

The Reactor

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Pacifica's 150th Birthday

It's almost time to celebrate again. Pacifica as a city will be 31 years old in November, but in a more fundamental sense Pacifica began on Jan. 26, 1839, and will celebrate one and a half centuries early next year. Jan. 26 was the day that the Mexican governor of California, Juan Alvarado, granted the 8,926.46-acre Rancho San Pedro to his loyal officer, Francisco Sanchez. Sanchez was a San Jose native and a real asset to the thinly populated Alta California of the 1830s.

Rancho San Pedro shares some common borders with Pacifica, and is almost the same size, except that the rancho included parts of Montara Mountain and the Devil's Slide that our city fathers wisely choose to keep out of their hair.

According to Sanchez expert Shirley Drye, Teodora Higuera, Sanchez's wife, was one quarter native Indian. Thus the present day descendants of the Sanchez family can claim descent from both Spanish and Native American ancestries.

In her well-researched article on the Sanchez Adobe published in "La Peninsula," the journal of the San Mateo County Historical Association, Drye told of Sanchez's ancestry. He was a grandson of Jose Antonio Sanchez, who arrived in San Francisco as part of the Anza expedition of 1776. His family was part of the Peninsula long before he became the father of Pacifica. Rancho Buri Buri, thousands of acres that became South San Francisco, was the property of Sanchez's father, Jose Antonio Sanchez II. Thus the Peninsula from bay to ocean once was owned by one family.

Those early Californians were men of generosity and principle. They lived by a rigid code of honor. In the end, it was their very decency that did them in. Just as the Indians had been defenseless against the sophisticated weapons, concepts and diseases of the Spanish, so in turn the descendants of the Spanish settlers were defenseless against the laws and the concepts of the American settlers. Within 25 years of the Gold Rush most of the great ranchos were the property of American bankers and lawyers. The Californios received their property as gifts, first from the king of Spain, later from a grateful Mexican government. They lost it in turn to skilled lawyers, clever bankers, and a legal system they did not understand.

The descendants of the Spanish Californios and their Native American predecessors live among us, intermarried and indistinguishable. At least one descendant of the Ohlone Indians is a Roman Catholic priest who is a vociferous critic of the Franciscans who baptized his ancestors.

I hope we will do something to celebrate this first founding of Pacifica, this 150 years of history. The celebration logically should take place at the Sanchez Adobe, which has been so important a part of the Sanchez family's contribution to San Mateo County and Pacifica history.

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