

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

November 20, 1958

Battle of Natividad

A bronze marker imbedded in a five-ton block of dolomite will act as permanent reminder of the Battle of Natividad, Nov. 16, 1846. It was dedicated Sunday afternoon in a public ceremony at the site where the old San Juan Grade and the Crazy Horse Canyon meet.

The stone is backed most appropriately by an age-old stake fence that has withstood decades of weather. Behind it is the monumental Sugar Loaf, mentioned in the battle's account. The dolomite slab came from Gabilan range plant of Permanente. The plaque was placed through combined efforts of individuals, city, county, and state offices and has been registered as "California Historical Landmark No. 651."

The marker reports this historical information: "Battle of Natividad. Combined American Forces under Captains Charles O. Burroughs and Bluford K. Thompson clashed with Commandante Manuel De Jesus Castro's Californians in this vicinity Nov. 16, 1846. Casualties on each side consisted of several men killed and wounded. The Americans saved a large drove of horses for Lt. Col. John C. Fremont, who concluded an armistice at Cahuenga in January 1847.

"Plaque placed by California State Park Commission in cooperation with the Monterey Historical Society and the County of Monterey, Nov. 16, 1958." The occasion marked the 112th anniversary of the Battle of Natividad.

Col. Fred B. Rogers (USA- ret) was the speaker of the day. He has been a student of California history for many years and the Battle of Natividad in particular and his desire to see a marker placed at the scene was realized at Sunday's unveiling.

We have read a manuscript prepared by Colonel. Rogers in which he states: "About midway between the city of Salinas and the Mission town of San Juan Bautista lie two famous ranchos of early California. Both ranchos were traversed by the modern Highway 101 before its relocation farther to the west. Each rancho is somewhat triangular in form, and the two join into an outline roughly resembling an hour-glass. It was there that the sands of time ran out for those killed during the engagement known as the Battle of Natividad, fought by Americans and Californians on Nov. 16, 1846. The

casualties, though few, were the greatest of the war in Northern California, and the affair had an influence beyond that which might be expected because of the small forces involved."

The northernmost of the two ranchos, the nearest to San Juan, was granted to Jose Joaquin Gomez in 1835, who named it "Vergeles," meaning "flower garden." Gomez built a two-story adobe home on the east slope of a small, bald hill just north of the junction of the two creeks, now named Mud and Gabilan. Hospitality was granted here to Sir James Douglas, Dr. William Maxwell Wood, Lt. Tecumseh Sherman, and the American consul to Monterey, Thomas Oliver Larkin. The adobe home has now disappeared and only a brief outline of the foundation can be located.

The Vergeles rancho contained terrain broken by ridges and valleys to the south from the Gabilan creek. Cart roads enter Natividad from Monterey and from the upper Salinas Valley and joined about one-half mile south, of Lagunita (little lake), which was near the boundary between the two ranches. "Add cattle and horses, and a few gardens, and such was the peaceful background for the exciting events of mid-November 1846," the colonel wrote.