

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

August 13, 1954

Rancho San Bernabe

The huge ranch of 13,296 acres known as the San Bernabe was granted to Jesus Molina in 1841 and confirmed by the United States in 1859 to Henry Cocks. The name given to this grant honored St. Barnabas or Barnaby.

The San Bernabe is located on the opposite side of the Salinas river from King City, the Jolon road running through the property. The grantee from the United States, Henry Cocks, was known throughout the county as the fighting justice of the peace of Natividad when that community was somewhat larger than it is today. He was noted for his exploits in cleaning the Salinas Valley of its horse thieves and bandits.

One historian relates that there was a great deal of interest created in Cocks and Bancroft's history states than in 1866, still in the quest of adventure, he went with an expedition to Alaska and Siberia. Upon his return he was appointed in charge of the Tule River Indian Reservation in Tulare County to keep some of the renegade Indians in their place, but that work was too tame for Cocks so he went with Lt. George Wheeler's expedition for three years exploring the Colorado river. He returned to the San Bernabe ranch about 1880 and opened a stage station known as Cocks' station. The last heard of him was in 1885.

Francisco Garcia was granted the San Benito Rancho in 1842. The 6,672 acres which comprised this rancho was confirmed to James Watson in 1859 by the United States land commission. This land is located on both sides of the Salinas river extending from the town of San Lucas in southern Monterey, several miles north.

James Watson was an Englishman who left his ship, the Royal George, at Santa Barbara and came overland to Monterey in 1823, where he engaged in trading. In 1832 he organized the "Compania Estranjera" company of strangers for the defense of Monterey against rebel forces from the interior.

In 1834 Watson married Mariana Escamilla and they had eight children. One of them was Thomas Watson who became sheriff of Monterey County for four terms, and lived in Corral de Tierra where he also had a large family. Many of the descendants of these two men are still living in Monterey County.

A portion of the old San Benito adobe can still be found along the banks of the Salinas river. James Watson lived there until 1864 when the worst drought California has ever had killed off all his stock and ruined him financially, as it did many other large ranch owners that year. He died in 1865.

One of the largest of the land grants of the 1830's was to Ignacio Pastor of 43,280 known as Las Milpitas. This large rancho takes in most of the valley land of the San Antonio river and Mission creek.

Ignacio Pastor was an Indian, in fact in his petition to obtain the grant he classed himself as a "neophyte of the San Antonio Mission." With the exception of 33 acres around the San Antonio Mission this ranch includes everything in that section. The Mission creek from which the Mission father obtained their water is included.

William Randolph Hearst bought this ranch in later years and there, near the Mission San Antonio, he built a \$300,000 "farm house."

It is a very imposing building done in mission style and looks majestically upon the San Antonio valley and the mission below. It was said that Hearst paid \$1,250,000 for the Milpitas ranch to James Brown and the Atherton heirs.

The real meaning of Milpitas is not known but some folks claim that it means "little gardens," from milpa, meaning "corn patch." The gardens were located near the mission where the soil is very fertile and wonderful crops were raised.