

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **No Interest Or Taxes In Those Halcyon Days**

There have been many tales told and written about the "Treasure Hidden and Lost in Monterey." A year or so ago Paul Parker, former publisher of a Salinas newspaper and now a resident of Berkeley, wrote an article for the California Historical Quarterly entitled "The Roach-Belcher Feud" which deals with the hidden treasure and the men who were interested in the mystery. Probably the oldest of the many stories has been told and written down by an eyewitness to a few of the incidents which took place in the early 1850s.

E.L. Williams, a former resident of Monterey, whose diary of his trip on the schooner California from Panama to Monterey in 1849, we reported in this column a few days ago, wrote of the treasure in 1892.

"On the 12<sup>th</sup> day of October in 1835 the Mexican government granted to Jose Maria Sanchez the rancho called "Tequesquite," situated on the banks of the Pajaro River, near the Mission San Juan. He afterward acquired by purchase, an adjoining rancho, which had for a name 'Las Aromitas' meaning 'odors', alluding to the perfume of flowers growing wild which scent the air for miles. And so he found himself the possessor of about 31,000 acres of land, over which roamed and grazed his herds of thousands of cattle and sheep and hundreds of horses," wrote Williams.

Upon the rancho granted to him by his government, he built an adobe house with a tiled room.

The mode of living was very primitive then. The diet consisted principally of beef, which was broiled over the coals or stewed. Stoves and their uses were also unknown to the Sanchez family in 1835. There was no flour, and for bread they used corn meal, made into flat cakes called tortillas, which were baked over the coals, and a piece, when doubled scoop shape, served as a spoon with which to eat the nutritious beans (frijoles). Coffee was not known except to the Spanish officers and their families at Monterey, about 40 miles west of San Juan.

For tea they made a drink from the herb "yerba buena." San Francisco was known in the very early days by the name "Yerba Buena" because that herb grew there in profusion. Tea in the Mexican Spanish was known as

"cha," such being also its Chinese name, but the natives of Spain pronounce it "Te."

In those days the people of California lived a pastoral life, according to Bancroft. So Jose Maria Sanchez led that life. His wants were few, his riches being his cattle, sheep and horses which were constantly increasing, and were diminished in number only, when to pay his debts, he would annually kill a few hundred of the cattle for their hides and tallow, such being almost their value. This commodity was taken to Monterey from San Juan in rude cars with wooden wheels drawn by oxen. To prevent the wheels from abominable screeching, a pot of grease was sometimes carried, though rarely, for lubricating purposes, and the contents of the cars were delivered to the storekeeper who allowed for the hides \$1.00 each, and for the tallow \$3.00 per quintel or 100 pounds. There were no taxes or interest on mortgages to be paid in those halcyon days.

Sanchez also had another source of income – making soap. Nature had deposited upon his land a strata of alkaline earth called in Spanish "tequesquite" (from which the rancho derived its name). This alkali, used with the tallow, made a fair article of soap, which was sold at one real, being the eighth of a dollar, per cake.

"Indeed, it might be well said that in those days the hides were bank notes of the country and soap the small change," to quote Mr. Williams.