

**NOTICIAS
del
PUERTO de MONTEREY**
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May Evening, Monterey by Lester Boronda
(courtesy John Steinbeck Library, Salinas)

¡BORONDA! (Part II)

José Eusebio Boronda

(10th child of Manuel and Gertudis and grandfather of Lester Boronda)

The life of José Eusebio Boronda epitomizes that of most vaqueros during his generation, men who were granted tremendous cattle ranches, only to see them overrun by squatters and eventually subdivided and reduced in size after the Gold Rush. These ranchers had to cope with powerful social adjustments: after secularization of the missions, the problem of the orphaned Indians; the rapid assimilation of the "blue-eyed strangers" into their businesses and often into their families; the eventual conversion (at least in the Salinas Valley) of grazing lands to agrarian uses. Even Nature challenged them with an unheard of three-year drought in the early 1860s: enough to try men's souls! Bancroft, the famous historian, sent questionnaires to personages whose memoirs he planned to include in his monumental tomes; in 1877 he grumpily complained that Don José Eusebio Boronda's *apuntes historicos* was "brief and unimportant." When one considers all the problems Boronda was having, one is not surprised that the poor man could find no time to provide Bancroft with a lengthy biography.

José Eusebio Boronda (1808-?) and Mariá Josefa Ramona Buelna (1817-1864), both children of early Monterey teachers, were married on September 15, 1831, at Santa Cruz where the groom was stationed as a soldier.⁽²⁾ In 1836 Eusebio was *Majordomo* (overseer) at *Rancho Los Vergeles* which lay along the Monterey-to-San Jose road; the couple already had two of the sixteen (or more!) children which would be born to them. The year of 1838 Boronda briefly farmed a small grant he was given in the *El Tucho* area (heart of the Blanco country). On September 19, 1839, he was granted the 6700 acre rancho *San Jose* (its name was changed in 1859 to *Rincónada del Zanjón*, meaning "deep ditch") lying northwest of present Salinas.⁽³⁾ Its boundary lines on the south and southwest were defined by curves of the Salinas River and adjacent sloughs. The area was all salt marshes, used for grazing mission cattle. Church records of 1813 indicate that Indians were the only humans who lived there: salt bogs were not too safe for either man or animal. Eventually the land was drained of its brine. The river itself had born many names, from "*Río de Chocolate*" by Portola's soldiers, to names of saints ("*San Elizario*" by Father Crespi; "*El Río Elzeario*;" "*Santa Delfina*"). The present name ("*Salinas*," for "salt mines," "salt marshes," or "chain of salt water ponds") was not in general use until 1846, after Boronda had acquired his grant. Measurements of his acreage were made by what Gwinn calls "riata survey," a loosely defined description which subsequently would cause much legal trouble, not only for Eusebio Boronda but also for most of his rancher compatriots.

The Borondas built a home atop the small hill which is opposite today's Graves School, near the Salinas-Castroville highway. "Horsemen traveling through the rank growth of wild mustard, by standing on their saddles, could see the red tiles of the Boronda adobe over the yellow blossoms, as Lieutenant W.T. Sherman did in 1846 after crossing the Salinas River on his way from Monterey." A few years later (in 1848, according to Salinas historian Robert B. Johnson) Eusebio and Josefa built a new home which probably was considered "more stylish." Johnston explains that when the Borondas lived at the *Los Vergeles* they became friends of a couple from an adjoining rancho, *Natividad*: William Robert Garner and his wife (nee Mariá Francisca Butron). Later Eusebio hauled lumber for Garner "who held a contract with Thomas O. Larkin, builder of the house which became the prototype for the 'Monterey Colonial' style of architecture. Several features of this style are evident in the second Boronda home ..."⁽⁴⁾ This adobe, located about three miles from Salinas, was placed on the National Register on March 20, 1973.⁽⁵⁾ It was dedicated as a State Historical Monument on May 18, 1974, "the last accessible and unaltered rancho home of the Mexican-Californian period in Monterey County." The artist Lester Boronda grew up in this ranch house. Today it is headquarters of the Monterey County Historical Society, Inc.

It should be noted that the original Boronda adobe attained a kind of historical immortality: its beautiful roof tiles were used to cover the Custom House in Monterey.⁽⁶⁾

Despite the new home, by the 1850s all was not well with the Boronda marriage. Perhaps it had something to do with the living accommodations; a dozen people (half of them teenagers!) sharing one large room (the *ramada*, or kitchen, was in a separate building). Even after two more rooms were added the Boronda adobe must have smacked somewhat of "sardine can." Possibly the arrival of yet another baby in October of 1851 triggered the couple's unrest. At any rate, even before that child died the following year, Eusebio and Josefa had agreed to a separation of nineteen months, at the end of which time Eusebio transferred all property to his wife ("excepting a mattress, a few cows, horses, sheep and chickens and an ox cart"). The agreement was signed and recorded on April 22, 1852, by William Hartnell. That same year the United States confirmed the Boronda ranch grant — but cut its size by two-thirds.

Where Eusebio disappeared the next few years is a mystery. Perhaps he took his "mattress, animals and *carreta*" and went seeking that illusive pot at the end of the rainbow; considering the gold fever which was burning men's souls in California of that time, together with Eusebio's known adventuresome spirit, it would seem to be a good guess. At least one of his descendants has stated rather obliquely that he was "supposedly at the gold mines, but which ones?"

By the fall of 1856 the Borondas were together again in their Salinas adobe where another son (Lester Boronda's father) and a daughter were born in 1857 and 1859. The property, now only 2,229 acres, was surveyed in 1858 and patented on July 3 of 1860. Coincidentally that marked the beginning of a devastating three-year drought which struck all California. Owners of cattle ranches watched helplessly as their herds were decimated, and many people went bankrupt. As author Susanne Dakin summarizes it: "Dry years were years of tragedy in California. Cattle died like flies on sticky paper and covered the pasture lands with emaciated black bodies. Lack of rain meant to them complete lack of food and drinking water, and to their owners the failure of a vital source of food, clothing, cleansing and illumination." Conditions at the *Rincónada del Zanjón* were as bad as elsewhere; the Borondas even sold-off some of their acreage. Finally, on July 17th of 1864, Josefa died.

Josefa had willed that the ranch be divided among her ten living youngsters, but Eusebio changed his mind about wanting to relinquish the land! In unprecedented legal action, in 1867 he sued his own children to regain the property. The court, in effect, approved the same distribution which Josefa had made: on April third it gave the property "for quiet and peaceful possession" to Carmen, Mary and Dolores and their husbands and the unmarried Esiquio, Octaviano, Sylvano and Agnes. Eusebio approved this partitioning in 1878 and the following year Carmen's husband, the surveyor Leon Cervantes, worked out the details.

Eusebio Boronda's troubles were not over. In January of 1877, while he was serving as bondsman to County Recorder Manuelote Castro (no relation to the famous general), the old wooden courthouse in Salinas suffered a fire in which valuable records were destroyed. Castro disappeared over the Mexican border (both Gwinn and Bancroft infer that he had set the fire). As bondsman, poor *Don* Boronda lost over \$20,000.

At an unknown date during the 1870s Eusebio married again, to a widow with children, Ricarda Rodriguez Castro (daughter of Joaquin and Guadalupe Rodriguez and widow of Ignacio Castro). There were no children from this union. Ricarda's daughter Mariá Ygnacia Castro in 1861 married Eusebio and Josefa's oldest son, Francisco. The young couple lived in an adobe on a hill "north of the Eusebio Boronda adobe," rearing a family of thirteen children before Ygnacia died in 1896. It seems that Eusebio and Guadalupe lived either *with* the Francisco Boronda family or near them, for the 1880 census lists Eusebio as "living in Santa Rita with Cassimira and a daughter Rosa, 16". (Santa Rita today is the area on Main Street north of Boronda Road). One Boronda descendant has written

that "Cassimira may be one and the same as Ricarda Rodriguez de Castro, or another mistress;" probably her first guess was right because in 1888 Francisco and Ygnacia named their youngest child "Francisco Casimiro" (note changed spelling). Whatever may be the answer to this puzzle, Guadalupe Rodriguez Boronda disappeared as suddenly as she seems to have entered Eusebio's life. At least there was no mention of her on March 30, 1880, when he "for consideration of love and affection" granted what was left of his rancho (38.376 acres) to his two youngest children for (as Johnson expressed it) "a tax-free, rent-free 'life estate' in the forty acres which he called his 'homestead place' and spent his last years in his house beside the road which bears his name." In the 1888 Monterey County Great Register Eusebio Boronda is listed (#249) as age 76 (sic), Salinas *rancho*.⁽⁷⁾

Lester Boronda's grandfather Eusebio achieved a kind of legendary position in the Salinas Valley because of his skill in handling wild bears. He was "accorded fame as the outstanding vaquero of the Spanish regime in California." A granddaughter recalls that "he was a very large man, weighing about 250 pounds, and he was six feet tall, so it took a good big horse to carry him around. He was an expert with the *reata*. He was also the first licensed bear catcher in the state."⁽⁸⁾ One Salinas newspaper recalls Eusebio (nicknamed "Chevo"): "Whenever bear and bull fights were scheduled in any of the important towns between San Francisco and Santa Barbara, Chevo Boronda was there with his trained horses from which he could lasso bears. He also had men in his employ who were adept at lassoing and handling bears — no household pets when it came to taking them. One especially, *La Reyna* (The Queen), was so ferocious he kept her for some time. Because most bears look alike, he repeatedly won bets that the bear would outsmart and outfright the bull. *La Reyna* did."⁽⁹⁾ "Tallow, saddle horses, hides and all the legal tender of the time were placed on her for betting purposes."⁽¹⁰⁾

Another newspaper story (from an undated clipping probably written in the 19-teens) reveals the glamor which surrounded the name of Eusebio Boronda. Employing phonetic, if incorrect, spelling, here is the saga of "The Great Historic Silver-Spangled Saddle:"

Senor Don Eustacio Berondo rode into Monterey one day from the San Francisquito Rancho. He was then young. "Gentlemen," said he to the group of friends who gathered about to greet him, "come quick with me and I will show you something you have never seen before. I have hanged a grizzly bear. He may not yet be dead. Come and behold!" Don Eustacio was not given to practical jokes. Nevertheless his friends laughed heartily and proffered suitable refreshment which Don Eustacio quaffed on horseback, as was his life-long custom. "It is true, gentlemen," he replied calmly. "I have roped a grizzly bear, and as he was large and troublesome, perforce I had to hang him. He is hanging yet; and for my part, I must return anyhow to recover my lariat, which is a good one. My fancy had it that some of you might like to see a grizzly hanging. However, if it be otherwise —" Don Eustacio shrugged his shoulders. His friends laughed again, but this time less decisively. "I will bet you a saddle it cannot be so, Don Eustacio!" said one. "Another sort of bear, mayhap; but no man could rope and hang a grizzly!" Berondo bowed serenely. "We are all in on that bet," said the others. And they all rode out to the San Francisquito. As they rode together, Berondo told the story:

I was coming down from the rancho when on the narrow trail I met a grizzly. He was of ugly temper and would not depart nor make way, and my horse fretted. The matter pestered me. I was not equipped for a bear hunt, but my horse is good, and my lariat is good. Therefore, as the bear stood up and menaced us, I lassoed him. The bear went down with a yelp and then commenced to struggle. It was my brave horse that won the battle. The bear tried to pull back. The horse would yield a little, then with a spring he would jerk the rope tight again. Then the bear tried to come up and overhaul us. The horse would not let him. For nearly half an hour we played



"Playing the Grizzly"⁽¹¹⁾

that bear as some fishermen would play a salmon on a line. Presently I saw an oak tree with a suitable overhanging bough. Thither we maneuvered the grizzly. By good fortune I got a turn of the rope over that bough. Then it was comparatively easy work to haul up the animal so that only his toes were on the ground. Next we took a couple of turns of the rope around his legs and lashed him to the tree trunk lest he should struggle free. We left him thus safely hanging. Belike he is now nearly dead. We shall see presently.

They rode on and they saw. Hanging to the tree, still warm but dead, was a half-ton grizzly bear. His legs were tied, his head lolling over, strangled. They rode back into Monterey and got the finest saddle ever made and presented it to Don Eustacio. When the Don was gathered to his fathers and the estate was sold, Ben Graves, who knew him well, bought the famous saddle. He subsequently presented it to Max Wagner who last week filled his usual role as assistant to Cheri Hebert in managing the rodeo at Salinas. Comparatively few of the spectators knew the true facts of the case, but every cattleman in Salinas knew Max and envied him greatly. A halo of romance seemed to float over him wherever he went because, between him and his horse, was the Great Historic Silver-Spangled Saddle that was won by Eustacio Berondo when he roped and hanged the San Francisquito grizzly eighty years ago.⁽¹²⁾

Tulita Boronda Westfall wrote that "Agapito, the Monterey silversmith, designed and adorned Eusebio's saddle with silver mountings and fashioned for him the spurs and bridle which were talked about far and wide." Today his distinctive, elaborately embroidered *sombrero* is on exhibit at the Pacific House in Monterey; it is not labeled as Boronda's but old-timers have no trouble recognizing it. And one of the Don's descendants owns the small guitar which he carried and played while astride his horse. It is the type which California cowboys introduced to Hawaii in the days of King Kalakaua when they were sent to "The Sandwich Islands" to help control wild cattle there. A Portuguese invention, the little guitar evolved into what we know today as the ukulele.

The offspring of Eusebio and Josefa Boronda will be discussed in Part III.

Notes

⁽¹⁾Quoted in Dr. Albert Shumate's book *Boyhood Days*. Dr. Shumate says the hymn was sung in the Monterey home of Francisco Pacheco.

⁽²⁾ Mariá Josefa Buelna, christened on March 19, 1817, at San Carlos Church in Monterey, was the sixth child of Josef Joaquin Buelna (son of Antonio Buelna who had conducted the early girls' school in Monterey). Her mother was Mariá Guadalupe Gabriela Rodriguez (daughter of the first teacher in the Monterey Presidio, the carpenter José Manuel Rodriguez who came to California with Fr. Serra).

⁽³⁾This is the date given by the California Inventory of Historic Resources (Sacramento: State of California Department of Parks & Recreation, 1976). Culleton says that Governor Alvarado gave the grant to Boronda on February 1, 1840.

⁽⁴⁾ Robert B. Johnson pamphlet written on the occasion of dedication of the José Eusebio Boronda Adobe.

⁽⁵⁾ Correspondence of August, 1983, with James Fisher, Staff Historian of the State of California, Department of Parks and Recreation, Sacramento.

⁽⁶⁾ (Salinas, California) *Salinas Daily Journal*, April 13, 1927. The abandoned structure itself was leveled by the 1906 quake.

⁽⁷⁾ Eusebio Boronda's death date and place of interment are a mystery. The burial records of San Carlos Church in Monterey do not give his name, but he may not have received a church burial. Early records of the Salinas Calvary Cemetery were lost in a fire long ago; the Knights of Columbus, who have been restoring it, have found no grave marker for Eusebio. If he was buried in Salinas's tiny Santa Rita Catholic Cemetery, his tombstone would have to be one of those defaced by vandalism of humans and nature: nowhere does "Boronda" appear there today.

⁽⁸⁾ *Noticias del Puerto de Monterey*, Vol. II, #2, December, 1963. During the early days preceeding the Bear Flag Revolt Eusebio played a small part in one episode, lassoing the unfortunate American Graham so that Boronda's fellow *Californios* could torture the man. The event was related to Bancroft in 1877 by Carmel farmer James Meadows; it is described in *Noticias*, Vol. IV, #4, December, 1960.

⁽⁹⁾ (Salinas, California) *The Salinas Californian*, June 22, 1968.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Dan E. Martin in *The Salinas Journal*, July 18-21, 1940.

⁽¹¹⁾ Robert Gebing, illustration for Ray Chapin, *The Grizzly Bear in the Land of The Ohlone Indians* (Cupertino, Cal.: The Local History Studies. De Anza College, 1971).

⁽¹²⁾ Author of the story was Edward A. Morphy; name of newspaper, not known.

ERRATA from Part I:

1. In the Bibliography, Hubert (not Herbert) Howe Bancroft.
2. Paragraph six to read: Some two decades later ... he was asked on February 26, 1791, to serve as proxy godfather at the christening of Concepción de Argüello, daughter of the *comandante* of San Francisco presidio ... Only a year later he would wed Mariá Gertrudis Higuera.

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Christmas Hymn⁽¹⁾

*Noche de paz, noche de Amor
Todo decirme y decirme
Entre los astrosque esparcenla
la luz*

*Bella Anunciado al Niño Jesus
Brilla la estrella de paz.*

Oh peaceful night, night of love
Everything tells me
that among the stars that spread
light

There is a beautiful star
Announcing the Baby Jesus
There it glitters, the Star of Peace.

In Memoriam

Richard Abbott, John Joseph Branson, Margaret Castro, William McCaskey Chapman, Philip Danielson, David DeMarche, Mrs. Jens Doe, Lawrence Farrell, Charles L. Frost, Courtland Hill, John Holbrook, Walter Jefferson, Pearl Noxon Johnson, Daniel W. Kohlsaat, John M. Marble, Thomas T. Ozamoto, Mrs. Mario Paccini, Dorothy C. Ronald, Mrs. DuPre Sassard, Luke Shields, Mrs. George B. Smith, Charleen Speer, Robert Stanton, Dorothy Taugher, Ruth Titus, Bernard Van Horn, Charlotte Doud Vecki, Bette B. Young.

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