunch, the telephone rang. It was Brad Hellis. He said, 'You need to call the Caterpillar Company and tell them where you want your tractor delivered and when.' And within the next year or a little over, my friend was completely out of debt with The Irvine Company.



Streams photo

: Prior to Westpark development, the Peters Canyon Wash cut a deep channel through the area. Turtle Rock development can be seen in the background; Harvard Road to the extreme right.. (Judy Liebeck photos.)

"Mr. Irvine was one of the finest people I have ever met in my life, and as long as you weren't trying to take him for something, why, he would stand behind you.

"Now, way back as I remember the dates - if I make a mistake with a year or two, you'll have to forgive it - but farmers around Orange County, a lot of them farming Irvine land, and Mr. Irvine had gone in pretty heavy on orange groves. He (Irvine) talked to some of those farmers and told them that if they wanted to plant oranges, he'd sell them a piece of ground and they could plant oranges, but they wouldn't make any money on oranges until after seven years. He told them that they could pay on the ground what they could afford in the meantime, but the balance of their trust deed would not be due for sixteen years.

"Well, during that sixteen years, what came up was the big, big Depression - all through 1929 and the early thirties. Most of those farmers would have had to turn their ground down, but during the Depression, Mr. Irvine notified the farmers that they would have an extension as long as they needed it if they preferred to keep the orange grove. The groves were coming into

maturity and Irvine knew the farmers would come out real well on the investment. Many of them kept the land. Those people were able to keep their orange groves only because Mr. Irvine came to their rescue.

"Another thing that Mr. Irvine did for Martin Aviation - which was the old Eddie Martin Airport - in the early thirties, the county and state decided to put through MacArthur Boulevard. Well, MacArthur Boulevard, when it crossed South Main Street, went right through the middle of one of my big hangars. That would have put my airport clear out of existence, of course. I figured we could probably get another lease on another part of the Irvine Ranch, but the county had an idea that they wanted to get hold of the airport business in Orange County and they started dickering with Mr. Irvine for a large strip down the road about a mile and a half away from my airport. There would be no percentage in having two airports in Orange County; that would put me out of business.

"But the county had 160 acres over east of my old airport that they had bought for a park. They had never done anything with it, and they proposed to Mr. Irvine that he take that 160 acres in trade for some land south of it that would be adjacent and contiguous to the new MacArthur Boulevard, and they would have what was later called the Orange County Airport. Well, Mr. Irvine was willing to deal with them on that, but he put one stipulation in that deal. In the purchase of that ground and the trade, they would have to give Martin Aviation a 17-year exclusive lease on that airport. That's the only way he would deal with them, and that's the way the deal was made.



Orange Industry photos

Many of the farmers whom Irvine sold land to plant orange groves, which took seven years to produce, would have lost the land during the Depression had Irvine not extended the term of their trust deeds to sixteen years. Top: harvesting oranges tracts. right: a modern technique (1972) for spraying the orchards. (Photos courtesy of Irvine Historical Society.)





Eddie Martin Airport, 1926 photo

By 1926, the airport had five hangars. Numerous airplanes were stationed at the popular field, which had a 100 percent safety rating. The Edison electrical substation, which still exists at Main and Sunflower, can be seen in the center left of the photo. (Courtesy of the late Eddie Martin.)



Orange County Airport photo

The old Eddie Martin Airport was relocated in 1939 to the site of the current Orange County Airport. The old airport was just to the right of the Costa Mesa (55) San Diego (405) freeway interchange seen in the extreme upper left corner of this photograph. (Courtesy of Irvine Historical Society.)

"Not many people would ever think about a lessee like Mr. Irvine did and protect him for that amount of time. Again, I will say, Mr. Irvine was one of the finest men I've ever known in my life."

Eddie Martin also recalled that Irvine donated much of the money required to build and run the Santa Ana Community Hospital. When Kate Irvine once became ill at the ranch, the only doctor willing to come out to the mansion to treat her was Horace Leecing, an osteopath. The local hospitals would not allow him on their staff because they didn't believe an osteopath was a real doctor. Leecing was on the staff of the Santa Ana Community Hospital.

"The community hospital was started but most all the money that was put up for that hospital was put up by Mr. James Irvine, Sr.," Eddie Martin said. "When he put together his foundation for The Irvine Company, he [stipulated] that 60 percent of the foundation money that was given away had to stay in Orange County. And a certain amount of that went into the community hospital on East Washington in Santa Ana. As I recall, one year it was over \$80,000 that he gave to them. There was never a man in Orange County that was any more fair than Mr. Irvine."



Fattening Steers photo

Each fall Bill Cook would purchase the "thinnest steers" he could find at the Los Angeles stockyard and turn them loose to graze on his lease until June. They would each gain about 200 pounds just eating pasture grass. (Photo courtesy of Irvine Historical Society.)

Remembered by Bill Cook

In 1929, a young man by the name of William C. Cook began farming on the Irvine Ranch. There were nine Bill Cooks on the Irvine Ranch, but William C. became the first "unofficial" mayor of the town of Irvine, and a leader in the revolution from sacked to bulk silo storage.

Cook lived and worked on the Irvine Ranch for 40 years. In 1983, he recalled some of his experiences on the ranch at an Irvine Historical Society meeting:

"For the first three or four years I was on the Irvine Ranch, I knew there was a Mr. Irvine, but he wasn't very visible. I heard a lot of stories and rumors with regard to Mr. Irvine. Through those three or four years I began to build up an image in my own mind about Mr. Irvine and it wasn't too good. But in the 20 years from that time until just prior to his death, I was fortunate enough to have had several experiences with him, and each one of them just brightens him.

"I had two leases on the ranch. One of them was an irrigated lima bean field - 240 acres of some of the best farmland on the ranch. The limas we grew were dry and white, and they were threshed through the threshing machine, very similar to the grain harvest. This particular lima field was where the Tustin Meadows housing tract is now - now it's all covered with blacktop and roofs.

"My second lease was 400 acres up in Peters Canyon, what we called a dry farm lease, meaning there was no irrigation water available. It wasn't suitable for irrigating anyway, just up hill and down. And my lease was surrounded by the Peters Canyon reservoir. The land around the shores of that lake had about 80 acres that was difficult to farm. It grew all kinds of native grasses; it was very productive. I got permission from the Irvine management to fence that and make a pasture out of it. I paid a dollar an acre per year for the extra 80 acres.

"I used that land to graze my work horses when I wasn't using them. But the main reason I wanted that land was so I could go to the Los Angeles stock yards and purchase about 20 head of the thinnest steers I could find. I'd take them up there and turn them loose in that pasture - that would be in the fall - and leave them in there until about June when the pasture began to give out a little bit. I could almost see those cattle put on meat when I turned them in to that 80 acres. Then I'd take them back to the stock yard and sell them. I wouldn't have had to feed them a forkful of hay or a scoopful of grain - they would gain about 200 pounds just feeding off that pasture land.



Irvine: Cattle Ranch photos

The Irvine Ranch has always been the largest cattle ranch in Orange County. James Irvine, Sr. applied for the "JI" brand on July 25, 1892. Years later, he tried to drop the bar under his initials, but another rancher with just a few head of cattle had registered that brand. Irvine Ranch cowboys rode excellent horses. Working as a team, they branded, castrated, dehorned and inoculated each calf in less than a minute. (Right) Phil Crosswaite, cattle foreman at the San Joaquin camp based at the current site of the golf course, moves the cattle down a path in Shady Canyon, adjacent to Bommer Canyon. (May 1971 photo by Art Brewer, courtesy of Irvine Historical Society.)

"Mr. Irvine made it a habit about once a week to come up and fish in that lake. Incidentally, that was the lake the Fish and Game [warden] arrested him on for fishing in his own lake [without a license]. They gave him a citation. He took them to court on it and finally won the right to fish in his own lake. He would come up there once a week and fish around the lake - get in a boat and row around.

"All of my friends told me that Mr. Irvine wouldn't allow any livestock except work stock and maybe a milk cow and a hog or two. I didn't pay much attention to that because the management of the ranch knew what I was doing. But I had a friend in the cattle business who had quite a bit of experience with The Irvine Company. He used to come up and inoculate my steers and every

time he would come up he would make a remark about how I was getting by, and what was going to happen when Mr. Irvine found out about what I was doing. This friend was pretty well acquainted with Irvine, and I thought maybe he knew what he was talking about. I began to worry about it a little bit.

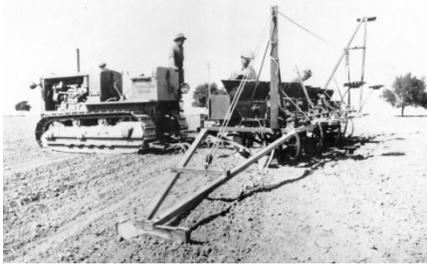
"I made it a practice every night to turn the steers out into this pasture for about an hour. I also had a small herd of about 25 hogs, and I turned them out as well. One evening I had just turned the steers and hogs loose in the pasture when I saw Mr. Irvine come down and get into his boat.

"He rowed out from shore and then he came around the bend, and headed right towards where I was standing with all the hogs spread out in the pasture. At that moment, all the steers on the other side of the lake decided to come down to the lake and get a drink. I thought, 'Well, now we're going to find out about this livestock business.' When Mr. Irvine rowed up even with me, he stopped and pointed to the hogs. He said, 'Boy, you've got a fine bunch of hogs here.' I was kind of stunned at that - I don't think I even answered him, I probably just nodded my head in agreement. Mr. Irvine then pointed across the lake to the steers. 'How much did you have to pay for them?' I said, 'Seven and a half cents.' And he said, 'I think you made a good deal.' And he started rowing off. I stood there with my mouth open just watching him, and I said to myself, 'Well, there goes a rumor down the drain.' He knew all along what I was doing and apparently he approved of it.

"About ten years went by before I had another experience with Mr. Irvine. I have to give you a little background on this. Prior to coming on the Irvine Ranch, I had farmed in Orange on a small scale. My only horsepower was actually from horses. When I came onto the Irvine, I had to have big equipment, tractors and tools to go with it, and for that I had to borrow money. So I went to the bank. It was October 1929, about one week before the crash.

"I borrowed the money, gave them a chattel mortgage on everything I owned, and of course by the time the first year was over the price of beans had gone way down (from 12.5 cents to six cents on beans the first year). I only had enough money to pay the interest on the note. I went to the bank to see if I could renew the note but they wouldn't do it. They said, 'We've got to have that money.' "I thought, 'Well, I'm going to go broke now. I'm going to go off the ranch with less than when I came on.' So I went to The Irvine Company to tell them that I thought I was through - I couldn't get financed. They said, 'Well, we're financing most all the other farmers on the ranch, there's no reason we can't finance you.' So some of my friends, when they heard that I was going to be financed by The Irvine Company, said, 'Oh, Bill, you're going to be sorry for that. That's what Mr. Irvine wants you to do, he wants you to get in debt to him and he'll never let you get out. He'll keep you in there until you're stepping on your beard.'

"The Irvine Company paid off my note at the bank - I paid off the interest, and they paid off the note. They reassigned my chattel mortgage to them, assigned my crops to the company, and I started out \$5,000 in the hole. For the next three or four years, the Depression really set in and the price of beans went down, down, down. I was getting farther and farther in the hole. Every year I'd settle up with The Irvine Company and I was farther in the hole.



Farm Equipment photos

Cleo Poh (standing left above) plants lima beans on the site of the current Irvine Medical Center, and (left) tries out a tractor on French Hill, current site of Christ College, with the Oliver tractor salesman (standing). Farm equipment such as this was expensive, and usually purchased with borrowed money. When the banks stopped financing the farmers during the Depression, The Irvine Company picked up the farmers' chattel mortgages so they could continue to farm. (Photos courtesy of Johnny and Ethel Poh.)

"About the third or fourth year, I began to think that my friends knew what they were talking about when they said I'd never get out of debt with The Irvine Company. I was really getting in the hole. But about 1938, things began to get better and I gradually began to get out of debt a little bit. In 1944, The Irvine Company sent me a note and said I was out of debt. I had been keeping track, too, and I figured I owed them about two thousand dollars more. I went to see the bookkeeper to verify it, and I told him that I didn't think I was quite out of debt yet. He said, 'What did you use for interest?' I said, 'The same as the bank is charging, four percent.' He said, 'Well, Mr. Irvine instructed me not to charge the financed farmers any interest. He figured they were there farming for him, and he would just have to pay income tax on it. So he said, "Just don't charge it.'"

"About six months after that, I had gone to the Irvine office to talk to their purchasing agent - he would do the purchasing for the farmers on the ranch. I had just stepped in the door when he said, 'Bill, Mr. Irvine wants to see you.' I thought, 'Here it comes. He's found out that I'm out of debt and now I'm going to get kicked off the ranch!' So I went to his office and he was reading the newspaper. He set the paper down and just looked up over it and motioned for me to sit down in a chair. He always had these beautiful Irish setters with him - every place he went, they went there too. He had four or five of them there in the office, and as soon as I sat in the chair, they began to climb all over me wanting attention and I had to fight them off. He just sat there, reading his newspaper. Finally, he put his paper down and called off the dogs.

"He said, 'I understand you're out of debt with the company?' And I said, 'Yes, sir.' He said, 'Well, I just want to congratulate you. I've got farmers on this ranch who have been in debt for 50 years and who have never got out.' He picked up his newspaper and began reading again. I got out. I felt about ten feet tall when I went out of there.

"Mr. Irvine made it a habit when he was on the ranch to just ride around. He would drive around through the agricultural section and up into the hills. And he always took somebody with him - I imagine it was whoever was advising him - so he didn't go alone. A man of his wealth riding around through the back country, there's no telling what might have happened.

"I was foreman at the Harkleroad Camp for seven years. Twice during that time Mr. Irvine asked me to accompany him on the trip. Of all the times that I've had with Mr. Irvine, these were the best of them, because it gave me an idea of how much he cared about the ranch. His affection for the ranch was terrific. He would drive around and he would talk constantly. I don't think the two trips that I went with him that I said two dozen words. He would talk about what he had planned to develop on the ranch, the things that had turned out good, and he would once in a while bring up a disappointing thing.

"Both times - he had a hill there in the south hills, not very far from the Irvine Museum, they call the 'Top of the World.' And both trips that I went with him we wound up on top of that and from that vantage point, you could see every acre of tillageable land he had - the whole Irvine Ranch. Well, he quit talking as soon as we parked, and I was afraid to say anything because I knew he was in deep thought. And finally, both times, he said the exact same words. He said, 'I cannot make up my mind when the ranch is more beautiful: in the spring when it's freshly tilled, or in the summer when it's growing and green.' We'd sit there for a while, and then we'd drive off. But he wouldn't talk too much after that.

"The best land on the Irvine Ranch is just this side of the north hills where it flattens out there, originally I suppose that was all filled in with sediment. That is where the San Joaquin Fruit Company was. They tested that out and they went down 50 feet in that soil and it never changes, it's the same all the way down. I used to call this - it's more than just a ranch, it was a kingdom. Mr. Irvine kind of felt that way about it too, I could just tell, the way he talked about it.



Supplemental Feed photo,

Farmers often had stock - a milk cow, mules and horses - that needed supplemental feed. This wagon load belonged to Cleo Poh and is stopped beside the barn in which it will be stored. The Poh farm house, facing current Sand Canyon Avenue, is to the right. (Photo courtesy of Ethel and Johnny Poh.)



'Best Land on the Irvine Ranch

"The best land on the Irvine Ranch is just this (south) side of the north hills where it flattens out...," according to William C. Cook. On a hill near Bommer Canyon, one could see every acre of tillable soil on the Irvine Ranch. James Irvine called it "The Top of the World." (Photos courtesy of Irvine Historical Society.)

"There was a controversy with some of the hired help and the superintendent of orchards and I had to go to the main house to talk with Mr. Irvine about it. There were eight or ten Pekinese dogs in the room that belonged to Irvine's wife, Katherine. Mr. Irvine had a little ball and he rolled it across the floor and all these dogs went screaming after it. The two or three that arrived at the ball first would practically kill each other over possession. They were mean critters and everyone was greatly amused by it. One time, the ball bounced up and one of those dogs lunged at it, deflecting it towards the fireplace. You never saw dogs slide to a stop so fast. We never did discuss the work controversy.

"I had another experience with Mr. Irvine a little later on. When I assumed the management of the Irvine Warehouse Company in 1946, which later became the Irvine Bean and Grain Grower's Association, I inherited the work crew there. And in this crew there was an elderly man, a maintenance man - blacksmith, carpenter, electrician - just a good, all-around maintenance man and I liked him very much. About two years before that, there was a strike with the employees at the warehouses, and this man was the only one that didn't go on strike. The sheriff brought him to work in the morning and took him home at night. About a year after I came there he took sick - I visited him a couple of times at the hospital and he died shortly after my last visit.

"After the funeral was over I went by his widow's house to see how she was getting along and to see if there was anything I could do for her. She said that there was, she thought she was entitled to Social Security but didn't know how to apply for it, how much she had coming, or anything. In 1948 the closest Social Security office was in Long Beach - after corresponding by mail, telephone, and one trip over there, I found out she had \$11 a month coming to her. And that was the exact amount she paid for rent.

"The only other income she had was by the needle sewing doilies and all that kind of stuff. That kind of bothered me, and I figured that Mr. Irvine ought to know about this. So I went by to see

him and I told him about the lady's situation, and reminded him that during the strike, her husband was the only one who didn't strike. I told him, 'I thought maybe you'd like to know about it.' All he said was, 'Well, thanks for the information.'

"About six months after that I went to see the bookkeeper about something and when I went to leave he said, 'Look, I'm not supposed to tell you this or anybody else, but I know you were involved with it, and I'm going to tell you. Mr. Irvine ordered me to give the widow \$150 a month as long as she lives.' She was along in her 70s at that time, and she didn't live but three or four more years. But Mr. Irvine didn't want any publicity, good or bad. He didn't want to be publicized at all.

"When I think of all the things that happened to me in my long life, this association with Mr. Irvine was probably the most interesting, and the most important to me, too."

Bill Cook talked about how The Irvine Company financed the farmers.

"You went in the first of the month, and took all your bills - blacksmith bills, fuel bills, everything that pertained to the ranch. You laid them down in front of the bookkeeper and he added them up and wrote you a check for that amount plus \$75, and that was what you were supposed to live on. We had a cow, a chicken, and a garden. We could go into a grocery store and pay \$5 and come out with both arms loaded with groceries.

"The Irvine Company bookkeeper had an account for each farmer on the ranch. When the bookkeeper wrote you a check, he charged your account with that amount. When your crops began to come in, the money went directly to The Irvine Company. I never saw a check while I was in debt to the company. That was charged to your account too. At the end of the year, you either lost money or gained, but that's the way they financed it. That was quite a meeting there the first of every month. There would be about 25 or 30 farmers in there waiting to get their checks."

Cook admired James Irvine's ability to plan for the future. "He had terrific foresight. When I first came on the ranch, I had a lease of 240 acres of limas and they were putting down wells all over the ranch with oil rigs. They went down two thousand feet, some of them. They got huge wells. The well on the ranch that I farmed got 250 inches of water when it was wide open. You'd have to take a third ditch and irrigate with it. But I think they drilled 44 of those deep wells, and then they capped them. They didn't need them right then, but he knew they were going to need them. Eventually they used them up. Hardly any of those wells will flow anymore."

James Irvine introduced water conservation on a big scale to Southern California. Irvine Lake was put in at the expense of an entire grove of sycamore trees. Cook remembered, "It took Mr. Irvine a long time to allow that site for the dam, which destroyed those sycamore trees. They were beautiful.

"After that dam and reservoir were built, Irvine built a whole series of small dams on the ranch. All the dams and reservoirs were built to catch the water - they used it very well when they brought in water from the Metropolitan Water District. All the lakes can be filled with MWD

water. If there was a lot of rainfall, Irvine Lake would fill up - it's the biggest reservoir on the ranch. That water would go all along the reservoir system, down in to Peter's Canyon and from there over to Rattlesnake, and from there to Val Verde, and so on. There were six small reservoirs built for the overflow."



Water Conservation

Irrigation enabled James Irvine to build his agricultural empire. He used his abundant financial resources to create his own water system, first pumping from the underground aquifers and later building dams and reservoirs. From top: windmills (wooden, left; steel, right - the only one of each that still exists on the ranch) pumped water until sophisticated water pumping stations (center) were built. Bottom: a reservoir. (Photo credits: Judy Liebeck, Barbara Wiener, and Irvine Historical Society.)

As Remembered by William Croddy

William Croddy saw James Harvey Irvine, Sr. from an entirely different perspective than William Cook. While Cook started out as a farmer, Croddy was interested in real estate and eventually built a successful mortgage insurance company. Croddy, who died early in 1990, recalled Irvine this way:

"Mr. Irvine did many things for many people. There are many people in this area that are well off today entirely because of the things Mr. Irvine did for them. I got to thinking one night about the people he had helped and I can name almost 100 people who are now financially independent - they were all hardworking people, but he loaned them money at the right time and he helped them any way he could.

"He was not the kind of a man that most people thought. He didn't talk much; he was very shy. He really helped me get where I am today. He loaned me money, security, and he helped me work out the deals that I was working on. He always gave me good advice, and I was just one of many that he did that for.

"One of the things he did, that I think very few people have any knowledge of, was in 1940. He had some lots over on what was then Palisades Road, which is now Bristol, there by the airport, scattered through the tract. So we talked about it a lot, and we started building houses 900-[square]-foot houses on one-half acre ground which we sold for \$2600. Irvine financed them. We sold them for \$100 down and \$26 a month. And they were all sold to working people - and I mean the lower element working people. It enabled those people to have something of their own. And they all appreciated the chance to do this. A lot of them didn't even have \$100 to pay down. They dug the cesspool, or did some work as part of the down payment. And then when they got the houses, some of them added to them, but they only had to pay \$26 a month with six percent interest. There was so much talk about providing low cost housing - that's been a subject that has been carried on as long as I can remember. Back in Roosevelt's time [there was] talk about low cost housing for the lower earning people. We built 78 of those, and then the war came along in 1941 and we stopped.

"But before the war started, we were about through with the lots in that tract. Mr. Irvine was so satisfied with the work that we had done - he would go there and talk to the people and did many things to help them. For example, it was quite a long way to the store to get a loaf of bread, about four miles. One of the families there had lived in Huntington Beach and they had a Mom-and-Pop type store with living quarters. They were an older couple. Mr. Irvine and I talked about the necessity of doing something to help the people get close to a source of food supply. Mr. Irvine built a store with a house attached to it, and this man moved over there and filled that need.

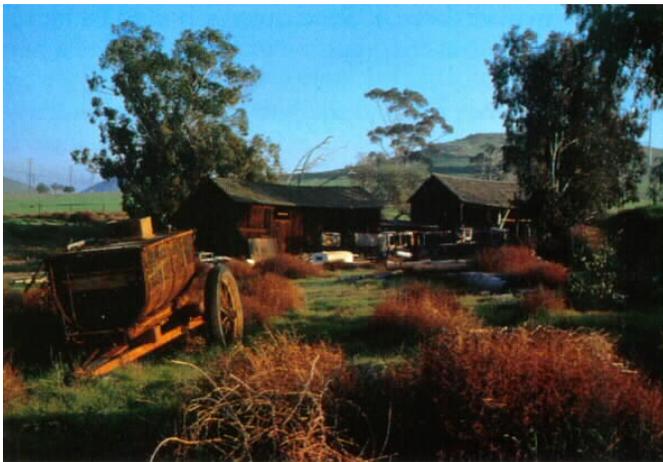
"Mr. Irvine would come down from San Francisco and we'd go over there and talk to this man. Mr. Irvine was very proud of what he had done there. It was the best example of what private enterprise could do. There was no government money there whatsoever; this was all private money and all his idea.

"I did a lot of work for him. I'd be in San Francisco on some business matters of his, and we would go to dinner and walk down Market Street, and he would tell me of all the deals he had made on Market Street. In my opinion, Mr. Irvine was probably one of the smartest businessmen in the state of California. The money he ended up with, he made. He didn't inherit anything like what he ended up with. He was a very smart man and he taught me so much. He was so modest. But I think that people should know more about the fact that these houses - there were 78 of them - everyone of them paid out. There was not a single repo.

"Mr. Irvine had a phenomena] memory. If we ever ran across a piece of real estate that we felt the company could use or needed, I would go up to San Francisco and talk to him about it. Invariably he knew all about it and could tell you all about it, even if he had only driven by it on the road. I think he had a lot of ability to analyze. He taught me a lot about analyzing property. I was very fortunate to have him during that stage of my life as a young man. It also gave me quite a lot of prestige around town. I was one of the few people who could call James Irvine on the phone and have him answer. So it worked out pretty good for me.

"I never worked directly for Mr. Irvine. He wanted me to, but the people who worked for him didn't get too much [in] wages. But he would help them acquire land. There were many of them who had tree leases and they ended up very well. But there was never any question who was the boss. And when he gave you a job to do, you did it. There wasn't any excuse. He made many of the decisions on the ranch himself. He had pretty competent people working for him. I bought a lot of real estate for him, and sold some odds and ends for him, and I was very well rewarded for it. Everyone that worked with him ended up the same way.

"Irvine really lived a very simple life. The first time I went up to San Francisco and visited his office, I couldn't believe it. He had an old Wells Fargo safe, an old roll top desk and a table. The table was covered with maps and bean samples and fruit samples and ore. The carpet was probably original - it had holes in it.



Tenant Houses photo

The Irvine Ranch once had the finest collection of tenant farm homes remaining in the southwestern United States. The homes were allowed to fall into a state of disrepair like the old Poh

Ranch near Laguna Canyon Road, and have all but disappeared. (Photo courtesy of Irvine Historical Society.)

"He had an old Packard down at the ranch and he'd get behind the wheel - he did the driving, and the dogs would always be in the back of that thing. He always had his dogs around. He didn't play with them particularly, he just had them around.

"Irvine had some ideas that were eccentric to a certain point. For example, he wouldn't deed property unless he got the money. Everything was sold on contract. One day we were talking about it and I told him I thought we would be a lot better off if we used a deed trust form, instead of a contract. He didn't even want to listen to it. He leased a lot of his land, all of it on very low rentals. Everybody that leased from him made a good deal. It turned out well for them.

"Most of his property was handled by managers, and I think he followed their recommendations pretty well. His rentals were almost all commercial. He owned property in San Jose, San Francisco, Portland, and some in Santa Ana. During the 1930s when things were really tough, he helped back the First National Bank [in Santa Ana]. He kept it going. He bought merchandise from people - he had quite a crew out there, maybe as many as 100 working [at ranch headquarters] that he boarded. He paid his debts - whatever he bought, he paid for. And that was a big help to this area. And to my knowledge, he never laid anybody off during the hard times. They might have quit and he didn't replace them, but he never laid anybody off that I knew of. Everybody [that] had a job, kept a job.

"I have been in business over 60 years - I started in 1922 - and I have never met a man Irvine's equal, and I met a lot of them. He was so good to me, and of course he always wanted to know everything that was going on in his community.

"He did have ... a very quick temper. When he got mad, he really got mad. But it didn't last more than about two minutes. Sometimes something would shake him up and he would really get mad. But he never held a grudge. In a couple of minutes it would be all over and it would be just like it never happened. He used to worry me because he was not a young man then. I thought, 'One of these days he's going to do that and it's going to be his last one.' But it didn't happen often - no more than three times when I was around."

The Flying D

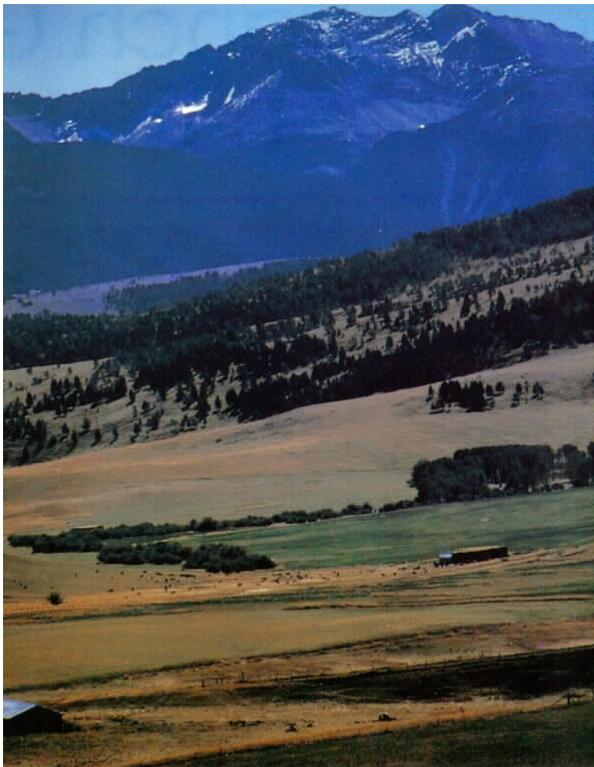
In 1944, The Irvine Company bought the 82,000-acre Flying D Ranch in Bozeman, Montana. The death of the ranch founders in 1931 and 1936 had left the ranch managed by people with little interest in its operation. James Irvine purchased it, trading dollar for dollar the amount the government had paid to buy the land for the Navy bases, in order to avoid capital gains tax. The Flying D, flanked by the Madison River on the west and extending beyond the Galatin River on the east, was located 40 miles northwest of Yellowstone National Park at the base of the Spanish Peaks.

The histories of both the Irvine Ranch and the Flying D have remarkable similarity. The principal industry of the Flying D was stock-raising, grain, and mining. The ranch was operated by resident tenants, paid for growing hay. The grain was sold on a cooperative basis. Many cattle ranchers considered the Bozeman area the best cattle country in the world. Some of the tenants managed herds on a share of the calf-crop basis.

James Irvine loved the Flying D property, and visited as often as possible. The altitude was high, and Irvine had a heart condition. His doctor advised him to be cautious on trips to the ranch. Irvine died while fishing in Spanish Creek at the Flying D on August 24, 1947. He was two months shy of his 80th birthday.

Perhaps the entry for James Harvey Irvine in the Rice family history book, published in 1909, summarizes his accomplishments best. It reads, in part, as follows:

JAMES HARVEY IRVINE, son of James and Henrietta Maria Rice Irvine, born October 16, 1867, in San Francisco; married, in 1892, Anita Plum, and resided at Tustin, Orange Co., Cal. Upon the death of his father, the son, James Harvey Irvine, inherited the estate. Few Americans of this generation born into an estate of such magnitudes as fell to James Harvey Irvine upon the death of his father came into it realizing its duties and responsibilities as he seems to have done, and exercising a rare judgment and modesty in regard to it that is seldom witnessed. The giving of the park in Orange Co. and other public and private benefactions are but a tithe, and he is fulfilling in the largest measure the command of the well-known saying - "Noblesse Oblige."



Flying D Ranch

James Irvine traded dollar for dollar the land sold to the Navy in Irvine for the land in Montana in order to avoid capital gains tax. Approximately 5,000 acres of Irvine land bought 82,000 acres in Montana, considered to be the finest cattle grazing land in the U.S. (Photos courtesy of Irvine Historical Society.)