

The Novato Historian

The Quarterly Publication of the Novato Historical Guild, the Novato History Museum, and the Hamilton Field History Museum
Preserving Novato History



Feature Section

Contents ©2021 Novato Historical Guild, Inc.

April—June 2022

The Novato Historian

Volume 46 Number 2

Olimpall

How a California Battle Was Fought in Early Days
AN OLD SETTLER TALKS.

San Rafael in the Time When It Was Only a Mission
The San Francisco Examiner Oct. 16, 1887 page 10

For nearly sixty years Don Pedro has lived at San Rafael. He was born in San Rafael, as was his father before him, and in his life, he has seen changes gradually occur that must cause his ancestors to groan in spirit as loudly as Don Pedro does in flesh. For everything about San Rafael has changed since Don Pedro was a boy, everything excepting the hills, which, thank heaven, not even the fortune-seeking Americans, with all their improvements can rob of their beauty. But the Americans, Don Pedro avers, are perfectly capable of stripping nature of her beauties, if any profit lay in the act. For what have the grasping Americans over spared which they ever desired to possess?

The old Californian may have a good deal of right to complain of the treatment he has received from the fierce invaders of his country. He can look back and remember the time when his father's land stretched out on all sides as far as the eye could see, and as a boy recalls the time when his father's herds could wander for days among the hills and still be grassing on his father's land. All was quiet and peace then. Life ran along as smoothly as a river. The only events that ever interrupted the dreamy



quiet of a Californian existence was the celebration of some fiesta or an occasional fandango. But all that was before the American arrived and brought to Arcady the love of gold, together with the idea of annexation. Don Pedro has long since ceased from bewailing his hard fate. Although stripped of his lands, his herds gone and his friends all dead, he has become in a measure reconciled to the inevitable and recognizes the futility of trying to better matter by constantly calling upon Heaven to witness his wrongs. It required considerable time for Don Pedro to arrive at this philosophical state of mind. It has only been of late, when he is

beginning to feel that his few remaining years should be spent in making peace with the world, and especially the American part of it, that was the cause of all his misfortune, that he has accepted the situation.

Don Pedro has little to say. His one great delight is to sit on his porch when the sun is warm, and the sky is clear and look out upon the valley that lies before him. But there are times when Don Pedro can talk, and then every feature in the landscape recalls some story of the well-nigh forgotten past.

Castro and Pico

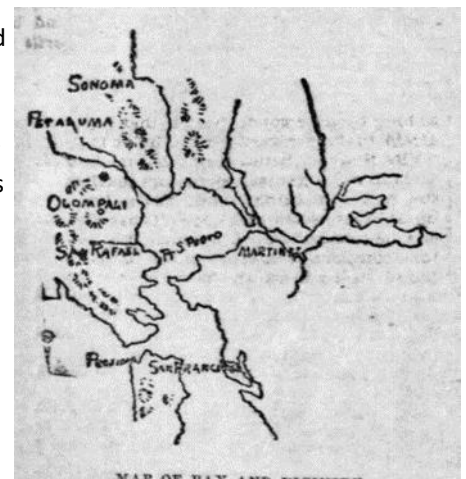
The other evening, when the cool of the evening had driven the old man indoors, he began his story of the Bear Flag war. Those were stirring times in Don Pedro's life, and as he told his story of the war the candle on the table with its constant flickering cast shadows that danced about the walls, which seemed to mock at the old man's recital.

Don Pedro prefaced his story with an account of the incidents that directly led to the Bear Flag war. He told of the jealousies between Castro and Pico, and how the former as military commander was constantly interfering with Pico in his capacity of Governor. Then he went on to tell of the way in which the native Californians and the Americans regarded one another.

Fremont

To Don Pedro's mind there is not the least doubt that the whole trouble was brought about by the concerted action of the Americans, prompted as they always are with the desire of acquiring the belongings of other people. As well as he could remember he traced the marching and countermarching's of Fremont. And, by way of parenthesis, it may be remarked that Fremont's name was never mentioned without causing Don Pedro's face to assume a wicked and an angry appearance.

Fremont's entry into California with his band of armed explorers, his violation of his agreement with Castro and his insolent way of disregarding the orders of the authorities, wrought the old man up to a pitch of frenzy. Fremont came to California for no other purpose than to steal horses, provoke a war and make California a part of the United States. There is no



(Continued on page 2)

doubt about this. Don Pedro says Fremont was a filibuster and robber at heart, and so were all his followers, and there are a good many others who were just as bad.

Don Pedro does not deny that California was destined eventually to become part and parcel of the Union. But the change in the ownership of the territory was made a pretext for the unlicensed raiding of a horde of freebooter, who seized every opportunity of making the patriotism of the native-born Californian appear as a proof of the ill-will and jealousy that they bore toward all foreigners. And it was Fremont who was the head and front of the whole business. Don Pedro says so and Don Pedro was not so young that he does not remember how matters stood in 1846. (He was around 15 in 1846)

After having, to his complete satisfaction, shown the depth of Fremont's depravity, Don Pedro told how Fremont fought the Indians in the upper Sacramento valley, and spread the story that the Indians had received orders from Castro to kill all the Americans and burn all their crops. There never was any such order, nor were any notices ever published commanding Americans to leave California. If any such orders were ever published, they were forgeries, and Fremont did the forging with his own wicked hands.

Horses

It was by this series of lies and these well-planned misrepresentations that Fremont ... the feelings of both Californians andup to a fever heat. By the month everything was ready for a revolt, and ...sized the first opportunity of bring (There is a hole in the paper and can't read these words with ...) ...at Santa Clara recruiting men to ... in case of trouble with the Americans. He sent Alviso, one of his lieutenants, to San Rafael to collect horses. Alviso collected about 200 horses, and started for Santa Clara with them, crossing the Sacramento River near Knight's Landing. This movement on Castro's part was what Fremont and his men wanted. They marched after Alviso, whom they overtook on Murphy's ranch, (June 10, 1846) and after taking every extra horse, told the Californians that they intended to take Sonoma away from Mexico and declare themselves free. "This is how the great Bear war was brought about," said Don Pedro, "and the country that the forces marched and fought in was right about San Rafael. I was only a boy then, hardly 15-years old, but I remember how families of settlers

kept pouring into San Rafael, each fresh arrival bringing with them tales of greater outrage and robbery.

I was always on horseback then, and as I heard of the exciting events that were taking place around, I used to scout the country, seeing as much as I could of the principals.

Neither side seemed to care about me, and it made no difference whether I visited an American or a California camp. I was free to go and come as I pleased.

Sonoma Bar Flag

It was on the 14th of June that Ide (William B. Ide was born in 1796 Rutland, Massachusetts. He became a Mormon and continually moved west, eventually settling in California in late 1845) took



possession of Sonoma.

Vallejo had been sent to Sutter's Fort as a prisoner of war and the Americans floated their flag. They had drawn up a set of resolutions, or a form of constitution, and after much labor succeeded in devising a flag. The flag at best was a very crude affair.

I always understood that it was Ide who designed and painted it. There was a red star in the upper left-hand corner and there was a large grizzly painted on the body of the flag. That is, the animal was intended to represent a bear, but Mr. Ide's execution fell very far short of his conception.

This was the flag which the American filibusters fought under. The idea of a star, no doubt, like everything else they had, was stolen from the flag of Texas, and the bear was Artist Ide's poetic way of expressing the firm determination and unyielding strength of his forces. There was a red stripe of common flannel, and the body of the flag was nothing more or less than a piece of Mexican manta, a yard wide and about five feet long. In rude lettering, the words 'California Republic' ran across the top of the flag.

Battle of Olompali

How well I remember the 23d of June 1846. It was the day before the famous battle of Olompali, for you must know that Olompali was considered by everyone in those days, and especially by the Americans, to be a famous victory. Well, on the 23d of June there was great excitement about San Rafael. We knew Castro had left Santa Clara and was marching towards us. I had ridden my horse near Pont San Quentin and there I could see Castro's forces on the other side.

There were nearly 200 men in the party, and at first, I thought that they were all coming over. But they changed their minds, for only one company left San

Pablo. I rode down to meet them and rode into San Rafael with them. I was very proud of my company, and I had reason for being so.

A finer body of men were never gotten together before. There was not a man in the company over thirty, and everyone was dressed in his most gorgeous clothes, as if he were going to a fandango. The buttons of their clothes were of silver and gold, and their saddles were heavy and resplendent with the same metals.

But their ever ridden in California, or anywhere else for that matter. They had been picked from the choicest animals in the State, for every corral had been visited and the finest horse selected. San Rafael came out to meet them, and as they rode into town the people saluted them with three deafening cheers.

Everybody, Californian and American alike, were glad to see such a body of men come to depose the adventurous Ide.

For the American settler, who cared more for his home than he did for the outcome of a revolt that had no foundation in justice, was glad to know that effective measures were about to be taken to bring the American robbers to account.

Joaquin de la Torre led the band. While De la Torre marched on up north to attack Ide, the two other companies, under Carillo (?) and Castro, remained at San Pablo. I rode a few miles with Torre's company and then came back to hear what the people had to say about the future.

It was about noon on the next day, that is on the 24th of June, that we heard of the

battle of Olimpali, and it was in an ignominious way that tidings were brought to us from of the battle, and they did not have to tell us who were the victors. They came in riding pell-mell over the hills back of the town, putting as much country between the Americans and themselves as they could.

In San Rafael they halted and formed into a company again. Then it was that we heard the story of their defeat.

It seems that their first camp on their way to Sonoma had been at Olimpali. The spot is called Burdells today and is a station on the broad-gauge road, about fourteen miles from here. It was towards late in the forenoon, and they were feeling ready for breakfast. It was while they were engaged in this that the Americans came by.

The Americans were a band of revolutionists, under command of Ford, one of Ide's right-hand men, who were on their way to Santa Rosa, utterly unaware that any Californians were anywhere in the vicinity. A sharp bend in the road brought the encamped Californians to their view, and they immediately took possession of the old corral and opened fire.

The Californians who were altogether unprepared and who did not know that they greatly outnumbered the Americans fired a volley and fled over the hills as

the Catholic Church now stands. It was pulled down in the fifties and the bodies were removed to the new cemetery. Torre's party after the fight at Olimpali went down to the point, then made their way to Bolinas and crossing above the American's reached Castro's main force.

Horses Taken

The American's went to Sausalito, and on the 26th of June, Fremont made his appearance. I remember well Fremont and his men riding up to our place and ordering my father to drive all his horses in the corral.

I sat on the top and cried my eyes out as I saw my pony driven away. Fremont did not leave us a horse. But there was one man who succeeded in keeping Fremont from stealing his cattle, and that was Carillo, ([Camillo Ynitia](#)) whose ranch was where the Burdells live now. Carillo ([Camillo Ynitia](#)) drove all his stock away, leaving behind only a couple of old oxen. When Fremont came up, as usual he demanded all the cattle,

three prisoners to be shot, and no matter what Fremont may say, I heard him say that day that he had no room for captives. Castro's forces, across the bay, could be seen and their movements watched. One day a little boat put off and landed at San Quentin. There were three men in the boat – two brothers, Francisco and Ramon de Haro, and an old man 70 years old known as Jose de las Reyes Berryessa.

A party went out and captured them, and then deliberately in cold blood shot all the tree. The bodies were stripped of their clothes and left lying where they fell and were afterwards buried by the Mission Indians.

Grasshopper Charge

In connection with Fremont's visit to San Rafael, there was an accident that

provoked considerable laughter. This was Fremont's celebrated Grasshopper charge. Fremont on his approach found that Torre and Padilla were in the town. So, when he reached the summit of the hills he charged down on San Rafael. The grasshoppers were very thick that year, and as the men rode down on the defenseless village the grasshoppers arose in swarms from the ground. Hence his



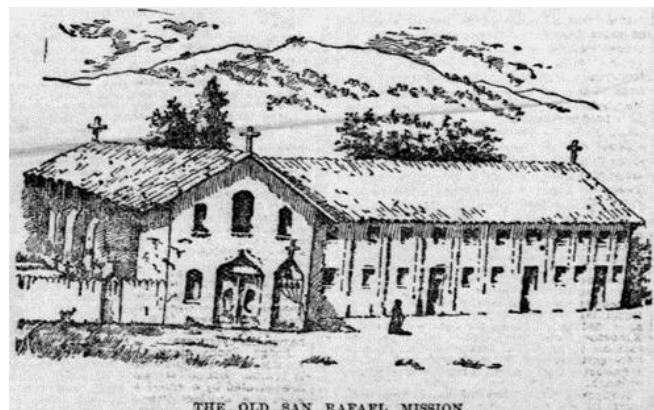
OLD KETTLE FROM WHICH FREMONT DINED.

taking of San Rafael was always spoken of as Fremont's Grasshopper Charge.

Ruiz Wound

Besides the killing of Cantera at Olimpali, one man was badly wounded. This was Agaton Ruiz. After the fight he managed to make his way to town and crawling up on the partitions of the Mission he lay hid for some time, in fear that Ford and his men had taken the town. Ruiz was discovered by his blood, which trickled down the wall and formed a pool on the floor. Ruiz had been shot through the left lung and for weeks he was nursed by the people of the town.

He recovered and lived to a good old age. His wound was a most singular one. It had been made by a large musket ball, and when he recovered, he had a hole clear through him. Often, I have seen a silk handkerchief passed through it, and it was a common thing to hold a lighted candle behind him and see the flame shine through the wound. The spot



THE OLD SAN RAFAEL MISSION.

fast as they could to San Rafael. Only one was killed. That was Manuel Cantera. The Indians brought him in, in the afternoon tied on the back of a horse. Cantera was buried in the churchyard of old San Rafael Mission. This is a building of which not the slightest trace remains today, and as far as I know I am the only one who possesses a picture of it.

It was considered a great piece of architectural skill. It was a two-story adobe with a tile roof, and all its rafters were held together by means of rawhide. The mission was situated back of where

kettle, fully four feet deep, perfectly capable of cooking enough meat for all his men. So, the kettle was scoured, and the oxen killed, and Fremont and his men supped. The kettle is there yet and owned by Mrs. Burdell, and besides the flag, about the only relic of the Bear war. While Fremont was in San Rafael, I followed his troop about vainly hopping that my horseless condition would excite his pity, or that at all events I might get my pony back.

Three Men Killed

I was in his camp the day he ordered the



THE BATTLEFIELD.

where Cantera fell at Olimpali is marked with a cross deeply into the bark of a tree. "In connection with the mission there is a story that is worth while telling. Right north of the mission was the carcel or jail, Joseph O'Farrell had charge of the jail, and locked up in it was an Indian who had a fight with another Indian named Trojinis.

It seems that Trojinis had gone to Santa Barbara, and while there had got into trouble and been put in jail. Trojinis vowed that he would have his life. The Indian came to San Rafael, and here was put in jail. When Trojinis had served his term in jail in Santa Barbara, he heard that his antagonist was in San Rafael, so he set out for here.

He walked all the way and crossed the bay in a boisa. A boisa is an Indian boat made out of bunches of tule leaves tied together and turned up at the end like a canoe. They make a very passable substitute for a boat.

He came to the jail and O'Farrell refused to admit him. Although O'Farrell was armed, Trojinis seized a rock, knocked the door in, and making his way to the room where the Indian was imprisoned beat his brains out.

Spanish civilizations

You must not imagine from this little incident of the old carcel of San Rafael that the Indians of those days were bad. The methods that the Californians employed to make them fit for civilization were such that the advantages the Spanish civilizations offered them, and they were quick in adapting themselves to it. You would hardly credit me if I were able to state how many Indians there were in California at the time I speak of. I have seen thousands of them about Sacramento. Sutter employed a great many.

Sutter raised an immense quantity of wheat, and, as the methods of gathering the crop were naturally primitive a great many farms' hands were required. In feeding them a very ingenious method for saving time was used. A long trough, or what might be called a V-shaped flume

was built in the shape of a cross, each arm being fully 150 feet long. At diagonal corners fire were built and a constant force of men were kept busy cooking food.

At one fire meat was cooked and the other was devoted solely to vegetables, of which beans formed the major part. As fast as the food was cooked it was heated in the flume and the Indians were at liberty to come and help themselves. "But the Indians are all gone and only here and there a mission remains to remind one what used to be.

"It won't be a great while before every vestige of early Californian life is swept off the face of the earth. Perhaps things are better today than they were then. It must be so, or people would not say so, but for myself. I can't say that it is so. Everybody had all he wanted then. No one was very rich perhaps, but then, no one was very poor. There were few discontented people, and the days passed without a shadow of anything unpleasant darkening them.

But the Americans came, and here we are rushing pell-mell through life, robbing, cheating, and lying in a way that would make a Piute Indian blush.

It may all be American civilization, but I should like before I leave this spot for good to pass a week of my life in the way we did before you Americans crossed the Sierras and your ships rode at anchor at Monterey."

By Michael Read

The first time I went to the Pacheco Ranch I heard the story by Herb Rowland taking about how Ignacio Pacheco had kept Fremont from getting his horse's. This story about Ignacio Pacheco can be found in the Guilds web site - Historian— July-September 2015 "Gracious Marin Living at Rancho de San Jose, Marin IJ 1949." Which talks about how Ygnacio Pacheco and John Fremont do battle in 1846.

I then heard about a story in the California Historical Society "California History, Vol. 65, No. 4 (Dec., 1986, PP 238 -247, that said Camillo Ynitia was the only one that battle Fremont, as reported to them by Robert Thomas, Camillo's great-great-grandson. He said it was Don Padro Pacheco, that told the story about Camillo in the "California History" and it was in the San Francisco Chronicle October 16, 1887.

The 1887 story has you can see just says "Don Pedro" and he was born in San Rafael, and it was in the Examiner not the Chronicle.

Who is Don Pedro

In the "HISTORY OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA AND BIOGRAPHICAL RECORD OF COAST COUNTIES, CALIFORNIA—By Prof. J.M. Guinn, A.M., 1904." The biography of Ignacio Pacheco says, "During the Mexican war, Senor Pacheco was taken prisoner by General Fremont, to compel him to give up all his horses to the United States government, which he did, thus securing his release."

In the 1880 book, "History of Marin County" says only this about Ygnacio. "The first civil officers in Marin, of whom we can gain any exact information, were Ygnacio Pacheco and Alferes Damas, who held the positions of First and Second Alcalde. These gentlemen were succeeded by William Reynolds and James Black, who held court in the large hall of the Mission building. This was in the year 1845."

Looking over the 1850 census on Marin County, there was only two teenagers born in California, Salvador Pacheco, 11 years old (1834-1905) or Pedro Sias, 15 years old (1830-1892).

Both were born in San Francisco not San Rafael. So, the "Don Pedro" has to be Pedro Sias.

The story about Ignacio confronting Fremont comes from Mercedes Pacheco Boeken (1878-1952), in the 1949 Ij story. Her father Gumesindo Pacheco (1852-1916) and her grandfather was Ignacio Pacheco.

Salvador would marry Besinta Saiz, Pedro's sister in 1851. Uniting the Pacheco's and Sias's Family.

James Black would marry Maria Agustina Sais in 1843, Pedro's Aunt. In 1866 Black married Mrs. Pacheco, Ignacio's widow.



This is a picture of the pot used by Fremont to cook the cows during the bear Flag revolt. Now at Olimpali State Historic Park.