

The Reactor

Paul Azevedo



We soon will be 155

It was right about this time, on Jan. 26, 1839, 155 years ago, that what came to be the City of Pacifica first took clearly defined form. Francisco Sanchez was awarded a land grant, recognizing service to his country. He lived most of his life near Mission Dolores. What he got from the Mexican government became, for practical purposes, his country place. Like many prominent California citizens to the present day, he liked to live in town and visit his ranch from time to time.

Almost 9,000 acres, Rancho San Pedro, added to the 15,000 acres of Rancho Buri Buri, owned by other Sanchezes, meant Sanchez land straddled the Peninsula from bay to ocean. Their combined property encompassed a piece of the Peninsula four-fifths the size of present-day San Francisco County, or roughly one-twelfth of the present-day San Mateo County.

Almost all present-day Pacifica was within the boundaries of Rancho San Pedro. The rancho also included much of Montara and San Pedro Mountains, and Devil's Slide. Small portions of Rancho San Pedro are included within present-day San Bruno. However, for all practical purposes, Francisco Sanchez is our founding father. His ranch house is our oldest structure. His name was quite justifiably attached to an elementary school and a library.

If I had my way, the meaningless name Terra Nova Blvd. would become Sanchez Blvd., the high school Sanchez High School, and some other streets changed to honor Teodora, Sanchez's part-Chumash Indian wife, and his children.

Sanchez himself did OK under the American occupation that came so quickly after the completion of his adobe house. He kept his honor, and he was also sharp enough to keep his

property during his lifetime. He was counted as one of San Mateo County's five or six wealthiest citizens. I'm not clear whether his family was careless, improvident, or just unlucky, but within a decade or so of Francisco's death, his ranch was mostly in the hands of bankers and lawyers. The bankers were mostly Tobins, of the Hibernia Bank Tobins. Their large vacation home was a landmark in San Pedro Valley until fire destroyed it within the memory of a few longtime residents. The lawyers included George F. Sharp, who owned a 410 acre ranch in the Salt Lake Valley. His property is now a golf course. The salt lake was known to Spanish, Mexicans, and now Americans as Laguna Salada.

It's ironic the largest district of Pacifica that honors an individual memorializes a San Francisco lawyer, Sharp, who never lived here, (he lived in plush San Francisco hotels) rather than Sanchez, who did spend time here, though his main residence was at Mission Dolores. Of the two, Sanchez was more attuned to public service, serving the community that became San Francisco as Alcalde, roughly comparable to the present-day Mayor. I like both men. I think both were probably honest and honorable. If I were forced to choose, I would prefer to do business with Sanchez.