



Historic Bakersfield & Kern County, California

www.gilbertgia.com

Where Bakersfield Threw Its Garbage, 1872-1992

By Gilbert P. Gia

Copyright © 2016, Gilbert P. Gia, Bakersfield, California
Public schools and public libraries are granted use of this work for direct instruction.
Commercial interests contact ggiaggia@gmail.com

Trash was not a problem for decades, but in 1913 a newspaper grumbled, "A village may find a dumping place for its garbage, and though it is unsightly and the practice unsanitary, it all passes with little criticism, but a city of 20,000 inhabitants situated in the center of a rich and populous section can hardly be disposing its refuse in that manner without offending both sight and smell, and certainly the danger to health is always a pressing question when the garbage of a city is left charred and uncovered by the roadside."¹

Scofflaw dumping today pales in comparison to how people used to dispose of their trash. Bakersfield's early dumps were all de facto ones, and even after the city sponsored a dumping ground, the convenient ones persisted. What residents should have done and what they actually did were usually quite different.

¹ Bakersfield Californian, Jun 10, 1913

Major Historical Dump Sites

**Panama Slough
Reeder's Lake
Hudnut Park-Kern County Museum
Union Avenue at Niles Street
Brundage Lane at Cottonwood Road
Brundage Lane at Mt. Vernon Avenue
Alfred Harrell Highway at Fairfax Road
Panorama Drive at University Avenue
The Metropolitan Sanitary Landfill at Bena**

The Panama Slough



**Panama Slough, about 1900
(It is the darker line across upper left quadrant) K Street is on far left. Railroad Avenue, across lower half, is today's Truxtun Avenue.**

Most low-lying places were dumping grounds, but the most heavily-used one was the meandering, off-again-on-again tributary of the Kern River called the Panama Slough, its bed scarcely a foot lower than the river itself.²

In 1998, historian Chris Brewer described its path.

“The Panama Slough formed, or better yet reformed, during the flood of 1862 and ran diagonally through what is now downtown Bakersfield. It left the old south fork channel north of the town ditch and passed near the north end of Jewett Lane. Once reaching the 23rd and L Street area, it turned pretty much down 23rd Street. It turned southwest at D Street and ran diagonally through Sec 25 or what is now being called, though a misnomer, Olde Westchester. It continued south, close to the intersection of 21st and D streets and backed up into Reeder Lake around Cedar and 18th Street.”³

In 1956, historian Frank Latta wrote this about the slough.

“Early travelers in this area might have seen two main channels of the Kern River. Except for flood stages, the eastern river channel [*which flows through today’s Mill Creek Park*] carried all of the water. The other channel [*Panama Slough*] ran diagonally through present Bakersfield, passing from near the north end of Jewett Lane close to the intersections of 21st and D streets, 7th and B streets, and just east of the Santa Fe Roundhouse [*Northeast of the intersection of Oak Street and California Avenue*]. From around 1900 this old watercourse was an overgrowth of grapevines, wild blackberry, and cottonwood and willow trees. Another old channel existed for many years just west of Chester Avenue in the

² The Californian, Oct 19, 1894, Aug 7, 1900. Slough rhymes with threw.

³ [Bakersfield] Village News, Mar 1998

neighborhood of 21st and 25th streets. Until the 1890s this old channel was the location of the City Dump.”⁴

Latta capitalized City Dump, but the slough was neither owned by the city nor was it a city-sanctioned dumping place. Where it crossed M Street, in 1874, it was called an "ague pond.”⁵ Three years later, when Bakersfield’s population was almost 2,000, the slough was little changed. A newspaper observed, “If the filthy slough north of town were cleaned out there would be very little sickness in Bakersfield.”⁶ The slough was foul, but it was convenient.

Both major land companies -- Miller & Lux and Haggin & Carr – owned water rights to the slough, but the former never exercised them and the latter chose instead to take most of its share of river water via the old South Fork of the Kern River.⁷ After Haggin & Carr did receive water via the slough, what little was left in it settled into a series of stagnant swamps along its bed.⁸ In the early 1880s the slough was still a heavily-used dumping place, but in 1883 it was cleaned when Bakersfield’s real estate market was heating up. The Kern County Californian wrote,

⁴ East Bakersfield Press, Feb 26, 1956. The Press carried several historical articles by Frank F. Latta.

⁵ Kern County Weekly Courier, Feb 21, 1874 (from Lynn Hay Rudy private database). Ague means malaria or illness involving fever and shivering.

⁶ Southern Californian, Kern County Weekly Courier, Jul 19, 1877. Bakersfield was then unincorporated. Financial administration was from the Kern County Board of Supervisors. Bakersfield’s first incorporation was in May 1873. It disincorporated in January 1876. Kern City [*East Bakersfield*] incorporated on December 12, 1893. Bakersfield’s second incorporation was on Jan 4, 1898. The Kern City ballot of Dec 21, 1909 merged Kern City with the City of Bakersfield. Today, neither Kern City nor East Bakersfield is an administrative entity. For information about Bakersfield disincorporation, see *Alex Mills* at www.gilbertgia.com

⁷ The Kern River Flouring Mill was just north of today’s Beale Memorial Library.

⁸ The Californian, Oct 19, 1894, Aug 7, 1900

“Captain Anderson has had a large force of Chinese at work for a considerable time clearing the channel of the Panama Slough and removing the brush along its banks for the distance that it passes through the Cotton Ranch [*a portion of which extended to 19th Street and K Street*]. This when complete will be a great improvement and, together with other improvements that have been made on this valuable property the present season will materially improve the sanitary conditions of the town and surrounding country.”⁹

The spruce-up probably boosted the value of town lots sold by W.B. Carr after Cotton Ranch property west of Chester Avenue was subdivided in 1889.¹⁰

Not all refuse found its way into the slough, and some was uniquely repurposed. An exasperated Weekly Californian reader wrote in 1893,

“Is this a civilized community or one of barbarians, that such outrages against the laws of comfort, health, and even life itself, can be openly perpetrated on the public streets? This is the season, if any, when special precautions should be taken to ward off disease. Vaults and cesspools to be cleansed and disinfected, drainage looked after, garbage properly disposed of, and everything possible done to prevent contamination of the water we drink and the air we breathe. But what do we see instead? On 19th street between G and H there is being industriously carted

⁹ Kern County Californian, Feb 24, 1883

¹⁰ Kern County Californian, Mar 23, 1889. The populations of Bakersfield and Kern City [East Bakersfield] were 3,262 and 625 respectively. In 1890 both were unincorporated settlements. (Kern County Californian, Jul 12, 1890). In 1891 the Kern County Land Company graded Railroad Avenue (Truxtun Avenue) west from Chester Avenue to the slough near Myrtle Street. (Lynn Hay Rudy, *Old Bakersfield: Sites & Landmarks, 1875-1915*, Jenner, California, 2000)

and thickly spread, from curb to curb, a mess of foul and reeking manure from a neighboring corral, where it has been accumulating for years – disgusting the eye of the passer and filling the air with a stench that causes him to hasten by. This, I regret to say, is not an exceptional case; it is the common practice of stablemen here to make a common dumping ground of the public streets, rather than incur the expense of properly disposing of their stable-droppings. (signed) Outraged Olfactories.”¹¹

Much refuse, however, wound up in the slough. In the early 1890s the Kern County Board of Health observed,

“We, the undersigned, legally qualified members in and for Kern County, having inspected the ditch or stream known as South Fork, or Troy Slough [*The Panama Slough*], running around to the northwest of the town of Bakersfield, determined that the said slough or stream is a nuisance and menace to the health of the inhabitants of the town of Bakersfield and recommend its abatement.¹² We would recommend that sewerage from the Southern Hotel [*a large building*] be turned into the city sewerage. We would further recommend that a pipe or tiling be laid throughout the course of the said channel or Troy slough sufficient to drain and carry off any and all discharges from sewers or drainpipes leading to said slough.”¹³

¹¹ Weekly Californian, Jul 23, 1893. Ordinances written during Bakersfield’s incorporation of 1898 attempted to control asocial behavior. See *Mme. Brignaudy in the Bakersfield Tenderloin, 1905-33* at www.gilbertgia.com

¹² The canal “running around to the northwest of the town” was the Panama Slough.

¹³ The Californian, Mar 26, 1894, “The Slough Condemned” “Pipe or tiling” referred to channeling sewerage to somewhere distant from downtown. This newspaper attributed the report to medical doctors T.E. Taggart, W.H. Cook, C.A. Rogers, T.W.

Months later as Bakersfield debated town incorporation, a newspaper wrote about garbage being burned in the slough.

“The banks of the sluggish stream is [*sic*] littered with a wealth of old tin cans of every nature and condition. Piles of offensive manure and trash dot the vacant ground, and from them arises, through the long hours of the day and night, a never-ending column of smoke which is floated into the adjacent dwellings and which renders life in that portion of the town at times almost unsupportable. Tin cans do not beautify town lots, and clouds of smoke from burning trash piles are not conducive to good health or temper. The citizens in the affected section therefore propose to move in the matter and if possible stop the practice of dumping the town’s litter at their front doors. By the way, incorporation will act as sure preventative for all such ills as the one under consideration. Then let us incorporate.”¹⁴

Reeder’s Lake

Municipal control over disposal of refuse came with Bakersfield’s incorporation of 1898. “All garbage, trash and debris gathered as aforesaid,” read an ordinance, “shall be hauled by the contractor and deposited in what is known as Reeder’s lake.”¹⁵ Bakersfield did not own Reeder’s Lake; rather the property belonged to the Kern County Land

Helm, and health officer Franz Buckreus. Regarding sedition charges against Buckreus, see *Sedition in Bakersfield, 1918*, www.gilbertgia.com

¹⁴ Daily Californian, Nov 3, 1897

¹⁵ Daily Californian, Mar 2, 1898. That dumping ground probably included the western portion of today’s Jastro Park.

Company, which had granted residents the privilege of dumping there. In 1898 horse-drawn wagons of the garbage collectors, known then as scavengers, crisscrossed the town streets much the way gardening services do today. Garbage service was elective (paid by the customer), but it was not required, and because some residents did not pay for service, refuse inevitably found its way into the slough.

The Railroad Avenue Sewer was built to channel effluent into the southern Panama Slough where it would not bother city residents.¹⁶ But in September 1898 the odor lingered for so long over town that fifteen barrels of lime were scattered in the slough.¹⁷ The Daily Californian reported,

“The odor arising from the slough into which empties the sewer draining the business and a small portion of the residence section has made outdoor existence next to impossible, and the condition of the slough is a serious menace to the health of the community. The abortive attempts that have been made to disinfect the dumping ground have given relief but temporarily if at all. The old smell goes right along and every evening when the night falls the air comes floating over the homes of the people laden with impurities sufficient to place a typhoid patient in every home. It is said that the sediment has settled along the banks and bottom of the channel to such an extent that so compact a mass has been formed that all the water of Kern River would not suffice to clear it away. In any event a serious

¹⁶ Railroad Avenue became Truxtun Avenue.

¹⁷ Daily Californian, Sep 22, 1898, p 3, c 4

condition confronts the community and it would seem that some steps must be taken to provide the town with an adequate sewer system.”¹⁸

In fall 1898 the river was low, water entitlements were reduced, and the Kern County Land Company refused to bear the cost of releasing water into the slough to flush it.¹⁹ That decision was surprising because it had been using the slough as a dump. After County Health Officer Snook examined the section between 24th Street and 27th Street and found it full of refuse and emitting a noisome stench, the county drew up a petition denouncing the slough as a nuisance. Herman Hirshfeld, president of the sewer company, presented demands to the Kern County Land Company that it stop dumping sewage, filth and garbage into the slough. ²⁰

In 1899 some businesses east of Chester Avenue were dumping their garbage promiscuously. One especially odious stench arose from standing water, festering heaps of trash, and rotting garbage in the gutters of what was called Jap Alley.²¹ The Weekly Californian observed, “It is said that the

¹⁸ Daily Californian, Nov 22, 1898, “The Sewerage System.” Work started in early 1901 on a trunk line that followed along 19th Street to Chester Avenue to Truxtun Avenue and then west to the Panama Slough. (Daily Californian, Dec 14, 1900.) See Daily Californian, Jul 6, 1906, “Sewer Experts Will Arrive Next Week.” “Entire sewer matter will be conducted to a separate tank, which will be situated about a mile and a half south of town and will follow the fall of the land. There the sewer matter will receive a septic treatment and the rest will flow into a channel, entirely free from odor in light liquid form.” (Daily Californian, Jul 18, 1906)

¹⁹ In an open letter to the Californian, President of the Kern Island Canal Company, Walter James, wrote, “But it is not reasonable for the people of Bakersfield to expect the Canal Company to do this without compensation: and under no circumstances unless there is some understanding on the part of the people of Bakersfield to find a permanent remedy for the condition of things of which they complain, as the Canal Company, through a greater portion of the year, cannot furnish this water without serious loss [of income].” (Daily Californian, Oct 31, 1898)

²⁰ Daily Californian, Jan 6, 1899, p 1 The Californian, Sep 19, 1899, “Action Taken Against Panama Slough Nuisance”

²¹ “Jap Alley” was in the Tenderloin between 19th and 20th streets and L and M. (1900 US Census, Kern County, California, Sup. Dist. No. 5, Enum. Dist. No. 28, p 193A, Sheet 15, 18. T623, Roll 87)

public scavenger has not visited the place for nearly a month, and the evidence is there to prove the truth of the statement.”²²

The Panama Slough, by 1900, had become a definite hazard to public health. A newspaper commented, “Fully 75% of the poor health can be traced directly or indirectly to Panama Slough. Merely to cover up the bottom with a few feet of earth would remove the watercourse. The municipality has the power to compel the change and owes it to itself to exercise that power. Not another summer should be allowed to pass before Panama Slough has become a memory only.”²³ After pondering the garbage disposal problem, the Kern County Board of Supervisors concluded that Bakersfield needed a dedicated dumping ground.²⁴

Over expected objections of Miller & Lux, on the night of February 19, 1901 and without notice, the Kern County Land Company filled-in one block of the “death-breeding” Panama Slough.²⁵ Two years later, trustees instructed City Marshal Ferris to put up signs ordering residents not to dump inside city limits.²⁶ The City Council also had signs posted instructing residents not to dump trash in the slough,²⁷ but as late as 1915 it was openly used as a dumping ground.²⁸

²² Daily Californian, Dec 26, 1899, “Alley’s Foul Condition”

²³ The Californian, Aug 7, 1900, “Exit Panama Slough”

²⁴ The city had incorporated in 1899, but the Kern County Board of Supervisors still exerted control over some city matters.

²⁵ Daily Californian, Feb 19, 1901. Los Angeles Herald, Feb 21, 1901, “The Panama Slough Is Being Filled up”

²⁶ Daily Californian, Jan 20, 1903

²⁷ Daily Californian, Feb 19, 1901. See also Morning Echo, Apr 2, 1904. Daily Californian, Aug 18, 1905, Nov 8, 1905

²⁸ On the clean-up day hosted in Feb 1913 by members of the South of the Santa Fe Improvement Club, citizens cooperated in removing rubbish. The Californian wrote, “The abandoned town ditch will in all probability be the dumping ground.” (Bakersfield Californian, Feb 20, 1913, “Clean up Day Becomes a Reality through

Upscale neighborhoods lay west of Chester Avenue, while on the east were the blue-collar hotels, mercantile businesses, and the Tenderloin.²⁹

Independent garbage haulers served both sides. For fifty cents a month -- or one dollar a month for homeowners who kept horses -- scavengers Winters and Bridges carted-off household rubbish and garbage. But the vacant lots and ditches still abundant in town were convenient and free dumping places.³⁰ Some months after Marshal Ferris started his street-sign work, the Kern County Grand Jury issued a scathing criticism of east-of-Chester businesses that had been piling stable manure and restaurant garbage in alleys.³¹

In 1905 Superintendent of Streets J.E. Yancey attended a convention of city municipalities at Chico and reported, "A few cities have erected crematories, where all the refuse matter is burned. This idea seemed to meet with the approval from the majority of the delegates, and it seemed to be the general opinion that the method will be universally adopted before long."³² The prospect of paying for a municipal incinerator must have raised taxpayers' eyebrows. Open spaces around Bakersfield were obviously still abundant, but few residents appreciated just how much Bakersfield's infrastructure had been stressed by the discovery of oil along the Kern River. Population

Efforts of City Club"). On Jun 23, 1915 the Bakersfield Californian reported the slough as a "disgusting mess."

²⁹ Tenderloin referred to the east-of-Chester district known for tough saloons, gambling, crime and prostitution. For information about prostitution in Bakersfield, see *Mme. Brignaudy in the Bakersfield Tenderloin, 1905-1933* (www.gilbertgia.com)

³⁰ Morning Echo, Apr 2, 1904. Residents on the L Street ditch used it as a dumping ground and cesspool. (Daily Californian, Aug 18, 1905). Daily Californian, Nov 8, 1905. During a downtown fire in early 1907, the water plug at 19th and L streets was blocked by oil that had been dumped into the ditch. (Morning Echo, Mar 22, 1907, "Cosmopolitan Block is Burned At Last")

³¹ Daily Californian, Feb 24, 1904. These businesses were located between 19th and 22nd streets and K and M streets.

³² Daily Californian, Nov 21, 1905. The convention was at Chico, California.

was booming. When City Trustee Munzer inquired about using the lower Panama Slough as a dump, nearby property owners complained, and he and his committee had to keep looking.³³

Hudnut Park

In summer 1906 the city made a dumping ground on Kern County Land Company property between Hudnut Park (today the vacant field north of F Street and Golden State Avenue) and the racetrack (which today is encompassed by Sam Lynn baseball complex at 4009 Chester Avenue).³⁴ Immediately after the site opened, trash began piling up along Chester Avenue, which provoked Henry A. Jastro -- who was both County Supervisor and Director of the Kern County Land Company -- to threaten the "fullest prosecution of the law" against anyone caught dumping between the ice plant and the river.³⁵

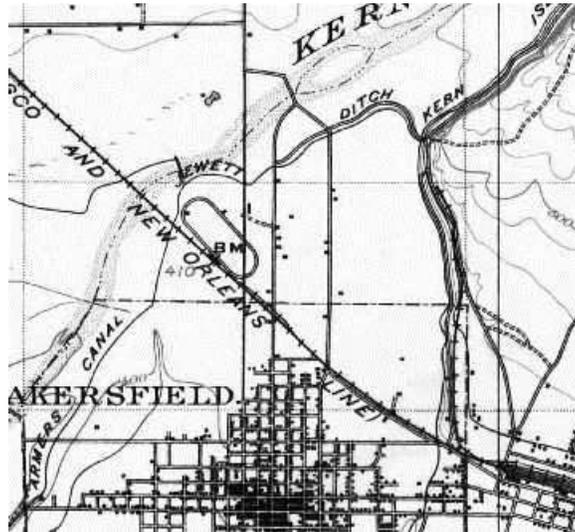
In summer 1910 a garbage hauler named Charlie Smith asked the City Council to give him an alternate dumping site because property owners along 24th Street had stopped him from dumping. Councilman Munzer suggested that Smith use Reeder's Lake because some weeks earlier the Kern County Land Company again had allowed haulers to use it for dumping.³⁶

³³ Daily Californian, Nov 28, 1905, "Garbage Question"

³⁴ Morning Echo, Jun 21, 1910. "More About City Refuse." Bakersfield Californian, Jun 28, 1910, "Garbage Disposal Worrying The Board Of Trustees." Bakersfield Californian, Aug 12, 1906

³⁵ Bakersfield Californian, Aug 12, 1906. The red-brick ice plant north of Chester Avenue underpass is extant.

³⁶ Bakersfield Californian, Jun 28, 1910, "Garbage Disposal Worrying The Board of Trustees"



The Race track, 1906, is the long oval adjoining the railroad line running top left to bottom right. Hudnut Park was just across the tracks

Growing interest in racing at the track north of Hudnut Park made the dump an annoying liability,³⁷ and the Kern County Land Company eventually declared it off limits for dumping.³⁸ Another reason that the dump closed was atmospheric conditions; Northwest summer winds drifted smoke and foul air over new residential neighborhoods to the east. As for Reeder's Lake, the City Council knew that the Kern County Land Company would not allow its use as a dump forever. So, space around town for dumping was running out. Modern incineration seemed the answer until Councilman Munzer announced, "We haven't money enough to build an incinerating plant. Something must be done."³⁹

³⁷ Bakersfield Californian, Jan 25, 1913

³⁸ Bakersfield Californian, May 26, 1910, "No Place For Trash." Jun 28, 1910, "Garbage Disposal Worrying the Board of Trustees." The dump site most likely extended into the field immediately west of today's county museum. The Kern County Fair Association owned the race track. (Bakersfield Californian, Aug 27, 1915, "Race Track Site Of 102 Acres Proposed for City's Large Park"). For more about auto racing at the racetrack see Bakersfield Californian, Jan 25, 1913. Bakersfield Californian, Jun 28, 1910, "Garbage Disposal Worrying the Board of Trustees"

³⁹ Ibid.

In spring 1911, garbage piled up at a residence by the high school agricultural farm, which then was about a mile north of 19th and Chester. Principal B.F. Macomber went to the City Council to find out if there was an ordinance against storing garbage on private property, and the council, after much pondering, replied there was no such law. In order for the council to do anything, it first had to declare that specific property a public nuisance.⁴⁰

The issue of private-property dumping versus public-property dumping soon arose again, this time about unsanitary conditions on 24th Street between H and Chester.⁴¹ At the meeting of the council, Trustee Dumble mumbled that garbage should be dumped outside city limits.⁴²

Actually, that kind of dumping had been going on a long time. In summer 1911 sanitarian E.H. Cornell was busy spraying oil on stagnant water just outside of town when he came upon piles of dumped manure full of maggots. "In one place," a newspaper reported, "he asserts that refuse from the local stables is being hauled and dumped in the open on a vacant lot, thus forming one of the most complete hatcheries that can be imagined. In another place he says the city garbage is being dumped, and in many places no attempt is being made to burn the refuse."⁴³

⁴⁰ Bakersfield Californian, Feb 21, 1911, "Garbage Complaint"

⁴¹ This was the Panama Slough.

⁴² Bakersfield Californian, Apr 12, 1911

⁴³ Bakersfield Californian, Jul 26, 1910, "Campaign Against Flies And Mosquitoes Begun"

Union Avenue at Niles Street

Sometime in early 1911 the Kern County Land Company banned dumping at its property at Reeder's Lake, but it offered a replacement site "just outside of the city limits back of the San Joaquin steam plant."⁴⁴ This plant, now gone, was between 30th Street, Columbus Avenue, Mill Ditch, and the Lake Street Canal -- about one-half block west of Union Avenue.

Dumping and burning started immediately. A homeowner living northwest of Baker Street complained of burning trash between Oregon and Quincy streets which caused "great clouds of disagreeable smoke to float over and permeate the residences."⁴⁵ That smoke probably came from burning garbage on the sloping bluff north of Niles Street and west of Union Avenue.

Over time, the Union Avenue burn dump moved incrementally north toward Bernard Street, but because the grade on Union Avenue rises to the north, heavily-laden drays most likely never dumped as far north as Bernard Street. Another reason that the dump probably did not reach that far had to do with a quarry north of Bernard that had operated as a commercial gravel pit since 1892.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Bakersfield Californian, Jun 11, 1917. The \$1M, three-story San Joaquin Light & Power steam plant, powered by both oil and natural gas, substantially increased the delivery of electricity to Bakersfield. It opened for public inspection on Dec 8, 1913 "on 15 acres near the Southern Pacific tracks in northeast Bakersfield." (Morning Echo, Dec 9, 1913). Evidence of the plant today is the array of PG&E high-tension transformers on the north side of 30th Street adjacent to the cold storage buildings facing Union Avenue.

⁴⁵ Morning Echo, May 5, 1911, "Burning Garbage Causes a Nuisance"

⁴⁶ Weekly Californian, Jun 18, 1892. A spur line between Panorama Heights and Sumner was in place shortly after summer 1894. (The Californian, Jun 2, 1894). The Kern Rock and Gravel Company was established in 1926. (Bakersfield Californian, Aug 4, 1926). Property owner James A. Bernard posted a \$25 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction "of any party dumping rubbish on Bernard properties in the Bernard addition." (Bakersfield Californian, Oct 18, 1911)

In the summer of 1911 unmistakable evidence of years of in-town dumping became obvious after graders broke up 18th Street between Eye Street and Chester Avenue. The manifestly-objectionable rising stink provoked the Morning Echo to write, "The dirt and filth of the street, when it was loosened up to the air smelled like an old Missouri hogpen on the Fourth of July. Under its old, uneven condition the street never could have been swept or cleaned by any method less drastic than a plow and scraper, and for years past the filth has been accumulating, getting thicker all the time."⁴⁷

Dependable, systematic removal of trash was so important to the city that it considered becoming the middleman between trash haulers and the public. The Morning Echo opined,

"We understand that the city finances will not permit the city to hire the garbage removed regularly from all parts of the city, and the expense accordingly must be borne by the householders and property owners themselves. This expense, however, is very light, about \$.50 a month for an ordinary family, and very few families indeed will begrudge this amount for so important a service. Whether the management of the garbage problem can best be undertaken by the city trustees or by neighborhood clubs or through the city Board of Health is a question to be determined."⁴⁸

In late 1911 the Californian described a five-year contract that as offered to the city by A.W. Rench and George T. Johnson, garbage haulers. Some newspaper might have foreseen the closure of Union Avenue dump when they read that Rench and Johnson promised to remove city waste to some

⁴⁷ Morning Echo, Jun 24, 1911, "Keeping the City Clean"

⁴⁸ Ibid.

location at least four miles from town.⁴⁹ Although the contract was promising, the council could not act on it because Trustee Dumble found no statutory authority allowing the city to enter into a garbage-disposal contract.⁵⁰

Heavily-laden, horse-drawn drays needed about an hour to get to the Union Avenue dump, and lightly-loaded ones took about half that time. Time meant money, the Panama Slough was convenient, and newspaper accounts show that dumping in the slough continued as usual. In 1912 the director of the Kern County Land Company, Henry A. Jastro, requested that the City Council enact legislation to make it a misdemeanor to use the slough as a dumping place for refuse, garbage or sewage. But legislation did little to stop illegal dumping.⁵¹

In the summer of 1913 the exasperated City Council said that soon as they found a new dumping place, property owners forced them to abandon it. A solution offered by the Board of Health was to buy a modern, municipal incinerator,⁵² and Trustee Dumble agreed. "It is only a question of time when an incineration plant must be had."⁵³ The Californian applauded when it heard that the council had contacted Berkeley city engineer J.J. Jessup for information: "The city trustees have taken the first step toward bringing into existence an incinerating plant – an institution of which Bakersfield

⁴⁹ Bakersfield Californian, Sep 19, 1911, "To Handle Garbage." In another issue, the Californian spelled the name Rench as Wrench.

⁵⁰ Bakersfield Californian, Nov 7, 1911

⁵¹ Morning Echo, Dec 17, 1912, "Jastro Wants Ordinance"

⁵² Bakersfield Californian, May 23, 1913. Morning Echo, May 23, 1913, "To Incinerate City Garbage"

⁵³ Morning Echo, May 27, 1913

stands in imperative need.”⁵⁴ The Morning Echo agreed. “The disposal of garbage and other refuse of cities, large or small, by cremation has been rightly termed the ‘utopian achievement of the 20th century.’ ”⁵⁵ Engineer Jessup arrived in Bakersfield in summer 1913, surveyed conditions, presented a lantern-show talk, and departed. His report of a week later included information showing that an effective incinerating system would be expensive.⁵⁶

The Board of Health then suggested that trustees find a new dump site outside city limits,⁵⁷ and the council answered back that that was the responsibility of the board.⁵⁸ Some days later the Board announced that after extensive searching it could find no place for a dumping ground that would not affect the town’s health and comfort.⁵⁹

In addition to the dump issue, the Board of Health had also been ordered to investigate two other issues: the unsanitary stables in town and the public’s complaints about vegetables grown on the city sewer farm and sold for human consumption. After the Board investigated, it told the City Council to enforce the law. But the Council told the Board that enforcement was its responsibility.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Morning Echo, Jun 29, 1913, “Incinerating Plant before the Trustees”

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Morning Echo, Jul 1, 1913. Incinerator plants cost between \$30,000 and \$60,000. (Bakersfield Californian, Jan 14, 1915). The equivalent of \$60,000 in 1915 is equal to around \$3M today.

⁵⁷ Bakersfield Californian, May 8, 1913, “New Place to Dump Garbage.” Morning Echo, May 8, 1913, “Old Place West Of North End Of Union Avenue Condemned”

⁵⁸ Morning Echo, May 13, 1913, “City Dump Condemned”

⁵⁹ Bakersfield Californian, May 23, 1913; Morning Echo, May 23, 1913, “To Incinerate City Garbage”

⁶⁰ Bakersfield Californian, Jan 18, 1914

City Health Officer Farris and County Health Officer Baumgartner wrote to the California State Board of Health and invited it to visit Bakersfield and see conditions firsthand. The state responded that enforcement was the responsibility of the City Council because it alone had the power to pass regulatory ordinances.⁶¹

When the shocked Council recovered, clerk Murdock insisted that enforcement had always been the responsibility of the Board of Health, and it must enforce the law. The duty of the City Council, he said, was solely to direct government not enforce codes.⁶²

The Council found the Board of Health patently deficient in policing the city's food supply, hotels, restaurants, stables, sewers, and privies, as well as the job of finding a dump site. On the motion of Trustee Dumble, and by unanimous vote from the Council, all members of the Board of Health were ousted. Wrote the Californian, "It was alleged each member seemed willing to place the blame for all unsanitary conditions within the city upon the city trustees."⁶³ The Echo explained, "Lack of activity in office, and a desire to lay on the shoulders of the trustees the burden of their duties, were the ostensible reasons for the peremptory dismissal."⁶⁴

The hope for a municipal incinerator persisted in Bakersfield despite the fact that every California city that had built one had lost money.⁶⁵ At a joint meeting of the Public Welfare Association of California and the League of

⁶¹ Bakersfield Californian, Sep 4, 1913, "Board Of Health Lacking In Power"

⁶² Bakersfield Californian, Jan 8, 1914, "State Health Officer Invited To Come. Sewer Farm And Other Nuisances Not Abated -Local Board Wants Aid"

⁶³ Bakersfield Californian, Jan 15, 1914. Two members resigned. They gave as reasons "that their terms of office had expired six months ago."

⁶⁴ Morning Echo, Jan 14, 1915, "City Trustees Oust Health Board For Negligence Of Their Duties"

⁶⁵ Bakersfield Californian Jan 15, 1914, "Incinerating Plant"

California Municipalities -- which included representatives from cities bordering the ocean – members agreed that high-temperature incineration of garbage was still in the experimental stage; moreover, dumping municipal waste into the ocean was economically sounder than incineration.⁶⁶ In 1914, San Francisco spent \$15,000 for a municipal incinerator, and more than \$190,000 to build the site, only to discover that operating costs were ruinous.⁶⁷ Many years passed before the Bakersfield City Council finally quit talking about the high-temperature incineration of waste.

Smoke from the Union Avenue dump annoyed, but it was unavoidable. Flies and vermin threatened public health, and for that reason Health Officer Ham Farris visited the dump every day to insure that garbage was being burned.⁶⁸

Meanwhile, illegal dumping continued unabated. Wrote Frank S. Judd who had announced earlier he that he would run for city council,

“Now this article is not directed toward the wickedness or saintliness of the town, but toward the carelessness and indifference of some of the people. It is rather discouraging for one who has a nice home and takes pride in keeping it neat and attractive, to have a lot adjoining him grown to weeds and made a dumping ground for anything that anybody sees fit to throw upon it.”⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Bakersfield Californian, Oct 9, 1913, “Favor Old Garbage Scows To Present Day Incinerators”

⁶⁷ Morning Echo, Nov 15, 1914, “State Briefs”

⁶⁸ Morning Echo, Jan 15, 1914

⁶⁹ Bakersfield Californian, Apr 6, 1914, “A Plea To Clean up”

In 1915 the council passed an ordinance requiring residents to provide covered, sheet-iron receptacles for their garbage. The cans were to be collected three times a week, taken to the Union Avenue dump, and that could be done by the individual property owner or by one of the fourteen independent garbage contractors.⁷⁰

Frank S. Judd's name did not appear on the June ballot, but that did not stop him from telling the public what he would have done had he been elected. One of his points was the establishment of a "municipally-owned garbage plant,"⁷¹ and to that no member of the council could disagree because the city needed a dumping ground of its own from which it could not be evicted. Days later City Manager W.M. Morgan and City Foreman Wheeler started scouting for property. ⁷²

The Panama Slough was closely connected to Bakersfield's plague of flies in 1915. City Health Officer Doctor Peter Cuneo observed garbage and pools of stagnant water in the slough south of 18th Street, and in his report in summer 1899 he referred to Ordinance 43, which sixteen years earlier had called the slough a public nuisance.⁷³ Doctor Cuneo said it was "assuredly a nuisance at present" and should be abated."⁷⁴

Concerning the collection and disposal of garbage, rubbish and stable manure, Doctor Cuneo agreed that it should be removed to "someplace

⁷⁰ Morning Echo, Mar 19, 1915. Minutes of the Bakersfield City Council, Jul 19, 1915, "Garbage Disposal," p 195

⁷¹ Bakersfield Californian, Apr 24, 1915, "Frank S. Judd On The Issues"

⁷² Bakersfield Californian, Jun 23, 1915, "Looking for New City Dumping Ground"

⁷³ Daily Californian, Jun 10, 1899. Cuneo retired as city health officer in 1947.

⁷⁴ Bakersfield Californian, Jun 23, 1915

more than two miles from town.”⁷⁵ He also suggested that the council install a garbage crematory, “which might be owned and operated by the city.”⁷⁶

Two local newspapers, the Independent and the Bakersfield Californian, favored the high-temperature incineration of waste, which they characterized as “one of the crying needs of Bakersfield.”⁷⁷ Later in the summer the council pointed to the slough and to the “horrors” of the dumping ground on Union Avenue and called them both nuisances and menaces to public health.⁷⁸

The City Council wrote to Civil Engineer R.G. Tilden of Nevada who represented the W.G. Kirkpatrick firm of Birmingham, Alabama. The Kirkpatrick Company sold a modification of the Dixon incinerating plant, which was a small-capacity incinerator for communities with inexpensive labor, cheap fuel, and places where smoke and odor from the unit would not be obtrusive.⁷⁹ After an exchange with Tilden, the city shelved the idea.⁸⁰

About this time a resident living near the Union Avenue dump wrote,

“We, the people of East Bakersfield wish to know how much longer the filth of the town is going to burn right under our noses. We expected under the new management to have the dumping grounds changed. It is not the dumping of the filth, but the smoke from burning the filth, that causes so much complaint. Sometimes of evenings the smoke blown

⁷⁵ Cuneo suggested systematic removal.

⁷⁶ Bakersfield Californian, Jun 23, 1915

⁷⁷ Bakersfield Californian, Aug 26, 1915, “Worth Attention.” The Independent was probably the Morning Echo.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ *San Francisco Municipal Reports For The Fiscal Year 1915-16, Ended June 30, 1916.* San Francisco, Neal Publishing Co., 414 Mission St., 1918. pp 814-15 [*Google Books*])

⁸⁰ Minutes of the Bakersfield City Council, Jul 19, 1915, “Garbage Disposal,” p 195

from the dumping grounds is so strong that people living near have to close up their windows and doors to keep out the undesirable smell; also, men employed at night at the steam electric plant are sometimes nearly overcome from the smoke that enters the plant.”⁸¹

The Californian was convinced that high-temperature burning of waste was in Bakersfield’s future:

“The city may find a place for the disposal of garbage far enough away that its subsequent burning will not be a nuisance to the public. That will temporarily abate the evil. But in the end, an incinerating plant must be provided. That is what modern governments are doing elsewhere, and it is what must be done here sooner or later, and the sooner the city can see its way to do that, the sooner we will be rid of an intolerable nuisance.”⁸²

In fall 1914 Councilman Silber brought up complaints about the burn dump from East Side residents who “nearly choked to death from the smoke.” City Manager Morgan answered that conditions there were much better than before: Refuse was being dumped in one big pit and burned, and the smoke was “not nearly as objectionable as formerly.”⁸³

In late 1915 the council located a prospective dump site southeast of town, but after examination of city finances, City Manager Morgan announced that the city’s total annual income was just \$120 more than the entire cost of the

⁸¹ Bakersfield Californian, Aug 31, 1915, “Intolerable Nuisance” by A.J. Busby

⁸² Ibid

⁸³ Ibid. The Bakersfield Californian of Aug 14, 1914 locates the dump approximately between West Jeffrey Street and the southwest corner of Union Avenue and Columbus Street. In 1914 the northerly boundary of City Ward 6 was 34th Street. Its easterly boundary extended to Union Avenue.

property. Councilman Silber suggested putting a city-wide bond measure on the ballot, but that did not happen.⁸⁴

Mike Alvarez was manager of the Union Avenue dump in 1916 when City Manager Morgan inaugurated a cleanup campaign of the town's South Santa Fe District.⁸⁵ During two weeks in December, hundreds of wagon-loads of trash were carted to the Union Avenue dump, and on some days Alvarez saw thirty wagons enter the gate.⁸⁶

The dump had a lot of traffic, but haulers also dumped elsewhere. One blighted area was old Reeder's Lake, which the Kern County Land Company had already declared off limits for dumping. There, millions of tin cans and mixed garbage littered the low, boggy ground. A wit suggested that canal water be released to cover the waste, thus allowing the city to operate a gasoline-powered water craft.⁸⁷

Wrote the Morning Echo, "In many cities, and Bakersfield among them, the matter of getting rid of garbage has proven a serious problem. By private means or by private contract without public direction, the work is not always done satisfactorily to the people who paid for it, and frequently there was menace to health."⁸⁸ Local complaints about unreliable hauling caused the council to change how haulers were paid. The dozen haulers who owned teams and depended on that work for a living would be unaffected; the city would collect fees from residents and pay the haulers.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Bakersfield Californian, Nov 23, 1915, "New City Dump Urged By East Siders"

⁸⁵ Bakersfield Californian, Dec 10, 1915

⁸⁶ Morning Echo, May 6, 1916

⁸⁷ Bakersfield Californian, Jun 12, 1916

⁸⁸ Morning Echo, Dec 14, 1916, Dec 15, 1916

⁸⁹ Morning Echo, Dec 5, 1916

In 1918, haulers could avoid the gate fees at Union Avenue dump by handing over collected waste paper so the city could bail and sell it to cover operating costs.⁹⁰ Sorting of paper was eased by Ordinance 362 that required residents to place rubbish, garbage, ashes and manure in separate containers – which customers had to provide for themselves.⁹¹ The volume of recycling was quite substantial as shown that summer when the dump suffered a \$2,000 arson loss. Destroyed were “more than 200 tons of waste paper, 10 or 15 tons of baled paper, as well as a baling machine and shed.”⁹²

Ordinance 362 also made it unlawful to store garbage or “deposit rubbish of any kind upon any street alley or other public place or any canal or ditch within the city of Bakersfield.” Haulers were required to remove the collected refuse solely to the city dump.⁹³

Significantly, residents did not have to set out all rubbish for pick up. Exempted items included “paper, pasteboard, carpets, bags, clothing, books, boots, shoes, straw packing, barrels, boxes, furniture, and other and similar articles that will incinerate through contact with flames of ordinary temperature.”⁹⁴ Nothing, said the ordinance, “shall be construed to prohibit

⁹⁰ Bakersfield Californian, Jun 11, 1917. San Joaquin Light & Power’s \$1M, three-story steam plant, powered by crude oil and natural gas, substantially increased the supply of electricity to Bakersfield. The plant opened for public inspection on Dec 8, 1913 “on 15 acres near the Southern Pacific tracks in northeast Bakersfield.” (Morning Echo, Dec 9, 1913). The steam plant was between 30th Street and Columbus, about one-half block west of Union Avenue between Mill Ditch and the Lake Street Canal. Evidence of it today is the array of PG&E high-tension transformers on the north side of 30th Street adjacent to the cold storage buildings facing on Union Avenue.

⁹¹ Morning Echo, Feb 9, 1918

⁹² Bakersfield Californian, Jun 20, 1918. The loss is equivalent to about \$60,000 today.

⁹³ Morning Echo, Feb 9, 1918

⁹⁴ Ibid.

the burning of rubbish in a reasonable quantity on the premises where it accumulates on vacant lots by the owners thereof or their agents or employees provided such burning be done between the hours of 6 AM and 6 PM. "⁹⁵

Ordinance 362 decreased illegal dumping in town but increased it outside of town. A resident noted in spring 1918, "On the north end of Jewett lane near the levy everything from auto tops to wire mattresses and refuse of every kind lies in heaps on the roadside. On the bluffs, down the picturesque ravine, on private roads, and property, instead of the city dump."⁹⁶

Brundage Lane at Cottonwood Road

In summer 1918 the City Council found a prospective dumping ground near the Weill-Jastro Colony and Mayflower Addition, both of which were developing residential neighborhoods.⁹⁷ Homeowners protested, and councilmembers took the day off to examine the site -- before buying it.⁹⁸ The city let a contract for its management as a dump but, importantly,

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Morning Echo, Apr 23, 1918. Trash haulers heading east on 34th Street toward the Union Avenue dump crossed Jewett Lane. An extant portion of the levee is south of Roberts Lane between Manor Street and Chester Avenue.

⁹⁷ Mayflower Addition lots were sold in summer 1911. An ad read, "I am offering 100 lots in Mayflower addition for the small sum of \$125 for corner lots, \$100 for inside lots... John Kincaid, Hopkins Building." (Bakersfield Californian, Jun 5, 1911)

⁹⁸ Minutes of the Bakersfield City Council, Jul 8, 1918. Bakersfield Californian, Jul 16, 1918. The Weill-Jastro district was outside city limits. It was south of today's Highway 58 between Union Avenue and Madison Street. The dump property occupied 9.33 acres, and the city paid \$800 for it.

retained oversight.⁹⁹ A guard shack was built next to the dump's gate at Brundage Lane and Cottonwood Road. The dump's telephone number was 1004 – J.¹⁰⁰

The city paid waste haulers in 1916, but that procedure, and the entire hauling system for that matter, came under question in early 1921 following complaints of irregular, careless garbage service.¹⁰¹ City Manager F.S. Benson called it a failure of private hauling, and he recommended that the city create its own centralized, motorized waste-collection and disposal service.¹⁰² The council did not act on that suggestion.

Two years after the dump was opened at Brundage and Cottonwood, a delegation of residents led by realtor George M. Wilkins stood before the council and condemned the dump as a menace to public safety and health, and they appealed for its removal either to the city sewer farm or to some other remote location.¹⁰³

When the council questioned dump manager Laz Montoya about conditions there, he insisted that conditions at the dump were the same as when it was run by the former manager, but he admitted it was an eyesore and was detrimental to nearby residents.¹⁰⁴ When accused of ignoring out-of-control fires, Montoya said that on at least two occasions he had notified the fire

⁹⁹ Bakersfield Californian, Jan 28, 1921, "Dump Question Revived." Mike Alvarez named in the article was probably the first lessee

¹⁰⁰ Bakersfield Californian, Jan 15, 1921, Ad: "For Sale – Cheap, empty bottles of all kinds and descriptions."

¹⁰¹ Bakersfield Californian, May 12, 1921

¹⁰² Bakersfield Californian, Jan 28, 1921, "Dump Question Revived." Benson was appointed City Manager in 1917.

¹⁰³ Bakersfield Californian, Feb 17, 1922, "City Dump Burns. City Council Makes Probe."

¹⁰⁴ Laz was an abbreviation of Lazarus. The city's sewage disposal plant was two miles southeast of Union Avenue, much the same location as today.

department. In response, Manager Benson said he personally had seen large fires burning there unattended. ¹⁰⁵

Dr. Cuneo stepped to the podium.

“Mr. Benson and myself inspected the yards Saturday and found conditions rather deplorable. We found where trash alone should be dumped, garbage and rubbish was mixed. This is against the state law, and the city of Bakersfield is responsible. Being outside the city limits, the dump is outside of my jurisdiction, although it belongs to the city. My recommendation to the board would be the same as that of any health officer, ‘Clean it up.’ ” ¹⁰⁶

Dr. Cuneo pointed out that the dump would not threaten health if it was conducted properly. When he concluded, the council appointed a committee of three to investigate the grounds “and report as to the best manner to remedy the evils.” ¹⁰⁷

Manager Benson promised during the meeting to confer with sewer-farm lessee Duval Williams about using part of it as a city dump, but in March when the council reconvened, Benson had nothing to report. Mrs. George M. Wilkins who lived in the neighborhood was irate:

“I have a truck and I will get my hired man to pick up the refuse and garbage in front of my home and haul it in front of your home -- If you will permit me? (No answer). I’m as fair as you are in the matter; you bring it out and dump it on us. We can’t stand it another week. The vermin, the dead dogs – oh!oh!”

¹⁰⁵ Bakersfield Californian, Feb 17, 1922, “City Dump Burns. City Council Makes Probe”

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

The matter of relocation was tabled in anticipation of manager Benson's forthcoming report.¹⁰⁸ Two months passed without an answer, except one from the state board of health that said a thorough cleanup of the dump would put it in a sanitary condition. Residents were not happy with it. They were there long before the dump was opened.

Mt. Vernon Avenue at Brundage Lane

The City Council was lethargic, but business was not. At the next meeting, realtor George Wilkins delivered a proposal from sewer-farm lessee Duval Williams that had merit, but Councilmember Ed Willow had recently resigned, which meant the council could take no action.¹⁰⁹ Days later another proposal came from private industry. Michael Alvarez, head of Bakersfield Waste Paper Company, offered a unified plan for city garbage collection, hauling and fees, as well as the offer to manage a 40-acre dump that could be built on the city sewer farm.¹¹⁰ Weeks later, manager Benson let a lease to Duval Williams to operate a 26-acre city dump on the Brundage Lane side of the sewer reservation.¹¹¹ The dump opened April 21, 1922, and the Brundage Lane and Cottonwood Road site was closed the same day.

An untimely prelude to its opening happened a week earlier when an illegal dump at 14th and R streets had caught fire and smoldered for days.¹¹² The

¹⁰⁸ Bakersfield Californian, Mar 7, 1922, "Vermin and Dead Dogs Arise Ire of Townspeople"

¹⁰⁹ Bakersfield Californian, Mar 14, 1922, "Willow Resigns"

¹¹⁰ Bakersfield Californian, Mar 27, 1922, "Will Offer Plan For City Refuse"

¹¹¹ Bakersfield Californian, Apr 20, 1922, "Complete Arranging For New City Dump"

¹¹² Ibid.

city's new dump was even more remote from town than the old one; Illegal dumping around town worsened. In 1928 a Mr. R.L. Sheehan wrote, "Ever since the dump at Cottonwood road and Brundage lane was abolished several years ago, the people of Bakersfield have made an unofficial city dump of the East Bakersfield outskirts." ¹¹³ Rubbish, tin cans, and wrecked automobile bodies littered vacant lots in East Bakersfield. The neighborhood around Robinson, Grace, and Jefferson streets were so filled with tin cans and rubbish that they became practically impassable to traffic. The once-desirable residential lots in Monte Vista subdivision lost value. Mr. J.G. Ruoff wrote, "The other day a well-dressed woman in a limousine drove up to the corner of Pearl and Robinson streets and dumped a load of tin cans in the street. In answer to a neighbor who saw it and protested she said, 'Other people dump rubbish out here in the street, and I guess I have as much right to do it as they.' And away she went." ¹¹⁴

An inspection of the city dump in September 1929 found it replete with health and safety problems and in a "deplorable condition as considered from any standpoint whatsoever." ¹¹⁵ The dumpmaster was ordered to begin an immediate cleanup, burn all combustible junk, and expose all salvageable material, particularly the heavy iron such as fenders and auto bodies. If he could not do it, manager Benson said he would do it himself. ¹¹⁶

Unsanctioned dumps surrounded Bakersfield's city limits. Mr. Ron Womack recalled the year 1936 when Wright Avenue, north of Norris Road, dead-ended into a field. There, rows and rows of burned and rusted tin cans

¹¹³ Bakersfield Californian August 28, 1928

¹¹⁴ Bakersfield Californian Aug 28, 1928

¹¹⁵ Bakersfield Californian, Sep 26, 1929

¹¹⁶ Ibid. Garbage collectors were then striking the garbage franchise.

identified it as a former dump.¹¹⁷ Construction in 1927 of Airport Acres – north of the Beardsley Canal -- might have hastened its abandonment.¹¹⁸

In the late 1930s the only authorized dump near Bakersfield was the city's site on the sewer reservation, but illegal dumping was everywhere else. Visitors to town called it attractive but said its environs were strewn with tin cans. In early 1937 County Supervisor Jay Hinman reported seeing at least thirty piles of garbage promiscuously dumped ever week on the outskirts of town. Hinman said he could point his camera in almost any direction and take a picture of a tin can dump. The outcome of his report to county supervisors was an agreement between the city and the county to let county residents who did not have garbage service to use the city dump.¹¹⁹

In 1938 the city let a contract to haulers Sepanian and Daschian who had thirty acres south of town and planned to feed collected garbage to hogs.¹²⁰

In noting the details of that contract, the Californian wrote,

“Collections will continue to be made twice weekly in the residential districts and nightly in the business district. The fee authorized by the city is one dollar a month for householders and graduated to a higher scale for business houses. An innovation is planned in the mailing of bills monthly, which patrons are asked to pay by check or at the office. This

¹¹⁷ Email between Ron Womack and Gilbert Gia, 2003 and Jun 5, 2014

¹¹⁸ Morning Echo, Mar 27, 1927, “Airport Acres Will Open Today. The new subdivision ... lies due west of the Kern County Airport on the San Francisco Highway. To reach the tract turn west on the first road north of the airport and go west about one thousand feet to the tract.” The nearly-illegible scan of the newspaper page was transcribed in June 2014 by Ron Womack and Gilbert Gia.

¹¹⁹ Bakersfield Californian, Feb 22, 1937, “Disposal Of Rubbish Plant For County Desired.”

¹²⁰ Bakersfield Californian, Mar 18, 1938, “Bakersfield And Kern Form Pact To Clear Situation In Local District.” If residents did not haul garbage to the city dump, a city ordinance required them to use the city's garbage service. (Bakersfield Californian Apr 9, 1938). Residents were required to separate their trash for pickup.

will supplant [*monetary*] collections by the rubbish truckmen. For those who are not making use of the service, the city dump will be kept open to the public from 7 AM to 6 PM.”¹²¹

The property of Sepanian and Daschian might have been necessary because the city dump was running out of space. At this time the city bought 2-1/2 acres of Kern County Land Company property and an additional 157-1/2 acres, both of which enlarged the sewer reservation by a quarter section. In late 1938 the city closed its sixteen year-old dump at Brundage and Mt. Vernon and relocated its operation two miles farther south on the sewer reservation. That move opened space for construction of a new sewage-disposal plant. ¹²²

In 1941 the County of Kern operated four dumping grounds near Bakersfield: (1) North of Highland Park in Oildale, (2) a mile southeast of the intersection of today’s Fairfax Drive and Alfred Harrell Highway, (3) south of Mount Vernon Avenue and Brundage, and 4) the Canyon Road dump southeast of Kern River Park.¹²³

¹²¹ Bakersfield Californian, Jun 10, 1938. A.M. Sepanian and John Daschian succeeded C and P Trucking Company that had operated under city contract the prior five years.

¹²² Bakersfield Californian, Nov 9, 1938, “To Remove Dump.” This project was WPA funded, two-thirds federal money, one-third city money. Bakersfield Californian, Dec 30, 1938, “Leveling Work Begun At City Sewer Farm”

¹²³ Bakersfield Californian, Jan 7, 1941, Jan 16, 1941, Oct 10, 1952. “Across from the city dump at Mount Vernon and Brundage lane” was probably the entrance gate of the county dump. Canyon Road was present-day Niles Street east of Mt. Vernon. The Canyon Road dump was probably between today’s Mesa Marin Sports Complex and Comanche Drive.

Those sites did not stop the “unsightly displays of tin cans and rubbish strewn over the desert north of Oildale, on the Bluffs, and other places.”¹²⁴ Renegade dumping no doubt worsened around Oildale after spring of 1942 when the county closed its north of Highland Park dump site.¹²⁵ To the east of Bakersfield makeshift dump sites, such as one at the end of Radio Street off Edison Highway, continued to grow.¹²⁶

Prior to the Second World War, Asia provided the US with ninety percent of its need for tin. After Asia fell under Japanese control, this country resorted to tin-can salvage for the metal, and in 1942 a Los Angeles company started harvesting cans from Bakersfield dump sites.¹²⁷ The concept of recycling was not new to Bakersfield because just years earlier, conveyor belts at the Brundage Lane dump were used for separating paper from glass and metal.¹²⁸

Panorama Drive at University Avenue

As mentioned before, the city dump shrunk by two acres a year. In 1942 the City of Bakersfield bought a 40-acre canyon about a mile west of the county’s dump off Alfred Harrell Highway.¹²⁹ The new site had been a de facto dumping place for decades, but its 100-foot-deep canyon promised a

¹²⁴ Bakersfield Californian, Jan 7, 1941, “Strict Enforcement Of Dumping Law Ordered”

¹²⁵ Bakersfield Californian, May 27, 1942

¹²⁶ Gilbert Gia, Sep 8, 2003 interview with Kathryn Giovanetti (JOE-vanetti).

¹²⁷ Bakersfield Californian, Jul 7, 1942. “Seek Tin From City Dump Cans.” Waste collected by haulers did not become city property. Tin was an essential component of solder used in electronic wiring work. The yield of recycled tin was small but significant. Two thousand pounds of cans could yield up to thirty pounds of tin.

¹²⁸ Gilbert Gia, 2012 interview with James Cullimore, Jr.

¹²⁹ Bakersfield Californian, Dec 15, 1942, “City Council. Group Holds Closed Meet Preceding Session”

useful life of least one-hundred years. The city constructed a 1.7-mile road to it from the Kern County Communications Center at Mt. Vernon and Panorama, and the new burn dump opened on January 3, 1944. That day the Brundage Lane dump closed.¹³⁰

In 1943 container manufacturers released limited shipments of six- and eleven-gallon garbage cans to stores, and city sanitarian G.W. Premo reminded residents to continue separating their waste; kitchen garbage was valuable as food for hogs that had been trucked up the hill to the new dump.

¹³¹ The hog pens were built on a wide, shallow depression, which had once been a race track, a few hundred feet west of the dump's entrance gate at Columbus and Panorama.¹³²

Next to the pens construction started in 1950 on a concrete-block power house and 260-foot-tall radio transmission tower.¹³³ Access was via a double gate and dirt road that was southwest of the property.¹³⁴ A general

¹³⁰ Bakersfield Californian, May 11, 1943. The cost was \$2,772, which is about \$40,000 in today's money.

¹³¹ Bakersfield Californian, Dec 31, 1943, "City Open New Dump January 3." The East Brundage site was closed and preparations made for its clean up.

¹³² The lot occupies most of Bakersfield Tract 3513, which was annexed by the city via "Ord No. 1838 N.S." on January 21, 1970. (Kern County Engineering, Surveying and Permit Services, sps.kerndsa.com/maps/zone-maps). Gilbert Gia interview Dec 2, 2015 with Sam Stewart, owner of Abby Carpets. In 1957 Stewart left his disc jockey job in Ventura to work at AM radio station KBIS on 21st and Chester. Traces of the race track are extant.

¹³³

¹³⁴ Bakersfield Californian, Oct 30, 1950, "Radio Station KMAR To Go On Air Again." Gilbert Gia, Dec 2, 2015 interview with Abby Carpets owner Sam Stewart. The gate entrance is extant north of the intersection of Christmas Tree Lane and Crescent Drive.

clean up of the area was done in 1955, but the hogs remained until at least 1957.¹³⁵ The tower is gone today, and the site is a vacant field.

The city was overly optimistic in thinking the dump would last one-hundred years. In 1946 City Manager Vance Van Ripper bought 80 additional acres east of the dump, and the buy was a bargain at ten dollars an acre.¹³⁶ A year later the city bought more: "Upon a motion by Ryder, seconded by Carnakis, a resolution accepting deed from William A. Howell for a portion of Section 14, Township 29 S., range 28 E., containing 24.46 acres to be used for additional city dump property was adopted as read."¹³⁷

By 1952 the County of Kern operated three dumps near Bakersfield: 1) the Greenfield dump "two miles east of Greenfield on Panama Road," 2) the Rosedale dump "west on Rosedale Highway to Brimhall then south to Jewetta Road," and 3), the China Grade dump "six miles northeast of Bakersfield on Alfred Harrell Highway on the way to Hart Memorial Park."¹³⁸

Prevailing breezes usually blew smoke, odor and flies away from town, but when winds changed, residents in new housing tracts suffered.

Bakersfield's air quality also worsened with population growth. "It's later than we think in the valley," remarked Modesto Mayor Harry Marks before the Bakersfield City Council. "We've already got a smog problem in our

¹³⁵ Bakersfield Californian, Jul 2, 1955, "New Dump Plans To Be Started In Month." Steward said the hog stalls were there the year he left.

¹³⁶ Minutes of the Bakersfield City Council, Jan 23, 1946

¹³⁷ Minutes of the Bakersfield city Council, Oct 20, 1947. City survey map "Min BK. 113, PG 270" of 1957 notes that the dump "canyon" was annexed by the city on January 2, 1957. (Kern County Engineering, Surveying and Permit Services, esps.kerndsa.com/maps/zone-maps)

¹³⁸ Bakersfield Californian, Oct 10, 1952. "Directions to the county's old China Grade Dump: East on Alfred Harrell Highway to Fairfax Road Exit. Immediate left turn east."

city.”¹³⁹ In 1955 a five-county San Joaquin Valley smog board was formed to advise government about air quality, and one of its topics was disposal of waste by burning.¹⁴⁰

Bakersfield’s proposed 1955 budget¹⁴¹ offered remedies to the burn-dump issue. One suggestion was transferring the city dump’s operation to the county dump, which was a mile-and-a-half farther east.¹⁴² Another idea was to convert the city dump from burning to cut-and-fill, and that might allow it to continue in use for about ten more years.

City Manager C. Leland Gunn suggested that after it was closed it might be converted to a public park or lush residential area. He noted that the rim of the bluff had superb views of the mountains, and the sale of lots there for homesites would be income to the city.¹⁴³ The Californian noted that if the site was closed sooner it could have an “early transformation into a thing of beauty and – possibly – a joy forever.”¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ Bakersfield Californian, Feb 19, 1955, “First Valley Smog Body Established. Newby To Head Group Fighting Air Pollution”

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Bakersfield Californian, Jun 16, 1955, “Eau de Dump”

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid. Gunn expected they would sell for about \$2,000 each.

¹⁴⁴ Bakersfield Californian, Jun 16, 1955, “Eau De Dump.” Aside from dwellings at the top of the bluff, the landfill today is barren. The conversion of former dump sites for soft use (i.e. parks, golf courses, landscaping, etc.) typically introduces additional moisture, which carries the potential of “reactivating degradation in dormant or mature landfills, particularly in arid climates. However, redevelopment of both young and mature landfills is feasible provided that enough background information has been gathered about the site, that a proper assessment of the potential problems has been made, and that redevelopment is managed properly.” (A. Bouazza and E. Kavazanjian, Jr., *Construction on Former Landfills*, Proceedings 2nd ANZ Conference on Environmental Geotechnics, Newcastle, Australia, (Nov 2001) <http://www.docs-engine.com/pdf/1/california-landfills.html>)

In 1955 the council halted all burning there and began cut-and-fill,¹⁴⁵ which changed its designation to sanitary landfill. In that process work started at the bottom of the steep hillside, where heavy bulldozers created the first trench.¹⁴⁶ Machines pushed the excavated soil just uphill of the trench, garbage trucks filled the trench, bulldozers compacted it and covered it with soil, and when it was full the next trench was started just above it.¹⁴⁷ When trenching reached the top of the cliff, it would be started again at the bottom. By then, officials believed, waste in the first trench would be completely rotted and disintegrated.¹⁴⁸

In 1956 a subsidiary of Mobilhome Corporation, called Cencal, started development of a tract of one-thousand homes just east Bakersfield College, which had opened that year. Cencal built a shopping center for College Crest at the northeast corner of University Street and Mt. Vernon Avenue and early in the process promised that at some future date when the city landfill was closed it would build a swimming pool on it and donate it to the city.¹⁴⁹

The city operated a sanitary landfill, but all county dumps burned trash. In 1961 Kern County residents threw away 2.5 pounds of trash a day on the average, and by 1969 it had increased to 4.6 pounds, which equaled about one ton per person per year. On a yearly basis that was 1,250,000 cubic yards of burning garbage.¹⁵⁰ Smoke was probably on columnist Jim Day's mind when he wrote in 1966, "Heaven help us if our supervisors and other political leaders do not do something about it [*the polluted air*] within the

¹⁴⁵ Bakersfield Californian, Jul 2, 1955

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

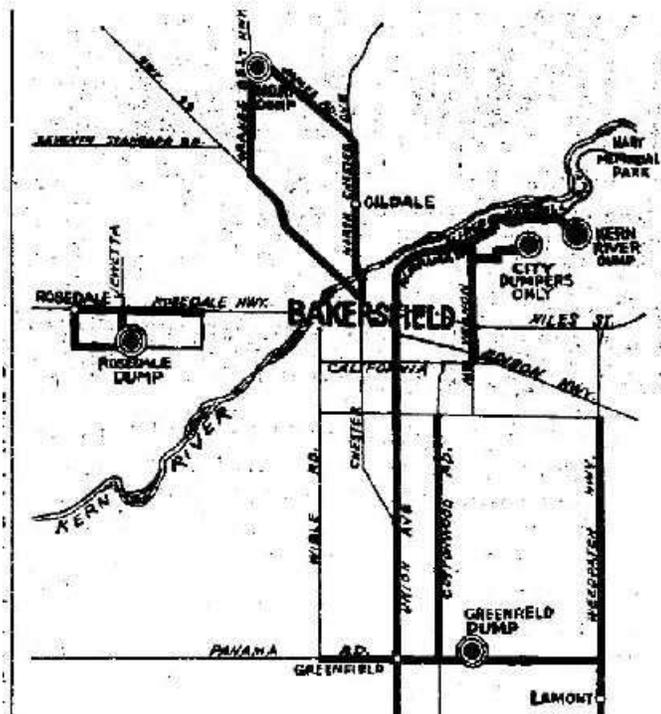
¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Bakersfield Californian Sep 4, 1956

¹⁵⁰ Bakersfield Californian, Feb 21, 1969

next decade. Old people have seen a better, purer period of air and mountains with clear, uncontaminated streams, but what of our children?"¹⁵¹



Dump sites in 1964.

**Kern River Dump at upper right was Kern County's China Grade Landfill.
Oildale Dump is shown at top of Round Mountain Road**

Ad hoc groups had complained for years about Bakersfield's poor air quality, but in 1968 real movement started when the state created a framework for local air-pollution control districts. That summer supervisors established the Kern County Air Quality Committee, an assemblage of leaders of industry, government and agriculture, and one of its proposals was the closure of all

¹⁵¹ Bakersfield Californian, Jul 21, 1966, "Pipefulls"

burn dumps.¹⁵² In 1969 the Kern County Air Pollution Control District restricted dump burning, especially the burning of vehicle tires.¹⁵³ Thus began the phase-out of burning in favor of cut and fill.



**Sheep grazing near the county's China Grade dump
Bakersfield Californian, January 28, 1969**

The city landfill was accepting 200 tons of waste a day when the county closed its dumps at North of the River, Rosedale, and Greenfield.¹⁵⁴ After that, truck traffic at the China Grade dump -- by then a new sanitary landfill -- jumped to 400 tons a day, and that increase shortened its useful life by sixteen years. Although landfill space was running out, the Bakersfield

¹⁵² Bakersfield Californian, May 30, 1968, "Smog Unit." Jun 24, 1968. The four county dumps near Bakersfield were Alfred Harrell Highway east of Fairfax, James Road at Orange Belt Highway, south of Rosedale Highway on Jewetta Road, and two miles east of Greenfield on Panama Road. (Bakersfield Californian, Apr 24, 1964, "County Opens Drive On Trash Dumping")

¹⁵³ Bakersfield Californian, May 8, 1969, "Air Pollution Unit Controls Refuse Fires"

¹⁵⁴ Bakersfield Californian, Sep 2, 1969, "Cities Groan From Waste Outpouring"

Californian optimistically wrote in 1969, "That is where Kern County has it over many other places – it can expand its garbage disposal areas."¹⁵⁵

By 1973 the county had phased-out burning at twenty-five sites and converted to cut-and-fill at Kern Valley, Glennville, Shafter, Tehachapi, Mojave, Rosemond, Boron, Ridgecrest, Arvin, Buttonwillow, Lost Hills, Taft, McFarland-Delano, and Arvin.¹⁵⁶

In 1974 Kern County Public Works Director L. Gale Mills announce the closure of China Grade landfill in favor of "a more efficient and environmentally acceptable disposal system."¹⁵⁷ That efficiency began on January 1, 1975 when the county closed the China Grade landfill and combined its operation with the city landfill on Panorama Drive, which at that time had a remaining life of about seven years. After that, the county planned to reopen the China Grade landfill.¹⁵⁸

Dump-truck traffic on Panorama Drive and Columbus Street intensified. To remedy noise and vibration, the entrance gate at Panorama Drive and Columbus was closed, and a new road off Alfred Harrell Highway was opened into the combined city-county Panorama landfill.¹⁵⁹ The solution was short lived.

In 1975 builder Jack Jost completed construction of townhouses on Boise Street north of Panorama Drive. Although the condominiums were just

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Bakersfield Californian, Sept 2, 1969, "Cities Groan From Waste Outpouring."
Bakersfield Californian, Dec 9, 1973, "Cost Of Eliminating Kern Garbage's \$640,000"

¹⁵⁷ Bakersfield Californian Dec 31, 1974, "Landfill to be open New Years"

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Bakersfield Californian, Mar 12, 1975, "New Road To Landfill To Ease Traffic On Streets"

above the city-county landfill, prices started at \$65,000, which is equivalent to about \$300,000 today.¹⁶⁰

On weekdays 1,500 trucks entered the landfill off Alfred Harrell highway, and any Saturday or Sunday the number reached 2,000. On the hill above the dump, 18,500 residents, 600 homes, and 150 swimming pools crowded the neighborhood bounded by Panorama Drive, Columbus Avenue, University, and Wenatchee. Noise, vibration, dust, odors, and smoke arising from the dump were daily annoyances.¹⁶¹

Traffic jams on the landfill caused supervisors, in January 1976, to talk about moving the dump a few hundred yards east of the Jost condominiums.¹⁶² The cost would be substantial and did not include \$11,600 in lost-use of the west side of the landfill. Andrew Honig of Bakersfield wrote, "The Board of Supervisors has authorized a \$17,000-\$20,000 relocation of the China grade landfill three years ahead of schedule, giving the \$65,000 Jack's Jost townhouses a better view and more salability. Those townhouses were built over an already existing dumpsite. Now the county is coming to the rescue. Will citizens concerned with other problems or issues find the supervisors equally helpful?"¹⁶³

Cut-and-fill on the floor of the landfill beneath the condominiums continued, and in March, to relieve traffic jams, the county reopened the entrance gate

¹⁶⁰ Bakersfield Californian, Feb 15, 1975 You'll find yourself glad to have recreation facilities, lighted tennis courts, putting and chipping greens, 30 x 50 heated swimming pool, basketball and handball courts, clubhouse recreation room, sauna, showers, lockers and dressing rooms."

¹⁶¹ Bakersfield Californian Feb 11, 1976, "Board Rescinds Action To Move Landfill"

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Bakersfield Californian, Feb 1, 1976, "A Better View"

at Panorama and Columbus.¹⁶⁴ Neighborhood complaints grew. Supervisors now faced a financial dilemma. Closing the upper gate translated as increased wear and tear on vehicles because the traffic would have to both enter and exit the landfill via Alfred Harrell Highway. There was also the possibility that increased fuel use might cause franchise haulers to raise their rates.¹⁶⁵ Councilman Gene Young pointed out that the landfill had been in operation long before neighborhood homes were built, but he felt that taxpayers should not have to pick up the tab for shifting the landfill's operation.¹⁶⁶

Public Works Director L. Dale Mills stopped all talk about moving the landfill when he revealed that the environmental-impact reports for the Jost condominiums and the Panorama view lots were missing, and it was likely that the matter of health hazards and soil composition had never been addressed.¹⁶⁷

Years passed. Bakersfield City Councilwoman Pat Smith, who owned a view-lot home by the 132-acre city landfill, led an effort to have it closed,¹⁶⁸ and in 1984 it was. By that time residents on Panorama Drive were not surprised by the pockets of glowing, blue light from methane gas that had migrated to the surface and caught fire.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁴ Bakersfield Californian, Mar 16, 1976, "Dump Road"

¹⁶⁵ "The oil embargo was lifted in March 1974, but oil prices remained high, and the effects of the energy crisis lingered throughout the decade. In addition to price controls and gasoline rationing, a national speed limit was imposed and daylight saving time was adopted year-round for the period of 1974-75."
(<http://www.history.com/topics/energy-crisis>)

¹⁶⁶ Bakersfield Californian, Feb 11, 1976, "Board Rescinds Action To Move Landfill"

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Bakersfield Californian, Jul 12, 1991

¹⁶⁹ Bakersfield Californian, Jul 12, 1991

The county reopened China Grade landfill east of Fairfax with the expectation that it would reach permitted capacity soon. Shortly after that the county applied to the state to increase it level by 50 feet. It was granted but it extended the site's useable life by only seven years.¹⁷⁰ Then the county would have to close it under state-mandated environmental quality laws.

How quickly could the county purchase a replacement dump site and bring it to state standards?¹⁷¹ After visiting twenty-six potential sites and spending \$500,000, the county settled on a parcel of 1,100 acres north of Bena, about 17 miles east of Bakersfield.¹⁷² If converted to a landfill, the Hollis Roberts' property had a projected life of sixty-five years; moreover, Roberts was willing to sell for around \$300,000.¹⁷³

As required of the other prospective sites, the county had to publish its intention to buy the Hollis acreage, and it also had to publish environmental and state reviews. Each of those alerted speculators looking to acquire financial interest in property before the county could by it.

Bena was certified for development as a landfill on July 14, 1987, but several months before that Roberts sold to Hilltop Developers, Inc., a

¹⁷⁰ Bakersfield Californian, Aug 8, 1989, "County Seeks Permits"

¹⁷¹ Bakersfield Californian, Apr 14, 1976, "No Environmental Impact Report Filed For Complex"

¹⁷² Bakersfield Californian, May 20, 1988, "Supervisors Push Bena Road Dump." Bakersfield Californian Jan 31, 1990, "Why The Bena Case Had to Go to Court." Bakersfield Californian, Jun 6, 1988, "Intensity Of Landfill Opponents"

¹⁷³ Bakersfield Californian, Jan 17, 1990, "Loses Landfill Ruling"

Wayne Reeder enterprise.¹⁷⁴ Hilltop set the price of the 2,100-acre site at \$8 million.¹⁷⁵

Three years later, County Administrative Officer Geary Taylor explained in retrospect what the county should have done:

“The way it turned out is we changed the zoning on it while it was owned by the current owner [Reeder-Hilltop]. And that opened the door for him to argue that he could put a landfill there, too. That’s what paved the way for such a tremendous increase in value of the property. Before changing the zoning on the property, it might have been wise to go through the process of designating the site and making sure it was environmentally sound for the purpose that you wanted to put it to. And then begin acquisition.”¹⁷⁶

Just eighteen months of life remained for the China Grade landfill, and if the county did not have a replacement site in place by then, California’s Solid Waste Management Board had the power to halt building construction throughout Kern County.¹⁷⁷ An additional negative outcome, although a less economically-alarming one, would be the need to transport Bakersfield’s monthly 36,000-tons of refuse to the Shafter-Wasco landfill, a move that would shorten its life span.¹⁷⁸

Kern County appraised the Hilltop parcel at \$943,990, which was what it was willing to pay, but Hilltop insisted that its \$8 million was realistic because Bena met the geographical and environmental criteria set by both

¹⁷⁴ Bakersfield Californian, Jan 31, 1990, “Why The Bena Case Had to Go to Court. Bakersfield Californian, Jan 17, 1990, “Loses Landfill Ruling”

¹⁷⁵ Bakersfield Californian, May 8, 1990, “County Pays \$4.3 Million For Dump Site”

¹⁷⁶ Bakersfield Californian, Jan 31, 1990, “Why The Bena Case Had to Go to Court”

¹⁷⁷ Bakersfield Californian, May 20, 1988, “Supervisors Push Bena Road Dump”

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

the state Regional Water Control Board and the Waste Management Board. And those boards were principal agencies in issuing landfill permits.¹⁷⁹

One-hundred-million dollars would be required to develop Bena, although that large number of tax dollars was not the only reason that Citizens for Economical Landfills objected to the buy. Understandably, nearby landowners did not want a landfill as a neighbor, but that objection did not come from another member, Empire Waste Management, Inc. It was among the nation's larger landfill corporations, and Empire had loaned \$2.5 million to Hilltop Developers to buy the Roberts' property.¹⁸⁰ Citizens for Economical Landfills gathered sufficient signatures to place two initiatives on the ballot, and if either passed, the Bena buy would be dead.

Favoring the Bena buy was Kern Citizens for Effective Local Government. Its supporters included Congressman Bill Thomas, Assemblyman Phil Wyman, Assemblyman Trice Harvey, the Bakersfield City Council, the Kern County Board of Supervisors, the Kern County Taxpayers Association, and several construction unions.¹⁸¹

Balloting of June 1988 defeated both of the initiatives floated by Citizens for Economical Landfills, and negotiations between the two parties started immediately, but talks soon broke down owing to the substantial difference between Hilltop's price and what the county offered.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ Bakersfield Californian, Jan 2, 1990, "Kern Long On Trash, Short On Space." The county's offer to Hilltop was \$680,500 according to the Bakersfield Californian, May 8, 1990, "County Pays \$4.3 Million For Dump Site"

¹⁸⁰ Bakersfield Californian, May 8, 1990, "County Pays \$4.3 Million For Dump Site." Bakersfield Californian, Jun 6, 1988, "Intensity Of Landfill Opponents"

¹⁸¹ Bakersfield Californian Jun 1, 1988, "No On A, Yes On C"

¹⁸² Bakersfield Californian, Jul 12, 1988, "Kern Plays Hardball"

Time was running out for the county. Because the China Grade landfill would have to be closed soon, the county started eminent domain proceedings¹⁸³ against Hilltop to acquire the three-plus sections. ¹⁸⁴ Hilltop's lawyers appealed and the proceedings were moved to Los Angeles County Superior Court.

After months of legal wrangling a jury set the value at \$3.1 million, which was about \$2.2 million more than what the county wanted to pay and almost \$5 million less than what Hilltop wanted. Both Kern County and Hilltop considered appealing to a higher court, ¹⁸⁵ but neither carried through. Empire offered the county the property for free if it allowed Empire to manage the site, operate it, and charge public gate fees. The county answered no and reaffirmed its commitment to operate the site as a public service. ¹⁸⁶

In the end both parties cut their losses and accepted the \$3.1 million as sale price. Their motivations were the same. Both had already incurred large legal expenses, and court appeals were notoriously unpredictable because higher courts could raise, lower, or let stand lower court decisions. ¹⁸⁷ The two parties concluded the sale, and the county began improving the site to state standards.

A survey of the defunct Panorama land fill in 1988 found methane fires common and concentrations of the gas at twenty to thirty percent within

¹⁸³ Under the law of eminent domain, government may adversely acquire property for public use if it can be shown to be in the public interest and for the public good.

¹⁸⁴ In November 1988 balloting, voters voted to finance the Bena landfill with land-use fees. (Bakersfield Californian, Jan 2, 1990, "Kern Long On Trash, Short On Space")

¹⁸⁵ Bakersfield Californian, Jan 17, 1990, "Loses Landfill Ruling"

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

200 feet of view lots. ¹⁸⁸ Ambient air with five percent methane gas is considered explosive, and some of the sub-surface probes detected equal percentages of air and methane. ¹⁸⁹ The survey also documented cracked concrete slabs and tiled swimming pools.

On June 28, 1991, Kern County Environmental Health issued a “notice and order” to the city and county requiring permanent control of the gas hazard. ¹⁹⁰ Extraction pipes and gas recovery wells were installed, but they failed. ¹⁹¹ The state Integrated Waste Management Board then ordered both municipal entities to install a reliable gas-containment system, seal the landfill with earth, and unless the job was completed by August 31, 1991, both faced legal action.



**Methane Gas collection system on city landfill in 1992
Bakersfield Californian**

¹⁸⁸ Bakersfield Californian, Jul 12, 1991

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Bakersfield Californian, Jul 12, 1991

¹⁹¹ “Report On California Expedited Remedial Action, Reform Act Of 1994” November 2006. (<https://www.dtsc.ca.gov/SiteCleanup/Brownfields/upload/Report-on-California-Expedited-Remedial-Action-Reform-Act-of-1994.pdf>)

The cost of compliance was estimated at \$5 million and the time that was needed two years.¹⁹² City water and sanitation manager Paul Dow lamented, “We’ve tried several ways over the years to control the methane from migrating, but they just haven’t worked. We’ve got another plan coming in from a consultant, but we’re a little reserved in our optimism because we haven’t had a lot of luck.”¹⁹³ An additional problem was paper work. Although the landfill was closed in 1984, state records still showed its status as inactive, not closed. Request for closure had not been filed with Sacramento.¹⁹⁴

In the late 1990s the city bought nineteen homes on the north side of Panorama Drive between Wenatchee and Columbus and installed methane gas detectors and tension meters to monitor foundation cracking.¹⁹⁵ Soil around the homes was excavated and replaced and the properties landscaped for resale.¹⁹⁶ The matter of lead and dioxin contamination was addressed by cautioning buyers not to plant root vegetables or disturb the soil two feet below the surface.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹² Bakersfield Californian, Jul 12, 1991

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid

¹⁹⁵ Records read by Gilbert Gia when the city sold the view lots.

¹⁹⁶ In August 2011 an environmental study reported “elevated methane level in multilevel monitoring well (K). Methane level in Probe K-D (Deep) (237 feet) measured 15.8% methane by volume. Methane gas measurements at or above 5% constitute a violation of State Minimum standards and Title 27, California Code of Regulations , Section 20921. Gas measurements taken from the same probe (K-D) on July 11, 2011 verified methane at 18.8% methane. Comparisons of monitoring results from April to August reflect a continual decline in methane from 28.3 to 15.8%. Methane levels in perimeter monitoring wells (I), (J) and (L) now demonstrate compliance.” [“Disposal Facility Inspection Report (52)” <http://calrecycle.ca.gov/SWFacilities/Directory/15-AA-0044/Inspection/344375/>]

¹⁹⁷ Record observed by Gilbert Gia. See also, Bakersfield Californian, Jun 10, 1998, “City Taking Loss On Sale Of Homes On Panorama”



**The city and county landfills on either side of Fairfax Road
Alfred Harrell Highway runs lower left to upper right**

On April 12, 1992 the county closed its 4.5 million cubic-yard China Grade landfill, then at capacity, and entered a new era in waste disposal with the opening of the 2,165-acre Bakersfield Metropolitan Sanitary Landfill at Bena. Ten million dollars had been spent in its development, and engineering work included an advanced \$1.5 million liner and leaching-collection system to isolate the site from groundwater. Bena also was fitted with a state-of-the-art methane-gas migration control and storage system and a fenced buffer zone of 1,000 feet that isolated it from surrounding properties.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ Bakersfield Californian, April 12, 1992, "State-Of-The-Art Facility Set For Onslaught Of Trash"



**Bakersfield Metropolitan Sanitary Landfill at Bena
Bena Road runs left to right at bottom of map.**

Bena's capacity was projected at 70 million cubic yards, and in its first year it was expected to receive 472,000 tons of municipal solid-waste, which, wrote the Californian, was equal to filling the Bakersfield Convention Center from top to bottom twenty-four times.¹⁹⁹

What is its future? Modern developments in recycling might extend Bena's life span beyond 2056, but growth in county population might shorten it sooner. Inevitably, Kern County will have to find funds to buy and build a new disposal site. Getting the money will probably require passage of a bond measure.

< 0 >

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.