

June 20, 1952

The Bear Killer

Because San Benito County was once a part of Monterey County, with Monterey as the county seat, and because San Juan Bautista, in San Benito County, was also founded by the Franciscan Fathers who built the mission there and in Carmel and the Royal Presidio Chapel in Monterey, we feel that most everything that happens in that delightful community of San Juan is interesting also to Monterey. Therefore today we are reviewing an article which recently appeared in the San Juan Mission News.

In an editor's note we have learned that an announcement was made several months ago of the formation of a committee of local people to study the possibility of a cemetery district being formed in this (San Juan) area.

Ralph L. Milliken of Los Banos, became interested in the move and gave an article to the Mission News in which he told that the present city cemetery at San Juan had been given or deeded to the town in 1863 by Don Manuel Larios. Mr. Milliken is the author of a delightful little booklet "San Juan Bautista, California, the City of History," published in 1950 and again in 1951.

"Manuel Larios was born June 16, 1798, in the pueblo of San Jose. When he was 18 years of age he enlisted in the Spanish Army in the cavalry and served seven years. He was stationed at Mission San Juan Bautista and other nearby missions" wrote Mr. Milliken.

On his discharge his worldly possessions consisted only of five saddle horses. He immediately contracted with the mission fathers at San Juan to kill and skin runaway mission cattle for a third of the hides. These were cattle that had escaped to the mountains from the mission herds and had become wild.

Manuel took with him his younger brother, Justo, Milliken relates, and together they spent the summer at a place later called La Aguilas, far up in the mountains east of the mission. Here they sallied forth each day lassoing and killing all the wild cattle with which they came in contact. Grizzly bears fed on the carcasses and were so numerous that they could not be counted.

Manuel and Justo had many exciting adventures lassoing bears. They quite often endangered their lives; but at the time they were young and the sport was old

to Californians, and thrilling. On one occasion, the bear proved too much for the pair. It was an immense animal. Although Manuel had been accustomed to seeing bears all his life, this was the largest he could remember. The boys succeeded in getting their ropes on the animal, but it was so powerful that it pulled Justo and his horse flat to the ground. It finally escaped from them by rolling out of sight down the precipice.

"Jose Maria Larios, the father of Manuel and Justo, had come as a foot soldier from Mexico at the time of the founding of the Pueblo of San Jose," Mr. Milliken wrote." He was known far and wide as the 'Bear Killer.' He never allowed a grizzly bear to go unchallenged when once he had track of it His method was to wait until the bear reared up on its hind legs and then shoot the attacking animal in the throat,

"Everyone predicted that Joe Maria was too bold and would one day meet his death in the embrace of some grizzly bear. Sure enough in 1818, along the banks of the Pajaro River near Mission San Juan Bautista, a wounded grizzly killed him."

The Larios family was originally from Barcelona, Spain, and a Spanish mangas or overcoat that had been handed from one generation to another in the Larios family is on display at San Juan in the Old Plaza Hotel, now a State Historical Monument. Manuel Larios married Maria Antonia Pacheco, a native of Monterey, in February 1821.

For a few years after their marriage the Larios family lived in the neighborhood of La Brae and San Ysidro to the north of San Juan Bautista. Larios was most of the time in the employ of the mission fathers looking after their cattle. In 1834, on the breaking up of the mission properties, Manuel came into the possession of one square league of land, 4,000 acres, adjoining the mission and known as the San Antonio Ranch.

(More Monday)