

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Mexican Land Grants

We have discovered some interesting items concerning the old Mexican land grants in Monterey County which we think are worth preserving in our historic archives.

While attending the Historic Foundation meeting in Columbia recently we heard Claude Arbuckle of San Jose, the official historian of that city, speak on "Correcting County Histories."

One very good point which he brought out was the fact that many of these grants are called Spanish grants, which is not true, for in most cases the grantee did not arrive in California until long after Mexico took California over from Spain. He named a number of such mistakes which had been made over and over again in the history of Santa Clara County in years past and which present historians are endeavoring to correct.

We will begin our "Historical Episodes" in the land grant era with the Noche Buena Rancho, which was granted to Juan Antonio Munoz, in 1835 when it contained 4,411 acres. The grant was confirmed by the American government in 1853. This ranch ran along the sand hills from the lake at Seaside to Gigling (now the site of Fort Ord.) The present road, which was humorously known as Cauliflower boulevard as late as 1935, ran through the center of this grant. Noche Buena means Christmas Eve, but why this name should have been given to this sandy ranch is not known.

Another 1835 grant was made to Felipe Vasquez, known as Pilarcitos and containing 2,737 acres. The grant was confirmed to his heirs in 1875. This ranch was a narrow but long piece of land that ran from the top of Toro hill on the Monterey-Salinas road to the Laguna Seca and thence to the Salinas River. In the old days we have been told travelers did not travel through the Toro rancho and cross the river at the present bridge but took a short cut through the sand hills. There were two trails which they used, one near the Blanco crossing and the other through the Pilarcitos Canyon.

At the head of the canyon near the Salinas river was the settlement of Pilarcitos that Daniel Martin mentioned frequently when he wrote a column for an early day newspaper. This ranch was also known as the Chamisal after the brush that grew there.

Pilarcitos means little pillars because rains washed down the steep sand hillsides forming the pillars. In fact on the nearby Toro ranch when one looks at an eroded cliff from the grade it resembles the huge pillars of a large building.

There was once the huge sum of 16,939 acres in the Poso de los Ositos which had been granted to Carlos C. Espinosa in 1839 and confirmed to by the United States in 1858 to the same owner. This large rancho extended from a bit south of Greenfield to a short distance south of King City bridge. The river was one boundary and the hills formed the other. The present state highway cut down through the center of the grant and divided the ranch.

A familiar place on this grant now is the California Orchard Co. but in the early days it was known as the famous William Dunphy ranch. Dunphy was one of the best stockmen in the West, having several large cattle ranches in California and Nevada. The name Poso de los Ositos means the pool of the little bears.

Punta Pinos Rancho should be most familiar to residents of the Peninsula for it was a grant of triangular shape that extended from the edge of New Monterey to Seal Rocks and included all that section along the coast to the Seal Rocks on the 17 Mile Drive. Most of the Monterey Peninsula Country Club and all of Pacific Grove was included in the grant which contained 2,666 acres granted to Jose Maria Armenta in 1833. The grant was confirmed to by the U.S. to Henry De Graw in 1868.