

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Rancho San Jose Tales

Rancho San Jose y Sur Chiquito lies just south of Carmel along the coast. The original Spanish land grant consisted of approximately 17,000 acres bounded by the Pacific Ocean on the west, Carmel River on the north, mountains on the east and Palo Colorado Canyon on the south.

Its beauty is every bit as colorful as its landscape. Many strange tales are connected with its past, according to Mr. and Mrs. T.F. Riley (who live on the ranch), and their daughter, Mrs. W. Robert Wilson, whose home is on Rancho Chupinos in upper Carmel Valley. They have provided much of the information on its history.

It is said that when the Spanish first came to California, the Indians had their gold in a cave on the rancho in what is now known as Point Lobos State Park. This cave was believed to be below the water line and only accessible twice a year in extreme minus tides.

Another tale told of a Spanish ship carrying gold that was shipwrecked on rocks off the point. There were only three survivors, who swam ashore carrying what they could of the gold. They sighted through a crotch in a tree and where a limb pointed they buried the gold.

The trio went to town to celebrate their good fortune. One told about the gold before the others could stop him. In the drunken riot that followed, two of the three sailors were killed. The other disappeared in a few days. Many have looked and dug vainly for the buried gold.

In the early 1900's Judge Ernest Micheles, a homesteader from the hills bordering the rancho, wandered all over the point with a divining rod.

Francisco Garcia, a Cilian Indian who worked as a whaler, once said he had found the gold after locating the limb pointing to the spot where it was buried.

He went there shortly before midnight and uncovered a small rusty box. According to the tale, at the stroke of midnight, as he was about to open the lid, a strange light appeared over the point and through the cypress trees.

The frightened Francisco dropped the box back into the hole, covered it up and fled. He told no one for a long time and never went there again.

Rancho San Jose & Sur Chiquito was granted by Juan Bautista Alvarado, Spanish governor of California, to Marcelino Escobar in 1839. The grass was lush, green and plentiful. Cattle were raised and sold for their hides and tallow.

When Marcelino Escobar died, there was some question as to his heirs' right to claim the rancho. They offered Delos Ashley, a lawyer, one-half of the rancho if he would get it back to them. In 1841, Dona Josefa, wife of Don Jose de Abrego, paid the heirs \$125 in silver and \$125 in merchandise for their half of the rancho.

The next year, Don Jose, whose weakness was gambling, lost a large sum of money in a card game with eight soldiers from the Presidio of Monterey. To clear up her husband's gambling debts, Dona Josefa, who held the power of attorney for him, turned the rancho over to the soldiers. In 1844, they deeded the land to their commanding officer, Col. Jose Castro.

Ten years later, J.S. Emery, then president of the Pacific Coast Jockey Club, and Abner Bassett, his associate, paid Castro \$750 for the rancho, which consisted of 8,818.56 acres.

Castro's claim to the rancho was rejected by the United States Board of Commissioners in 1855. He appealed to the United States District Court, and Emery's and Bassett's claim to succeed Castro was not confirmed until 1885. Not until 1888 did President Cleveland sign the patent to the rancho.

During this time squatters moved in on lands formerly owned by the Spaniards, believing them to be open and free. Among the squatters on Rancho San Jose y Sur Chiquito, and who later brought title to their claims, were Messrs. Doud, Escobar, Soberanes and Sozer.

It was said that soon after Mr. Emery bought the rancho from Col Castro he offered to sell all of Point Lobos to Warner Dodge of Monterey for \$10 an acre in 1856. Mr. Dodge refused the offer because it was poor grazing land.

In 1860, M.G. Ireland bought 1,000 acres north of San Jose Creek. In 1873 it was sold to J.W. Gregg. This portion of the rancho, except for the section bought later by Alexander MacMillan Allan, now belongs to Palo Corona ranch.

Mr. Allan decided to settle on the ranch. In 1898 he obtained 640 acres of the original land grant, including Point Lobos and rancho headquarters. The main ranch

home, once a stage coach stop, was built with whale vertebrae under each corner for a foundation.

It is still part of the present ranch house, though it was expanded and remodeled by Mr. Allan when he took over the place and again in 1935 by his son-in-law T.F. Riley.