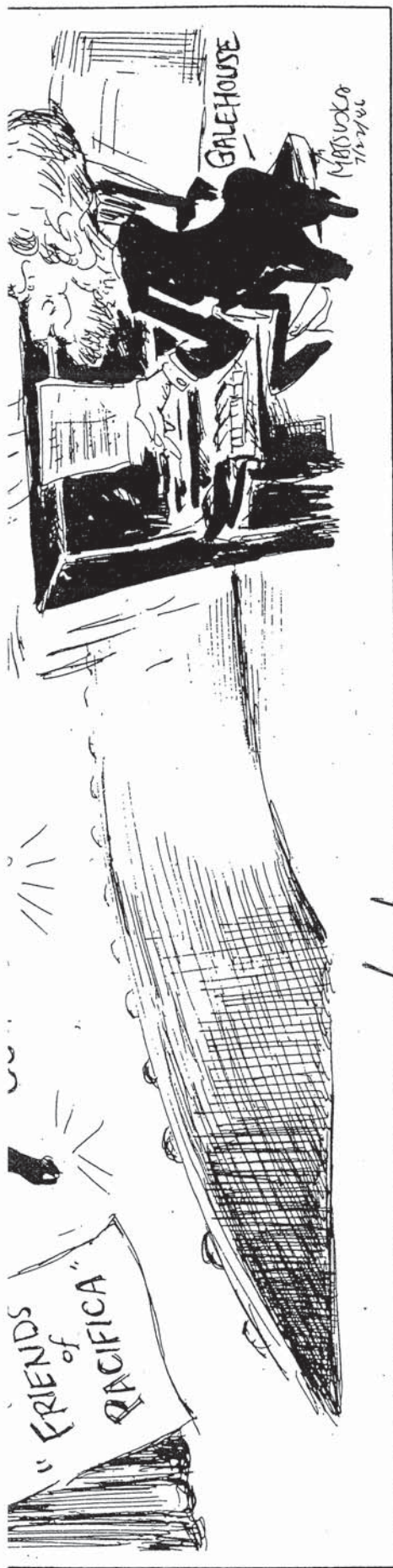




The Reactor

Paul Azevedo



A Ditch in Local History

La Peninsula, the magazine of the county Historical Society, now has something that is indispensable to rapid research: an index. Checking it the other day I discovered a short article by Historian Alan Brown in a 1961 issue. Francisco Sanchez, he said, succeeded during his lifetime in keeping his Rancho San Pedro acreage intact, not easy to do after 1849. There were just too many Americans who would squat on any apparently "idle" land. Sanchez fought them in the courts, with some success, but he also, Brown says, invented a barricade. He dug a deep

ditch, five feet wide, with a rampart, for five miles along his northern and eastern property line. (You may remember that his southern line crossed Montara Mountain and his western boundary was ocean.) The idea was to keep his cattle in and Americans out. It seems to have worked. His ditch was near what is now Skyline Boulevard. While it didn't quite match the border as the courts finally laid it out, the ditch was respected by many squatters and became the property line for some later farms. Probably this means that some streets in Pacifica, Daly City and South City are where they are because Francisco dug his ditch where he chose to dig his ditch.

Brown continues "Sanchez did let some of his Spanish speaking friends settle on his land, thus forming in some of the valleys little ranchos with one or two Indian herdsmen and a bean field or two." That's how Juan Cartagena became the first settler in Pacific Manor, while Carlos Cibrián and Jacinto Gamboa settled further south.

Michael Comerford's place (which I believe was in what is now Fairmont) dated from 1853. Comerford was a very well known name in what was then all called "Colma."

Laguna Alta marked the northeast corner of Rancho

San Pedro, Brown says, at about where Skyline and Highway One cross. It was also known as Carroll's Lake.

In 1854 Mike Comerford opened a new era by hauling cabbages to market in San Francisco. It's hard to believe, but Brown says it was a two-day trip. The cabbages were a good cash crop, especially when the potato crops were lost to blight.

"Almost immediately after Sanchez' death," wrote Brown "his widow and children were in financial trouble. They succeeded in breaking the trust arrangement he had set up, and soon the property was divided up...The lion's share...to the Tobin banking family..."

To get in on the fun of history, take a drive down to the College of San Mateo, where the history museum is open five days, including Sundays. It will be well worth it. You'll find old issues of *La Peninsula*, including the writings of famed historian Frank Stanger and other tidbits, such as the article by the late Pacifica Historian Angel Stewart, who wrote of an early postmistress who hated cooking so much she checked chimneys, inviting herself to dinner at the first house where she smelled smoke.

The poor lady would have starved in this day of gas and electricity.

Letters to the

Space for



both Spanish and English that we were one passenger short. Because of that we were requested to climb down and identify our luggage, which had been taken off the plane and was lined up alongside. No one questioned what we pointed out, but simply reloaded it without comment as we returned to our seats. At the end of the process there