

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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More on Irvine Ranch

The Irvine Ranch near Santa Ana, originally known as Rancho Santiago de Santa Ana, where 50,000 Boy Scouts are camped for their third Jamboree, is the first of three Spanish grants that went into the making of the great ranch that stretches across California's past and present. Robert Glass Cleland, a member of the research staff of the Huntington Library at San Marino, has written a history of the property in "The Irvine Ranch of Orange County" from which we have gleaned much interesting data concerning the several former grantees.

Don Tomas Yorba, son of Jose Antonio Yorba, a Catalan Volunteer in the Portola expedition of 1769, was willed the ranch together with his mother and three brothers, upon the death of Don Jose Antonio in 1825.

For many years after the confirmation of the grant, the ranch remained in possession of the Yorba and Peralta families. In Alfred Robinson's "Life in California," Don Tomas is described as; "a tall, lean personage, dressed in all the extravagance of his country's costume. Upon his head he wore a black silk handkerchief, the four corners of which hung down his neck. An embroidered shirt, a cravat of white jaconet tastefully tied, a blue damask vest, short clothes of crimson velvet, a bright green cloth jacket, with large silver buttons, and shoes of embroidered deer skin, comprised his dress. On some occasions it has been said that his entire costume often exceeded in value a thousand dollars.

The second of the large land grants that went into making the Irvine Ranch was known as the San Joaquin. This rancho consisted of two separate grants, a tract called the Cerrito de las Ranas or Hill of the Frogs, and an adjacent area known as La Bolsa de San Joaquin.

Jose Andres Sepulveda, son of Francisco Sepulveda, owner of Rancho San Vicente, applied for a grant to the Cerrito de las Ranas in 1836, which was approved the following year. Don Jose build a large adobe house for himself and his family converted considerable acreage into fields and gardens, and grazed large herds of horses and cattle on his many unfenced leagues of rolling hills and far reaching plains.

In those days rancheros patronized visiting painters one of the most popular of whom was Henri Penelone, a

French artist. An original of his painting of Don Jose Sepulveda, is in the Charles W. Bowers Memorial Museum in Sana Ana. It pictures the Don on horseback with silver mounted saddle and other appointments and all his grand dress of a Spanish gentleman.

The third grant that entered into the making of the historic Irvine Ranch bore the engaging name of El Rancho Lomas de Santiago, or the Ranch of the Hills of St. James. As early as 1836, Teodosio Yorba, a younger brother of the famous Don Bernardo, lived on the ranch without bothering to complete the formalities necessary for a valid title, until 1846 when his petition was approved.

Don Bernardo Yorba was also a great landowner, but his name does not appear in these transactions. He ran cattle from what is now Riverside County to Newport Bay, and unlike most rancheros, was much interested in agriculture. He was the father of 25 children.

In May of 1853, Liewellyn Bixby, Benjamin and Thomas Flint and James Irvine of San Francisco took over the Ranchos. The four partners continued to own and operate it until 1876 when Irvine bought out the other three. Irvine was of Scotch-Irish Presbyterian ancestry, born in Belfast, Ireland, next to the last of nine children. He came to the United States in 1846 and in '49 joined the gold rush to California. The Humboldt, on which he came up the coast from the Isthmus, required 101 days to reach San Francisco. His companions on the journey were Colis P Huntington and Dr. Benj Flint.