

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Eleven Square Leagues

Don Antonio Maria Castro was the first to appreciate the Pajaro (bird) Valley and decide upon that location to establish his home. He applied in 1820 to the government of Spain for a grant of land which he called Vega del Rio del Pajaro (meadow of the river of the Pajaro). It contained 4,310 acres. But the grant was not received from Spain, for in 1821, shortly after the application was made, Mexico rebelled and overthrew Spanish rule in California. Mexico extended the grant to Castro in 1833.

When we came across this interesting bit of history in Guinn's History of the State of California, we decided to study further some of the land grants in that part of Monterey County and around the City of Watsonville. We find that Manuel Jimeno was the next applicant for land.

In 1823 he received the grant known as Salsipuedes rancho. It extends eastward to Chittenden and from the Pajaro River to the top of the mountains and contained 31,200 acres. Don Manuel Jimeno was the builder of a two story adobe building on Calle Principal, directly back of the San Carlos Hotel. After using it for a hotel for a period it was taken over by a group of Dominican nuns who established St. Catherine's Convent, the first in California.

Jimeno was at one time secretary of state under Governor Juan Alvarado. He had married Dona Angustias de la Guerra, daughter of Don Jose de la Guerra of Santa Barbara. He had built for his bride an adobe home on the present site of the San Carlos Hotel.

In 1823 Don Luis Antonio Arguello, known as "Superior Political and Military Chieftain of Upper California located at Monterey," granted to Don Jose Amesti, the Rancho de los Corralitos, containing four square leagues of land. Amesti was a Spanish Basque, who arrived in Monterey on the Panther and married Prudencia Vallejo, the daughter of Jose Ignacio Vallejo. Amesti was the builder of Casa Amesti on Polk street.

Don Ignacio Vallejo Rodriguez received by grant the Rancho Bolsa del Pajaro, on which the town of Watsonville is now located. It contained nearly 5,500 acres. Rodriguez appears first in the records as a company sergeant at the Presidio of Monterey in 1828.

He married Perfecta Pacheco, to them were born 12 children. His will, written in Spanish in Monterey in 1854 was featured in this Diary a few months ago.

One of the conditions exacted by the Mexican government in giving these grants was that fruit trees should be planted. The pear was the variety most commonly planted, although even in those early days, according to Guinn, some apples were planted.

It is interesting to read the formalities required in securing these grants. The profuse wording of the applications; the order setting aside the land; the appointment of an Army officer and witnesses to go with the grantee for the purpose of installing him in his new possessions; how the official took the owner by the hand, led him around, caused him to pull up weeds and to throw stones and then proclaim him the owner of the premises. The government was very liberal with the public lands as any applicant was entitled to 11 square leagues.

History of the Pajaro Valley records that J.B. Hill, first American settler in 1851, leased from Manuel Jimeno 1,000 acres of the Salsipuedes Rancho. Just 100 years ago, Edward Martin, who had come to California with Hill, opened the first furrow ever struck off in Pajaro by an American, and with the first iron plow brought to the Valley.