

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Vasquez the Bandit

Mr. and Mrs. Paul Pioda of Salinas have in their possession an old scrapbook which had been compiled through the lifetime of Mr. Pioda's uncle, E.D. Williams. Evidently Mr. Williams was genuinely interested in the history of Monterey County, for he had saved clippings of many interesting historical events and items concerning people living both before and during his lifetime. On one of Mr. Pioda's visits to the Old Custom House they brought with them the scrapbook in order that Mrs. Mary Greene and her assistants might enjoy reading it and copying some of the items for the historical files.

One of the newspaper articles found pasted in the book was entitled, "Interesting Sidelights on Vasquez." We are reviewing it in the column today, thinking that it will be of interest to our readers. The clipping bears no date but credit for the facts in the story is given to Daniel Martin and tells of the near capture of the bandit gang just across the river from Salinas.

Mr. Martin writes that a former article recalled to his memory the incident that happened in the vicinity of his old home in the Corral de Tierra country – the Calera Canyon (Lime Kiln Canyon from which the material came that was used in the building of the Old Custom House in Monterey.)

In this canyon about half way between the Speigle ranch and the ranch of William Hatton, there stood on an elevated flat an adobe building occupied by the Valensuelo family; also in the vicinity lived Semon Ebara, his wife Juana; Esidro Solesar, and his wife, Nacimeana. These last two named couples had been for many years inhabitants of that once notorious Pilarcito village situated just across the Salinas River from Davis crossing, then on the main thoroughfare from Salinas to Monterey.

Living with his friends in the Calera Canyon was a man named Agapito who was an expert blacksmith, spur and bit maker, and on Vasquez' arrival, Agapito was at once engaged to make and repair bits and spurs for him and his party, so the old clipping relates.

"This was in the early summer of 1871 and as it was my daily duty to drive cattle to the Calera creek to water, I met and talked with Vasquez frequently, and when he

learned that my native town was Monterey, that I had attended school in "the Old Cuartel" and that Dona Senora Catherine Cole (Mrs. Tom Cole), who had owned the Rancho San Carlos or Potrero, in the Carmel Valley, was my aunt and for whom he had worked in his youth as a vaquero, we became quite friendly, which allayed my feelings somewhat" writes Mr. Martin.

After some weeks someone informed Sheriff Tom Watson of Vasquez's presence at Calera Canyon and advised that in the course of a few nights there would be a full moon and Vasquez and his gang could be easily captured. So, relates Mr. Martin, in a few days a posse was selected and at midnight under a bright full moon the Valensuelo's residence was raided. They had tied their horses a distance away and approached the house very cautiously and call for Vasquez and his gang to come out and surrender, but they were gone. The door was opened by Valensuelo and they were permitted to search the house and surroundings.

In a small hayfield, nearby, they found where Vasquez and his men had been lying in the hay, with their horses saddled ready to make a hasty retreat. When they heard the commotion in the vicinity of the house the bandit and his men (five in all) mounted their horses and rode up the canyon.

Mike Noon of Monterey, who was Mr. Martin's half brother, according to his record of the event, was a member of the sheriff's posse and Mr. Martin wrote that he had heard his brother say that perhaps it was just as well that the raid had been "tipped off" to Vasquez, thus avoiding no doubt, a fierce encounter.

The sheriff did, however, find a fine buckskin horse in the corral that morning that Vasquez had brought there and it is told that Sheriff Watson took charge of it and returned it to its rightful owner in San Luis Obispo. The horses that Vasquez and his men were riding that day were the property of E.J. Breen, owner of the Topo Ranch and these animals were also returned to their respective owners in due time, related Mr. Martin in his article.