

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

December 5, 1952

### **Cult Met in Joaquin Rocks**

Today we will relate the strange story of Joaquin Murietta's widow and the religious cult she formed which met in a rocky canyon near the New Idria mines in San Benito County. We extracted the details from the diary of J. Warren Matthews, pioneer of the Bitterwater Valley in that county. On May 15, 1883 he wrote:

"A heavy frost this morning. I have been working in the garden most of the day. Sam Matthews has a band of about 80 head of cattle here in our corral tonight. He bought this stock of Cheveya, a half-crazy Spaniard who lives on White Creek about 7 or 8 miles from Anderson Akers, and who for years past has supported himself and his family comfortably by raising cattle."

Then Mr. Matthews goes on to explain that recently a strange and most unaccountable religious excitement had broken out among the Spanish people in his section and Cheveya had become one of the most zealous followers of the new movement.

"There is an old Mexican woman," he wrote, "named Mariana Joaquina, who many years ago was the wife or mistress of the famous bandit, Captain Joaquin Murietta, but since his death has lived about Poso Gena, New Idria Mines and Cantua Canyon for 20 years more."

On the summit of the Coast Range mountains near the head of the San Benito's Cantua Canyon and White Creek, are those hugh rocks or picachos which can be seen for many miles distant, known as the Joaquin Rocks. According to olden reports these rocks were a favorite rendezvous for Joaquin Murietta and his robber band, and near where in the desperate hand to hand battle, he and a number of his band were killed by Harry Love and his rangers.

"Some months ago Mrs. Joaquin and several others moved up to these rocks to search for treasure supposed to be buried there by Murietta," continued the Matthews diary. "Soon strange stories began to be circulated about spirit manifestations seen and heard in the cave in one of the rocks. They claimed that a spirit priest who claimed to have passed to the spirit world several hundred years before, and known as Father Mahine, noted for his piety and goodness of heart during his early life, had come back to warn the people

that the end of all earthly things as they exist now was at hand."

The converts to the strange cult were told by the Spirit priest that within three years all living human beings would be destroyed by fire and flood, except those who heeded his warning, turned to God and came to Joaquin rocks to live.

"During the general destruction they would be under divine protection and would be the elect to repeople the new world when cleansed of its present abominations. That those huge rocks were hollow and really great churches which would be opened in due time for the accommodations of the faithful," were the predications related to Mr. Matthews and carefully noted in his diary 69 years ago.