

## Question:

'What can you tell me about the origin of Buellton?'

—Jane Butler

by Michael Redmond

**B**uellton became the seventh incorporated city in Santa Barbara County in 1992. The town was named after Rufus Thompson Buell, whose life story weaves a classic tale of the traditional American Dream, where hard work and persistence result in financial success.

Although Buell was to become a very successful California rancher, life on the land did not particularly appeal to him as he grew up on his family's farm in Vermont. He yearned to get an education and to see other parts of the country. He attended Oberlin College in Ohio for three years, then taught school for a time in Kentucky. In December 1853, he boarded the steamship *Yankee Blade* for the 100-day voyage to California.

Landing in San Francisco, he set out for the gold fields, where he enjoyed moderate success as a prospector. By mid 1856, he decided to return to what he really knew best, farming. After spending a short time in Sonoma County, he purchased 13 cows and began a dairy near Point Reyes in Marin County. In 1865 he relocated to Salinas, and by now his herd of 13 had grown to 800 animals. He also became editor of a local newspaper.

Having made something of himself, he returned to Vermont in 1867 to marry and soon returned to California, where he and his brother purchased interest in the nearly 27,000-acre Rancho San Carlos de Jonata, at the western end of the Santa Ynez Valley. Buell proved successful in this venture; in 1872, he purchased the balance of the ranch from his brother and the other owners.

Over the course of the next two years, Buell invested some \$100,000 into the ranch. He increased his dairy herd to 1200 cows, his cattle to 3500 head, and his sheep to 1700. He also kept over 700 hogs. He planted barley and wheat, put in orchards of various fruits, and planted vineyards. His ranch employed

over 50 men and in 1889, he opened a school for their children. Buell established a post office on the ranch in 1883. There was also a general store. He built a slaughterhouse and a cheese factory. He put up over 40 miles of fencing with lumber hauled from Gaviota pier through the rugged Gaviota Pass, a trip that usually took two days.

A serious drought in the mid 1870s threatened Buell with ruin. To save his herds from starvation he cut down hundreds of oaks on the ranch so the animals could feed on the tender shoots and mosses of the trees.

Financial recovery came slowly and Buell was forced to sell 12,000 acres in 1890 to get back on firm economic footing. (A portion of this acreage was later purchased by the Danish-American Corporation to found Solvang.) Buell died in 1905 and the ranch was divided among his sons.

In 1916, construction began on the re-routing of the state highway, which led to the birth of Buellton. In 1920, the area's postmaster, William Budd, submitted the name "Buell" to the federal government for the post office.

As there already was a Buell in Oregon, Budd next submitted "Buellton," which was accepted in December 1920. Located at the crossroads of highways 101 and 246, the small community came to depend on the ever-growing stream of automobile traffic for economic viability.

The town's best-known landmark got its start in 1924 when Anton and Juliette Andersen opened Andersen's Electric Café, so named because the restaurant boasted an electric stove. Although pea soup was a popular menu item early on, the restaurant underwent a number of name changes before being rechristened Pea Soup Andersen's in 1947.

With another rerouting of the highway in 1964, the 101 no longer went through the middle of town. Still, Buellton continued to grow. Today it is a thriving community of around 4,000 people—the seventh city incorporated in Santa Barbara County.



Rufus Thompson Buell