

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Gomez Rancho---Soldiers' Retreat**

The Jose Joaquin Gomez rancho on the old Natividad – San Juan stage road, which was also the mission trail, between Monterey and San Juan Bautista missions, was granted by the Mexican government to Gomez in 1835. It was named Vergeles, meaning flower garden. The remains of the two-story house and adobe corrals can still be seen in a little swale on the north side of the valley, just above where the junction of Gabilan and Mud Creeks come together.

As the Gomez adobe home was on the direct trail north, it was the stopping place of many of the notable men of the day when the Battle of Natividad was fought there in November of 1846. Such men as Thomas Oliver Larkin, the American consul to Monterey; Lt. Ord, who was later general, and for whom Fort Ord was named; Lt. Sherman who was also later commissioned a general and became famous during the Civil War, and others.

Gen Sherman, writing his memoirs in later life, described a stop he made at the rancho of Jose Gomez: "I can well remember that Ord and I, impatient to look inland, got permission and started for the Mission of San Juan Bautista. Mounted on horses, with our carbines, we took the road by El Todo. In the morning we crossed the Salinas Plain, about 15 miles of level ground, taking shot, occasionally at wild geese, which abounded there, and entering the well-wooded valley that comes out from the foot of the Gavillano.

"We had cruised about all day and it was almost dark when we reached the house of a Senor Gomez. His house was a two-story adobe, and had a fence in front. It could not be seen until within a few yards. We hitched our horses to the fence and went in just as Gomez was about to sit down to a tempting supper of stewed hare and tortillas

"We were officers, and caballeros, and could not be ignored. After turning our horses to grass, at his invitation we joined him for supper. The allowance though ample for one, was rather short for three, and I thought the Spanish grandiloquent politeness of Gomez, who was fat and old, was not over-cordial.

"However, down we sat, and I was helped to a dish of rabbit with what I thought to be an abundance of sauce of tomato. Taking a good mouthful, I felt as though I

had taken liquid fire; the tomato was chile Colorado, or red pepper, of the purest kind. It nearly killed me, and I saw Gomez's eyes twinkle, for he saw that his share of the supper was increased. I contented myself with bits of meat, and an abundant supply of tortillas.

"Ord was better case-hardened, and took it better. We stayed at Gomez's that night, sleeping, as did all others on the ground, and the next morning we crossed the hill by the bridle path to the old Mission of San Juan Bautista."

Victor Mossop of Monterey, who thoughtfully drew this historical story to our attention; and the editor of the Hollister Free Lance, for whom Mossop wrote an article on the subject, are in agreement that the historical societies in this and San Benito Counties, the Native Sons and Native Daughters of the Golden West, and individuals interested in historical preservation should find some means of marking the graves of these Fremont soldiers who were buried on the Gomez Rancho more than 100 years ago. They have so far received no honor or glory for their participation in one of the earliest battles fought on California soil.