

The Reactor

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Historical Reminders are Few

Laguna Salada school district has been more mindful of the history of Pacifica than, perhaps, other government divisions.

We have a closed school named after Francisco Sanchez and another school named after Gaspar de Portola. For those new to the history of Pacifica, Francisco Sanchez was the most prominent person in these parts between 1839 — when he was given almost 9,000 acres because he was a good old boy of the Mexican establishment — and 1862, when he died. Rancho San Pedro was his country place. He actually spent most of the time at his home close to Mission Dolores. At one point he was alcalde of San Francisco, the equivalent of mayor. He was also a career soldier. Sanchez was a California native. His father, Jose, was the proprietor of the ranch (Buri Buri) that became a major part of South San Francisco.

We have no streets or districts named after Sanchez. We honor him only with a library and the now-closed school. Let's rectify this error. Let's rename the new post office on Crespi, now called Station A, "the Francisco Sanchez" branch. Station A is a dull-as-dishwater name. Sanchez has not only history, but character. It would be a fitting memorial to a real Pacifica pioneer.

Crespi Drive is named after a missionary priest who pioneered this area. The name is fitting and appropriate, but where are our Portola and our Sanchez boulevards?

Perhaps we could change Terra Nova, both the boulevard and the high school, to Sanchez. Terra Nova (new land) has no particularly profound meaning or historical roots. In spite of my interest in geographic names, I have never been able to learn who named Terra Nova High School or why. It should have been named after Sanchez in the sixties, before there was built up a 25-year layer of yearbooks and graduates and memories. Still I think it would work even now to rename the school. The problem with Oceana these days is not its name, but whether it will be allowed to stay open. It could close if Jefferson loses its feeder schools in San Bruno. But again, neither Oceana Boulevard nor the high school are steeped in history, and a change to Portola High School and Portola Boulevard would be appropriate, since Pacifica is the location of the place where Portola discovered San Francisco Bay.

While we're at it, next year is the sesquicentennial of the granting of Rancho San Pedro. The great rancho with its 8,926.46 acres included almost all of what is now Pacifica. In addition, there was a chunk of the Devil's Slide region south of present-day Pacifica. That means Pacifica is dated from the day that Sanchez got his grant deed from the Mexican government. Just as San Francisco traces its history as a city to 1776, we can trace ours to 1839. It's a date to be proud of.

Sanchez was to enjoy his grant in peace only seven years. In 1846, the year he completed his adobe house, his world was changed completely when the Americans occupied his beloved Alta California. After that, his lands were at the mercy of strange courts, strange customs and strange lawyers. All the rules changed in 1846 and life became much more difficult. In spite of it, he held onto his land until he died. Then the bankers and lawyers prevailed.

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