

The Reactor

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Pacifica's 150th Birthday

Tomorrow (Jan. 26) is a great day in Pacifica history. It is the sesquicentennial of the founding of Pacifica. One hundred, fifty years ago, in a real sense, Pacifica was created as a separate entity.

Before there was a state of California, before the Bear Flag Revolt in Sonoma, before the gold rush, while grizzlies still roamed our hills, Rancho San Pedro was mapped out and granted to Francisco Sanchez, son of Jose Antonio Sanchez, and grandson of one of the pioneering 1776 Anza expedition to San Francisco.

Mexican governor Alvarado signed the grant that gave 8,926.46 acres of coastal land to Sanchez. The land had been part of the extensive holdings of Mission San Francisco de Asis, which we usually call Mission Dolores. Mission cattle had ranged the hills, and before that, Indians and priests stationed at the asistencia of St. Peter and St. Paul had raised crops in the little valley. Before that, Don Gaspar de Portola had camped here before his disappointing discovery that he had overshot Monterey Bay and that a large inlet was in the way of continued exploration.

This area was not new to Sanchez. He had lived most of his life near Mission Dolores, which was where the action was in the 1830s. His family owned Rancho Buri Buri, a much larger spread on the bay side of the hills and the civic ancestor of South San Francisco. With both ranches in the family, the Sanchez family owned the peninsula from bay marsh to ocean sand, from Oyster Point to San Pedro Point.

What was that day like in 1839? We probably shouldn't overdramatize it. In a way it was more important to us than it was to Sanchez and his family. We're aware of the wheels that were set in motion that day. Because he had been granted this vast ranch, actually larger than the present 8,000-acre city, Sanchez would come to build a home. That home, the Sanchez Adobe, would become in our time the oldest structure in what would become San Mateo County and a historic landmark.

Francisco Sanchez was not long to enjoy his property in peace. Seven years after the granting of the rancho, the United States and Mexico fought a war. California came out of that argument as part of the United States. Unlike many of his fellow rancheros, Francisco Sanchez did not lose his ranch, but he did have to fight for it in the American courts, under a set of laws and customs that were alien to his whole way of thinking. His intelligence and flexibility are shown by the way he kept his property and the respect of his Anglo adversaries.

When you get up tomorrow morning, step out of your door. Look up to the hills. If you live in most of Pacifica, all the land in sight in every direction once belonged to one man. Think kindly of him for a moment. He was the real father of Pacifica.