

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

October 16, 1951

I Am Vasquez

"I am Vasquez. I come for the money you have just received." He rose from his chair threateningly. "You give me the money. I go away."

These were the words uttered by the noted bandit to Mrs. Charlotte Gray Rowland, the step-grandmother of Mrs. Joseph Colling of Seaside, at her home on the La Puente rancho in Southern California in 1875.

This rancho granted to John Rowland and William Workman in 1820 numbered 48,790.55 acres. It was one of the first visited by Vasquez when he entered Southern California that summer. Mrs. Rowland was in the parlor of her home, and had just received a large sum of money from her husband who was in Monterey. He had come here with cattle and as he did not intend to return at once, he had sent the proceeds of the sale by a trusted employe. The money was in an old tin box upon the parlor table.

Mrs. Rowland was startled as a stranger walked unannounced into the parlor and seated himself in one of the nearby chairs, according to the local tradition of the Puente district. She was about to upbraid him for his intrusion, when she caught sight of the hard features and steely eyes of her visitor. Intuition warned her that the man was a dangerous character and no mere intruder from the rancho. The presence of the nearby money caused her instant apprehension, but her uneasiness was carefully concealed. The man immediately enlightened her as to his intentions by coming directly to the point. He spoke in very bad English when he informed her of his identity and the reason for the call.

Without looking in the direction of the table, this woman of great courage coolly faced the bandit and asked, "Do you suppose that Senor Rowland would send the money ahead from Monterey, and not bring it himself? Why should he do that?"

Vasquez appeared puzzled, so the story goes. "I do not know why he should. I hear that he has sent it. Perhaps it is a mistake. But I must look for it". Before he could avail himself of a search, voices were heard outside the door. The bandit, cool as though a robbery were an every day occurrence, asked for a drink of water.

Fortunately the water bottle was handy, and Mrs. Rowland poured him out a generous portion.

Vasquez thanked her for it with exaggerated politeness, stepped outside, mounted his horse and was gone, disappointed before Mrs. Rowland could raise an alarm.

Another interesting story of the early days on La Puente rancho, as told by the descendants of John Rowland, is one concerning an old Indian of the rancho. This workman had found a cache of coin near the old highway. It was worth \$300. As soon as his luck was known he became Don Cano among his own people. Within a week, when he began to spend the money, he was called Senor Don Cano. As he continued to spend, his name continued to grow. He was soon known as El Senor Don De Cano, caballero. His wealth soon gave out, and he immediately became plain old Cano again.

When Rowland and Workman came to California in 1842, the Mexican government required that the names of all persons who arrived in the state be recorded with the proper authorities. Promptly upon arrival, Rowland, the grandfather of Mrs. Colling, presented the names of his party and stated his intention of obedience to all legal requirements. The following is the list of names of the Rowland-Workman party as listed in Bancroft's "History of California".

William Workman, and William Gordon and their families; James D. Meed, an Episcopal bishop, Benjamin Davis Wilson, William Knight of Knight's Ferry on the Sacramento River; Jacob Frankfort, a tailor, William Gamble, a naturalist, Thomas Lindsay, a mineralogist; Hiram Taylor, a musician; Wade Hampton, a gunsmith; Isaac Givens, an engineer; John McClure, James Doke, L. Lyman, a physician; Daniel Sexton, a carpenter; Albert J. Tibeau, William C. Moon, a cooper; Frank Bidebey, a carpenter; Albert G. Toomes, a carpenter, Francis Gwinn, a blacksmith; Michael White, John Rowland, Juan Manual Bara and family, Lorenzo Trujillo and family, and Ygnacio Salazar and servants.