

The Novato Historian

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Preserving Novato's History Feature Section

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Gracious Marin Living at Rancho de San Jose 175 years ago

by Florence Donnelly

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Ygnacio Pacheco



John Fremont

The two men were tensed. Steely blue eyes flashed into large brown ones. For several moments neither man moved and then Capt. John C. Fremont demanded: "Bring out your horses, these," and he turned to glance contemptuously at the few old animals in the pasture, "are nags."

Slowly a smile came to Ygnacio Pacheco's face although he watched carefully every movement of the man opposite of him – John Fremont – feared and hated by the early Californians. Ygnacio, owner of the vast grant, Rancho de San Jose, knew of the ruthlessness of the man who had come to California under the guise of an explorer and was inciting the revolt against the Mexican government.

But Ygnacio, as had been his father before him, was a trained soldier and a fearless one. When the rancho owner had heard from his Indian runners that Fremont was coming through Marin County

taking stock and provisions whenever he and his troops found them, he acted quickly. The Pacheco rancho was stocked with finely bred horses and cattle which ranged over hundreds of acres of the fertile land. Ygnacio and his vaqueros sprang into their saddles and galloped from one pasture to another driving in the finest of the animals. These were then herded to Humboldt County for safe keeping and Ygnacio remained at the ranch to face Fremont. The American who had planned to take his choice of Pacheco's stock, which was known throughout California, realized he had been tricked.

Fremont's face was flushed with anger. He bent forward menacingly. His men, standing nearby, were alert, ready to carry out whatever order he gave. Ygnacio Pacheco spoke softly, quietly; his words part English, part Spanish. "Si, si, senior. These are the best on the ranch." Fremont was speechless for the moment. Open defiance he could hardly believe. Then poured from his lips epithets which no brave man will take. And Ygnacio Pacheco was a brave man. He broke in on the torrent of words and challenged Fremont to a duel. "You can choose your own weapons." The ranch owner was as quick on the trigger as he was deft with sword. But Fremont ignored the invitation and signaling his men to follow he jumped on his spent steed and rode away. Why did he not have Ygnacio taken prisoner or shot on the spot has long been a matter of conjecture. Perhaps he feared that the killing of the widely known and greatly beloved ranch owner would defeat his purpose.

This dramatic episode occurred in 1846 not long before the "Bear Flag" then the Stars and Stripes were raised over California.

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De Anza Expedition

Although California was “young” then, the Pachecos were at that time longtime residents of what is known today the entire world as the “Golden State.” Ygnacio’s father, Bortolo (Bortolome), who was born in Senora, Mexico, had come north with his parents, Juan Pacheco and Maria del Carmen del Valle Pacheco and his brothers and sisters, in the colonizing expedition headed by de Anza in 1776. Spain, which then owned California, had ordered establishment of colonies in lands to the north of Mexico which it also ruled. Making the long and perilous journey with de Anza were 80 colonists and their families.

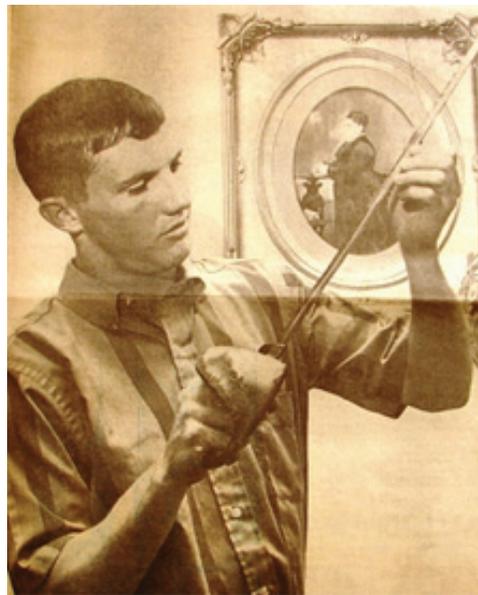
The mission in San Francisco was established then. Some of the younger Spaniards were sent into the “interior” to report on their explorations. For such a purpose was the “visit” made by two to Marin county during which they taught the Indians at Olompali to make adobe bricks and construct a home. However, it was San Jose which was designated for immediate colonization in northern California. The pueblo of San Jose was founded November 7, 1777 by order of Felip de Neve, then military commandant and governor. It was designed for an agricultural settlement and together with the pueblo of the south (Los Angeles) received constantly the favor and encouragement of the government. Both villages were surrounded by many thousands of acres of fertile land and the Spanish expected, and their expectations were fulfilled, that sufficient agricultural produce would be raised for the supply of the military posts.

Bortolo’s mother died soon after her arrival in California, the long journey and many hardships proving too much for her frail strength. Bortolo married Biviana Cantua, daughter of another colonist family and they had several children. Ygnacio Pacheco, who was born in San Jose, July 31, 1808, was an officer at the Presidio in San Francisco as had been his father but California was then under Mexican rule.

Arrives in Marin

Ygnacio was in his early twenties when he first came to Marin. He was one of the first civil officers in the county of whom there is any record. He held the position of first alcalde and Alferes Damas that of second alcalde. By the authority vested in him by the government the early settler was a judge and administrative official. He held court in the mission building. The large District of Sonoma, before the occupation of California by United States forces and its subsequent independence of Mexican rule, included all the territory between the Sacramento River and the ocean on one side and the state of Oregon and the Bay of San Francisco on the other. It was divided into prefectures, responsible to a Grand Council at Sonoma, and its officials were alcaldes.

Young Ygnacio was a firm but kindly judge and as a reward for his military and civil services to the govern-



In this 1967 picture, Herb Rowland Jr., 17, great, great grandson of Ignacio Pacheco, displays the sword his ancestor carried as a soldier in the Mexican Army while serving at the Presidio in Yerba Buena (San Francisco). Behind him is a portrait of Maria Loreta Duarte Pacheco, third wife of the don who was granted one of the largest ranches in Marin in what is now the Ignacio – Hamilton area.

ment he was granted Rancho de San Jose, one and a half leagues of land (6,659.25 acres) bounded on the south and west by Las Gallinas (Marin IJ building) and Nicasio Ranchos, on the north by Novato (Nave Shopping Center) and on the east by San Pablo Bay. This includes what is today all the land in the vicinity of Ignacio, Hamilton Field, Meadow Park, and to the top of St. Vincent’s Hill.

Ygnacio, who came to Marin

County in 1834, soon afterwards made application for the property. He received official approval in 1838 and im-

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mediately started building of his adobe home. This was for that time an “imposing” structure with four large rooms. It was located on the property where Galli’s (Boca’s) is today. To do the work, making



In this 2008 picture, Debbie Rowland, Herb’s wife, shows Ygnacio Pacheco’s sword to the Historical Guild during a tour of the Pacheco home in 2008.

the adobe and constructing the structure, the ranch owner brought 16 Indians, who were skilled in the crafts, from Mendocino County. These men built shelters of wood and brush for themselves along San Jose Creek and lived there until the Pacheco adobe was completed.

The official papers, giving the grant to Ygnacio, were signed by Governor Juan B. Alvarado on October 3, 1840. Ygnacio’s wife, whose maiden name was Josephine Higuiera, and who was a native of the county he had “adopted”, had died in 1837 leaving one son, Salvador.

After several years, Ygnacio married Guadalupe Duarte, who was born at the San Francisco Presidio. They had two children, Ramon and Maria Antonia, and then death claimed their mother.

Troubled Years

It was not until 1851 that Ygnacio married again. The years intervening from the death of his wife until his third marriage were sorrowful ones, be-

cause of his personal loss and because he and other early Californians were alarmed and bewildered by their uncertain status. While the war between Mexico and the United States (commencing in 1846,) was going on, the Californians expected to be under the control of the military, as theirs was a captured province. But military rule continued to 1849.

According to history - as to civil law - the country was utterly at sea. It had a governor in the person of the commandant of the military district it belonged - but no government. After peace had come there was a succession of military governors and the people chafed under their rule.

It was therefore welcome news in June, 1849 that a proclamation had been issued announcing an election would be held on the first of August to appoint delegates to a general convention to form a state constitution and for filling the offices of judge of the Superior Court, prefects and first alcalde or judge, such appointments to be made by General Riley after the wishes of the voters were ascertained.

Then in September, 1849 the convention was held in



Ignacio Pacheco and Maria Loreto Velasco are buried at Mt. Olivet Cemetery, along with many of their descendants.

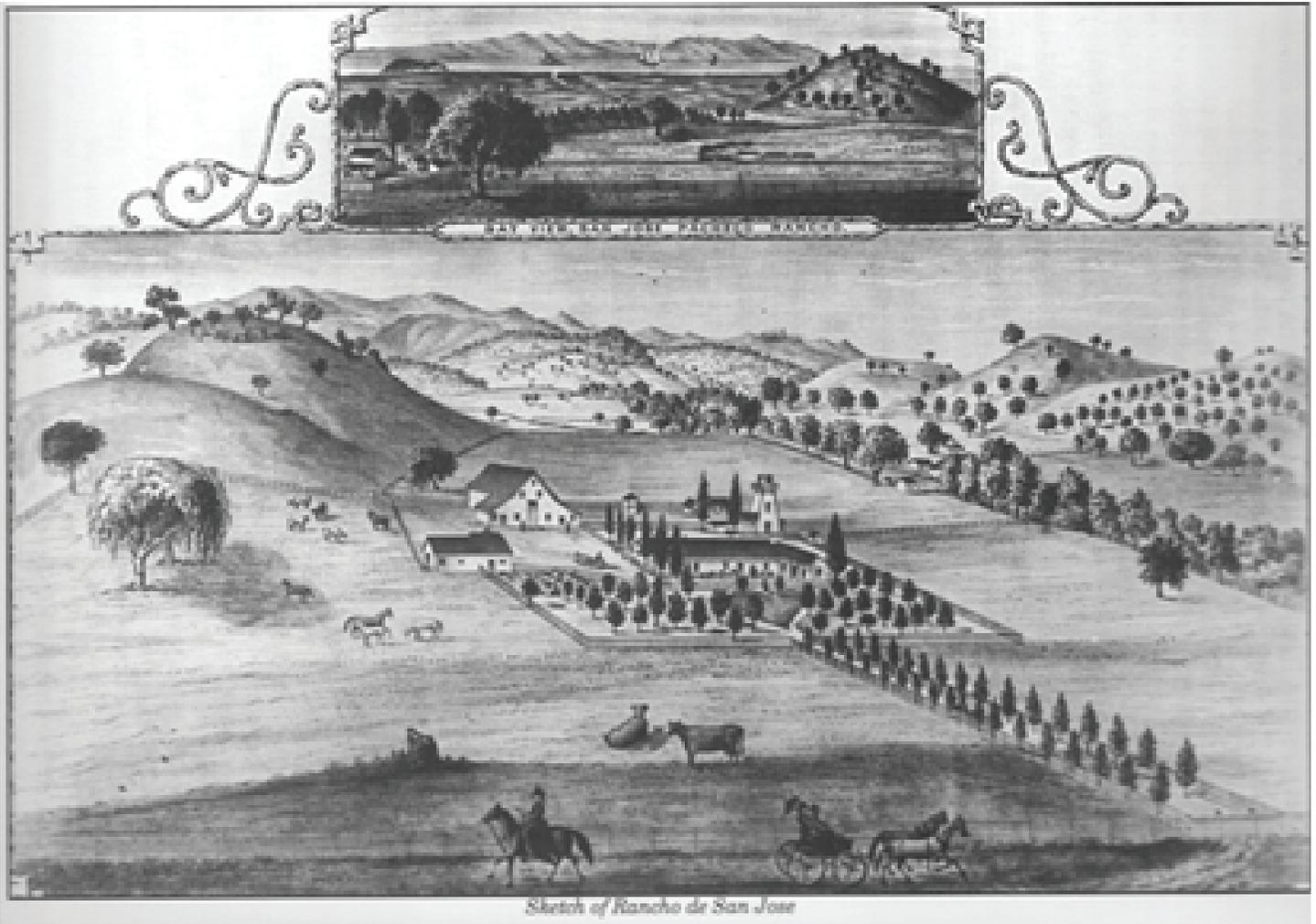
Monterey to frame the state constitution. In December, 1849, with the gold rush then in its height, the first state legislature met at San Jose. Soon after California was admitted to the union in 1850, Marin was established as a county and it was apportioned into townships by the Court of Sessions. The court was composed of James A. Shorb, county judge, Associate Justices

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James Black and George Millwater, and William F. Mercer, clerk. The townships were four: "Sausalito, San Rafael, Novato and Bolinas." These were later divided and there were over a period of 10 years many changes in boundary lines. Novato townships lines were finally determined as "com-

mencing at the Bay of San Pablo at the southeast corner of Rancho San Jose" to the southerly line of the Olompali rancho.

San Jose Rancho was then one of the best stocked in the county and Ygnacio Pacheco was one of its wealthiest men..



The adobe home, built by Ygnacio Pacheco, just after he arrived in Marin County around 1830, was later greatly enlarged as shown in the picture above. The home, which was located at Ignacio, was the center of the vast grant of land, San Jose Rancho, given to Ignacio Pacheco by the Mexican government during the time its flag flew over California. The pioneer and his sons all were interested in raising finely bred horses and cattle. Note the large stable and the barns.

The lady riding side saddle and the couple in the horse drawn vehicle, shown in the foreground of the picture, were riding along when was then known as the Petaluma Road and is today Highway 101.

Transportation in Marin had just come into the new era. The trains of the San Francisco and North Pacific Railroad had a right of way over the Pacheco Rancho. The Pacheco family and their friends could board the train at the station at Ignacio and travel by rail to Tiburon and then take the ferry "James M Donahue" to San Francisco. The picture inset shows the train and the portions of the Pacheco lands which extended to San Pablo Bay.