



Oil painting by H. H. Cross of "Lucky" Baldwin, his daughter, Anita, and pet mastiffs, circa 1888. The recently completed Queen Anne Cottage is seen in the background.

Rancho Santa Anita

Sandy Snider

VISITORS to the Los Angeles State and County Arboretum nod appreciatively at historian H. H. Bancroft's description of this "... ideal region, calm and peaceful as the fabled realm of Rasselas, where soft vernal airs induce forgetfulness of the din and turmoil, the crowded streets and selfish intensity of city life." Bancroft's rhapsodic prose, as applicable today as when it was written in 1891, is testimony to the dreams, the tenacity, and the untrammelled enthusiasm of Rancho Santa Anita's most colorful owner — Elias Jackson "Lucky" Baldwin.

Born in 1828, the son of a Hamilton, Ohio preacher-farmer, E. J. early in life demonstrated a flair for the game of "American Capitalism." At the age of twelve, young Elias arranged with his father to drive the family hogs to a Cincinnati market for slaughter (a four week journey). Elias was to give the family all proceeds from the sale up to 160 pounds per hog, with any profit from excess weight to be reserved for himself. Shrewdly investing in a large sack of salt along

the way, Elias waited till the night before delivery to set his feast before the hogs, then again waited patiently as the thirsty animals drank enough water to temporarily send their weight well above the 160 pound figure the following morning.

With a personal profit of \$32, the budding entrepreneur bought gifts for his family, a new rifle for himself, and an investment in a horse that three months later yielded a 100 percent profit. Having thus established a pattern of reasoned investment, of timely buying and selling, Baldwin's business ventures changed only in scale and complexity over the years. From the hogs and farm horses of his youth, E. J. eased into mining shares and real estate; from doubling a few dollars investment in a horse, he learned to manipulate thousands and occasionally millions of dollars in stocks and mortgage policies.

Severing his midwestern roots for the more lucrative promises of 1853 California, Baldwin arrived in San Francisco too late for the big profits of the Gold Rush,

but in ample time to establish a reputation as a wise and usually ruthless investor (hotels, brickyards, livery stables) who continually proved the wisdom of his oft-stated business philosophy: "To be a success, you've got to keep your eye on two ends—when to go in and when to go out—and don't waste any time doing either."

When news of the Comstock Lode (Nevada silver mining) struck San Francisco in the early 1860s, Baldwin waited and watched and studied while others ran off to the mines. When he went "in," it was to invest in mining shares, not in a pick and shovel, and in a short while his carefully orchestrated system of buying and selling began to pay off in quite handsome profits. A killing on some Ophir shares alone netted him a clear five million dollars (a 500 percent profit on his total investment) and set the stage for a flamboyant entry into an unsuspecting Southern California.

By now popularly nicknamed "Lucky" (many stories, all hazy, surround the origin of the name), Baldwin had decided to personally investigate rumors of good property available near Bear Lake in the San Bernardino Mountains. After a miserable night in Los Angeles, E. J. set out early for Bear Valley on a ride that took him through the heart of Rancho Santa Anita. Lovely at any time, the rancho seemed to have a special glow of health and promise after the dusty squalor of Los Angeles.

With a farmer's eye for good soil and perhaps a sixth sense about land values, "Lucky" Baldwin determined he would soon make the Santa Anita his own. In 1875, backed by millions in cash reserve, Baldwin offered owners Harris Newmark and associates a generous \$150,000 for the 8,000 acre ranch (Newmark had paid \$85,000 for the land three years earlier). An intrepid Newmark demanded \$175,000 and, taken aback, E. J. balked.

When, after businesslike consideration, Baldwin decided to pay the \$175,000, he was boggled by Newmark's new demand of \$200,000. Recognizing that he had already violated his business philosophy by not "going in" quickly enough, E. J. grudgingly paid the \$200,00 which, at \$25 an acre, became the largest real estate transaction ever recorded up to that time in Los Angeles.

Elias Jackson "Lucky" Baldwin thrived on the challenge of largeness and basked in the glow of superlatives. Under his ownership, Santa Anita not only reached its full potential as a working ranch, but also metamorphized into one of the show places of Southern California. "The scene is one of fairy-like loveliness;" wrote Bancroft, "not only the little bijou residence (Queen Anne Cottage) and its surroundings, but the entire estate, with its groves and vineyards, its golden fruit and waving harvest, its shaded drives and vistas of mountain peak and valley . . ."

Though Baldwin personally spent little time on the ranch in the early years of his ownership, he funneled in money at a phenomenal rate and, through manager Dick Kelly, issued explicit directions for ranch improvement. Some three hundred Chinese, Mexican, and American laborers were hired and housed at such economical rates—Chinese received \$1 per day, Mexicans \$25 per month plus board, Americans \$35 per month plus board, and manager Kelly a mere \$60 per month—that Baldwin could carry out his plans quickly and efficiently.

Orders for tree plantings, for orchards and groves, for reservoir building, well digging, and irrigation systems were issued; water rights in Sierra Madre Canyon were purchased and dams and conduits were planned for the conservation and distribution of water. A large grove of English walnuts (one of the first in Southern California) was set out, and an

extensive vineyard that was to become the basis of prize-winning Baldwin wines and brandies, was begun. The old adobe house of Hugo Reid, with its various and sundry additions, was renovated still further by Baldwin to serve as a quite comfortable, thoroughly modern eight-room ranch house for himself, while across the lake a gay red and white gingerbread or Queen Anne style guest house was constructed for visiting friends and business associates. Surrounding the homesite were exotic gardens, well-tended lawns, shaded walks and decorative fountains, plus, for animal lovers, a well-stocked deer park and numerous peafowl (descended from three pair Baldwin had originally brought over from India).

That 8,000 acres was not nearly enough land to support E. J.'s plans and dreams was apparent to all who knew him or of him, and when the opportunity to acquire additional property on mortgage foreclosures presented itself, the businessman in Baldwin raised its head. During a financial crisis in 1785, the Temple and Workman Bank of Los Angeles had been forced to suspend operations till additional monies could be found. Baldwin agreed to lend the owners \$210,000, but he secured the loan with a blanket mortgage on the properties of both Temple and Workman and their friend Juan Sanchez. The bank failed, despite the loan, and after admirably allowing the mortgage to run almost to the statute of limitations, Baldwin foreclosed. Temple suffered a stroke and a lingering death, Workman committed suicide, Sanchez died a poor man, and "Lucky" Baldwin acquired some 54,000 acres of the San Gabriel Valley (Sanchez's 2,300-acre Rancho La Merced, 4,600-acre Rancho Portrera Grande, and 4,000-acre Rancho de Philip Lugo, plus Temple and Workman's 40,000-acre Rancho La Puente). Now a landowner of note, Baldwin's holdings in the San Gabriel Valley

stretched from the Sierra Madre Mountains on the north to the Puente Hills in Whittier on the south and from just west of East Pasadena (near Cal Tech.) to the Merced Hills on the east.

From the homesite at Santa Anita, E. J. oversaw a ranch almost unequalled for variety of products. The Baldwin Ranch at its height boasted 500 acres of orange groves with over one million young trees in the nursery; 3,000 English walnut trees; large groves of lemons, almonds, pears, peaches, apricots, prunes, figs, persimmons, and olives; experimental camphor, pepper, coffee, and tea plants; and a grape crop that produced 384,000 gallons of wine and 55,000 gallons of brandies yearly (the Baldwin winery still stands on the hill overlooking the west turn of the Santa Anita Racetrack). Agricultural experimentation was a favorite activity on the ranch and ran the gamut from pomegranates and bananas to potatoes, asparagus, tobacco, hops, and cotton. Grains and alfalfa were produced in high yields to help feed 33,000 sheep, 3,000 head of cattle, large dairy herds, hundreds of registered hogs, and 500 horses, seventy some odd of which were pampered, specially housed, lavishly cared-for thoroughbred racers (the red and black Baldwin racing colors made turf history at every track in the nation).

"Lucky" Baldwin was rightfully proud of his accomplishments at Santa Anita, and as the years went by the ranch continued to produce both edible and inedible dividends. National recessions took their toll on his finances, however, and throughout his last thirty years Baldwin was constantly land rich and money poor. Almost continually pressed for cash, it was during this period that he developed a reputation for never paying a bill without pressure. Employees, it was noted, were paid "more regularly with promises than with cash."

The boost that probably saved Baldwin from financial collapse was the unprecedented real estate boom that struck Southern California in the 1880s with the coming of the railroads. With the still sure hand of a successful businessman, Baldwin contracted with Sante Fe to build its line into Los Angeles across the Santa Anita property. An "incidental" provision, that all passenger trains should stop on his signal at his ranch station (the Santa Anita Depot has been restored on the Arboretum grounds) was included not so much as a personal power play, but rather as a stimulant to buyers of the tracts of land he hoped to sell.

Having earlier observed the promotional methods of Nathaniel Carter (founder of Sierra Madre) and William Monroe (founder of Monrovia), Baldwin had come to the realization that the profit to be had in selling individual town lots far exceeded the possibilities in selling land wholesale. Thus, with the enthusiasm and thoroughness now recognized as typical of the man, Baldwin created the town he forthrightly named Arcadia.

"This land," he advertised, "including water, in 5-to 20-acre tracts, clear and ready for the plow [costs] \$250 to \$400 an acre." When accused of charging too high a price for unimproved land, Baldwin is said to have replied, "Hell! We're giving the land away. It's the climate we're selling." Exhibiting as masterful a hand in real estate promotion as he had over the years shown in other avenues of business, the Baldwin ad continued, "Epidemic diseases, poisonous insects, tornadoes, cyclones, earthquakes and thunder storms are practically unknown. An average of more than 300 sunny days makes it possible to work in the open air without injury to health."

Elias Jackson Baldwin, the man of many callings, was nearing his seventh

decade when he laid out the town of Arcadia. His interests had shifted over the years, and now in his later life he turned full and undivided attention on his beloved Santa Anita. Life was peaceful, in fact *too* peaceful at the ranch, and though Baldwin enjoyed entertaining guests (especially the young ladies who came so often), he nevertheless was on a constant lookout for adventure.

In 1903, Baldwin adroitly engineered the incorporation of the city of Arcadia and installed himself as mayor. Heading the fledgling city was, typically, a means to an end for businessman Baldwin, for his eye was now on the possibility of building and operating his own race track on his own property with the tax base of a city he had created with his own contrivance. In December, 1907, the Santa Anita Racetrack was opened (on the site of present Arcadia County Park) to 20,000 spectators. "I desire no other monument," said Baldwin. "This is the greatest thing I have ever done, and I am satisfied."

Fourteen month later "Lucky" Baldwin died in his lakeside home at the ranch, bringing to a close the longest and most important chapter in the story of Santa Anita. Under Elias Jackson Baldwin, Rancho Santa Anita reached its peak in acreage, in productivity, and in variety of output. Its fame was such that it elicited frequent tribute, as witness these final words of praise: "It is a spot whose attractions, both natural and artificial, it would be difficult to exaggerate, and we know not whether most to admire its vast extent, the magnitude and diversity of its interests, the beauty of its situation, the skill with which its various operations have been planned, or the well-nigh perfect generalship with which they have been executed."

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