

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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An Old Salinas Adobe

Always on the lookout for old adobes in Monterey County I remembered a charming one I had once visited a long time ago when I first came to Monterey to live and enjoy and absorb the historical atmosphere of my surroundings.

One adobe that I visited was the Sausal, near Salinas. It was pretty much of a wreck at that time but still a beautiful structure of the early land-grant days in California

There was no one living on the place, but when I phoned to Mrs. Howard Darrington a few days ago she proudly told me that she was a descendant of Stansfeld Sherwood who owned the land at one time, and that she and her husband now live there and have restored the house for their use. She also seemed proud to relate that she was born in the adobe residence.

Now a bit of the history of the El Sausal Spanish land grant.

Sausal, 1834, Jose T. Castro, 10,241 acres. This a large grant that lies northeast of Salinas City and extends along the edge of town from the Catholic cemetery to garbage dumps and then to the Gabilan mountains. The ranch house is situated about a mile from the county hospital and is one of the finest types of old California architecture and belongs to Stansfeld Sherwood. The old gate with its peep hole to see who stands without the portal is still in wonderful condition.

The old bar for locking the gate at night against intruders is still there. The original tiles are still on the building and the hair is still on the rawhide which was used to bind the roof in order to hold the tiles.

The United States patent to this ranch was confirmed to Jacob P. Leese, one of the outstanding Americans who settled in California. Leese figured in the civil and political history of the state. He was a native of Ohio and came to California as a trader in 1863. He built the first house in San Francisco and his daughter Rosalie was the first white child born there. This little girl lies buried in an old-fashioned grave in the Catholic cemetery at Monterey.

Jacob Leese married Rosalie Vallejo, sister of the famous General Vallejo. Two sons of this union were well known to many people now living in Monterey County. "Jake" Leese held several county jobs at the court house and David Leese who resided on the San Bernabe ranch near King City was the other. "Jake" Leese will be remembered as the deputy sheriff at the time of the capture of Vasquez, chronicled in this column, when someone sent his picture to the San Francisco Chronicle as that of Vasquez, making the handsome deputy sheriff very angry.

Sausal means willow grove. The proper way to spell this is sauzal.

In reference to the age of the El Sausal adobe, I direct your attention to the following excerpt from James Culleton's "Indians and Pioneers of Old Monterey." Page 176 – Heading – "Mission Ranches." Page 177 – "Some Entries by Father Amoros."

"In May, 1811, Estefana disappeared ... nothing was learned of her despite many inquiries ... it is judged they killed her or that some beast devoured her ... January, 20, 1813, I found myself and identified the remains of the aforementioned, her body was encountered between El Sausal and the front of the large garden on the other side of the river, where this day I ordered placed a cross ... the body had been eaten by animals."

This entry could indicate that the El Sausal was occupied in 1811. The river being the Gabilan and the garden lying on the flat on the east side. Mrs. Darrington's father often spoke of the pear trees and grapevines that were still growing in this location during his childhood.

Of passing interest, on page 109, under heading "Father Serra's Death." His last baptism was that of the infant, Estefana, on August 2. I wonder if it was the same Estefana who met her death in 1811?

Owner of the El Sausal has been Jose T. Castro, who apparently received it at the disbandment of the mission land, grant confirmed in 1934. Jacob P. Leese in 1856. Eugene Sherwood in 1859. The adobe has remained in the Sherwood family for 109 years.