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The Reactor

Paul Azevedo



Pacifica Then and Now

A little more than 100 years ago, in 1878, a publishing house called Moore and DePue published *Illustrated History of San Mateo County*. At a time when there were no black children in the county census, a black man became involved, literally, in the history of the county. Grafton Tyler Brown was the lithographer and printer of the book. The son of a freedman, Brown was probably one of the first blacks involved in this county.

Besides listing all county schools, and a brief description of how the county came to be, the bulk of the book contained lithographic drawings of the properties of its patrons. "Patrons" were those whose vanity persuaded them to spend money to have their property shown in this book. Happily, it also brought us information that may be available nowhere else concerning the early history of the county. Gilbert Richards Publications about 12 years ago reprinted it to let people today learn something about a county that has changed drastically in 100 years.

Lithography is useful in another way. Instead of the crass realism of photography, which would have shown just what was there, including shabby buildings and perhaps piles of horse manure, the lithographic drawings showed perfect borders of trees, prancing horses in the roadways, cattle artistically arranged in neatly weeded fields, smoke curling up from cottage chimneys, and other artistic cliches.

San Pedro School was the only school listed in this area in 1878, and presumably in 1883. That means, I think, that Jack London, at age 7, attended a school located in what is now Fairmont. I hope someone else can tell me exactly where it was located. In the 100 or so years since London lived in the Edgemar/Pacific Manor area while his stepfather tried to raise potatoes, so much has changed it's possible no records remain. Wouldn't it be nice if we could put up a commemorative plaque?

In the patron's directory (by definition the patrons were a group of successful and proud people) we find Robert Inches. He was born in Scotland and came to San Mateo County in 1851. He listed his residence as San Pedro Ranch. We know that Inches was one of the first property owners in what is now Sharp Park. Then there was Walter Fahy, farmer, San Pedro. John Gardner, a tanner lived at Lake Altha near Michael Comerford. Lake Altha (or Alta) is a vanished landmark in what has become Fairmont. An earthquake sag pond, it is a surface indicator of the San Andreas fault as it passes through Pacifica on its trip north.

Do you recognize any of these landmarks? Canada Raymundo, Byrne's Store, Eleven Mile House, Oak Grove, San Felix Hotel, Baden, Ocean View, Laguna, Froment's Mill, Mountain Home, Twelve Mile Farm, Pomponia, Summit Springs, Uncle Tom's Cabin, Green Oaks, Sierra Point House, Starvation Valley, Clark's Landing, Mayfield. Some of these landmarks are simply gone. Can you tell me where any were? In another 100 years, will the people then recognize Linda Mar, Sharp Park, or for that matter, Pacifica?