

RECORDS ROOM

A Californio History of San Jose and California

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Introduction

The history of a place is generally taught by teachers in terms of grand events, glorious battles, the accomplishments of great men, and the significant dates not to be forgotten. Although these facts are of importance, and the history of Spanish California and Santa Clara County have their proud historical moments, most "history," however, is the little or unknown lives of the families who lived and reflected the milieu they occupied. This brief story, written basically as a genealogy of a more or less typical family, is about the reflection of some events in the saga of California's Spanish days as lived out by some members of the Soto and Cantua families and their kin.

Exploration

It must have been a hard life, in comparison to our present day pampered lifestyles, for a colonial soldier in Baja, California of the 1760's. With primitive tools, the hot sun, a warm and dry climate, no women to help with the traditional duties, limited varieties of food, possibility of Indian attacks, and endless days of routine, a common soldier, Jose Joaquin Caytano Espinosa, spent many of his days with the small garrison at Loreto. It is true that he had a wife and large family; it must be assumed he often was separated from them for they lived at Villa de Sinaloa across the Gulf of California.

Others have described in detail the daily ways of such Spanish soldiers in the slowly northward advancing colony of New Spain (Mexico). In brief we can say that life to a common man born in the colony would have little to offer aside from the rewards of a wife and family, church services, and a lifetime of duty as a lowly soldier in desert outposts. The opportunity for Jose Espinosa, when he learned of the possibility of an expedition to little known places north of Baja, may have been the most exciting adventure of a lifetime. Surely it was the most significant event in the lives of many men. Jose Espinosa took advantage of this adventure and joined Gaspar de Portola as a soldado de cuera (leather jacket soldier, with lance and shield) on his expedition to present day California in 1769.

There were numerous reasons for Spain's desire to send a land expedition into California. Amongst these were the desire to explore lands claimed, to find riches for the crown, to increase the size of the colony, to evangelize the Indians, and possibly the main reason was to prevent its colonization by others, like the Russians. For these and other minor and no doubt personal reasons, a party to explore California was approved and would be led by Portola and Junipero Serra. It is true that the missionary Serra was instrumental in the expedition, though much of the thanks for its success must go to men like Galvez and the not flamboyant, yet very able administrator of Mexico, Bucareli.

Portola's land party of 1769, in which our friend Jose Espinosa participated, was only part of the effort to better learn of California. Two ships with men were also to go northward. The daily discoveries and heartaches of the land expedition which left Velicata, Mexico on May 15, 1769 are best told in the diaries of the few educated men who were participants on this journey. In them we learn of encounters with Indians, discoveries of new lands and of a great bay, of starvation and illness, of cold rain and frightened men, and of the faith of the followers of God. The records of these leaders are invaluable yet we are unfortunate not to know directly of the feelings and thoughts of the plain soldiers who made up most of the party.

Despite the difficulties of this exploration, the first permanent Europeans came to California. Probably the first Spaniards to visit our then lightly populated Santa Clara Valley were the members of Portola's group which included Jose Espinosa. This exploration, with thanks to Portola and Serra, led to much knowledge of California and to settlements established at San Diego and at Monterey.

Colonization

These permanent colonies were not only important to the history of California, but were also important to our soldier Jose Espinosa. The beauty of the land and the

possible opportunities must have seemed great to him. We know this because he returned to Loreto, sent for his family at Villa de Sinaloa, and thus his wife (Maria Serafina Lugo Espinosa) and seven children joined him at San Diego in September of 1774. That must have been a happy time for Jose; it certainly was for California because the arrival of women and children guaranteed the future of Spanish California.

It must be mentioned that not all of the Espinosa children came to San Diego to join their father. Left behind was the fourteen year old Barbara who had, during the previous year, married a soldier at Villa de Sinaloa named Ygnacio de Soto. Like his wife, Ygnacio was a native of Sinaloa and the son of a soldier. His parents were Juan Nicolas de Soto and Maria Juliana de Avila. Ygnacio too was a soldier.

The survival of the new people in California depended very much on the ships sent from Mexico which brought the desperately needed supplies. Also of great importance to the survival of the posts was the need for more colonists. Probably the most known and respected explorer was Juan Bautista de Anza. Anza, a tough frontier soldier who achieved high officer rank because of his good abilities, is famous to California because of his explorations and as a leader of expeditions bringing colonists to California.

Of particular notoriety for Anza was his leadership of the "De Anza Expedition of 1775-1776" which brought many

soldiers, women, and children to the new colony of California. Amongst the members of this infamous group were the soldier Ygnacio de Soto and his wife Barbara. Certainly their desire to join the other colonists was due to the pay they would receive and for the possibility of new opportunities. Those of us with family far away know, however, that Barbara must have been greatly influenced by a desire to be closer to her parents, Jose and Maria Serafina Espinosa. They too would want to see their daughter and young grandchildren.

Also on this expedition was a soldier from the Presidio of Tubac (near present day Tucson, Arizona), Ygnacio Antonio Linares. He was joined by his wife, Maria Gertrudis Rivas Linares, and their young children. This was especially important to Ygnacio and Barbara de Soto because they would become life long friends and kinsmen by marriage.

The influx of soldiers and families was important to the growth of California. Even though the padres were more interested in establishing their missions and Christianizing the Indians, the governmental officials were pleased because of the permanence and security from invaders these colonists provided for the Crown of Spain. The Anza colonists, of course, were not the only new people to come to California. More priests, soldiers, and pobladores (settlers) followed. However, most of the new people came by ship. The land route from Sonora to California, which was used by Anza, was closed in 1781 because of the Colorado River Massacre by the

Yuma Indians. Barbara de Soto's brother, Jose Joaquin Espinosa, was one of the soldiers killed there on September 17, 1781.

Likewise, San Diego and Monterey did not remain the only settlements. Twenty-one missions would be established, three presidios erected, and four pueblos founded. The first pueblo (town) to be founded was San Jose de Guadalupe on November 29, 1777. The site of the town was chosen by Governor Neve because of the fertile plain and availability of water for irrigation.

Of significance to the Soto and Linares families was the founding of the Presidio of San Francisco in 1776. The young soldiers, both named Ygnacio, were part of the garrison that started the fort and near-by mission. They remained at the presidio as guards for several years with their families.

The birth of a child is usually the reason for much pride by the parents. This was especially so for Ygnacio and Barbara de Soto when their son, Francisco Maria Soto, was born because he was the first Spanish child to have this distinction in San Francisco. He was baptized at the infant Mission Dolores on August 10, 1776.

Spanish Days

The people of Spanish California were basically of four types: missionaries, soldiers, pobladores

(colonists/farmers), and the native Indians. It is true that some of the colonists received large land grants, but these were very few under Spanish rule. Most of the European citizens who worked the land did so on small plots near the few pueblos in order to help provide food for the soldiers. These people generally came because of the promise of pay and rations, and because of a loan of animals and tools which would be paid back through deliveries of food to the presidios. Probably more common of the Spanish men was to be a soldier. The main work for the soldiers, when not loitering and doing as little as possible, was to guard the towns and missions, to catch Indians who ran away from the missions (like the earlier mentioned Francisco Soto who became a famous Indian fighter), and to deter foreigners. The missionaries kept busy in evangelizing the Indians, in teaching them Spanish customs and farming methods, and in having the Indians tend the vast crops and herds of the large mission lands.

Like most men of their time and place, Ygnacio de Soto and Ygnacio Linares spent most of their lives as soldiers. However, in 1784 both the Ygnacios moved to San Jose where they and their wives remained until their deaths. Even though still considered soldiers, they built adobes (next to each other!) in the new pueblo and were given plots of land to be farmed with their Indian servants.

Aside from the birth of more children their lives were fairly mundane. Ygnacio de Soto did have the distinction of

serving as acting alcalde (mayor) when Gabriel Moraga was ordered to Monterey for a conference with Jose Arguello and Governor de Arillaga in January, 1794. Ygnacio's son, Antonio Soto, later became alcalde of San Jose in 1818. Ygnacio de Soto also led a pack train to Monterey with grain, garlic, and chickens when requested to do so by Jose Arguello in July, 1794.

Of importance to the Soto and Linares families was their friendship with another Ygnacio and San Jose poblador, Cantua, and his family. Ygnacio Cantua was originally a soldier who came to California in 1782 with his wife, Maria Gertrudis Castillo Cantua. Also of significance to the Sotos and Linares' was the marriage of Ygnacio de Soto's son, Isidoro, to Ygnacio Linares' daughter, Maria Marcela, at Mission Santa Clara in 1800. What a happy time the people must have had during the ceremony and following festivities when compared with their daily routines.

The Spanish period of California was relatively uneventful aside from the growth of the missions and settlements, the few non-Spanish visitors, and the minor skirmishes with Indians. As mentioned before, most of the people were soldiers, small farmers, or missionaries. The missions were by far the most prominent economic and probably political entities.

Independence

Events outside of California were to change the relatively slow growing and slow to change colony. The main event was Mexico's independence from Spain in 1822. Most of the Californios (Spanish Californians) considered themselves loyal to the King of Spain but their small numbers and basic political control from Mexico meant they too became independent of Spain and thus became part of the new country, Mexico.

At first the change of nationality meant little in terms of the daily lives of the Californios. The sons of the three Ygnacios (Soto, Linares, and Cantua) became soldiers. It is true that the previously mentioned Francisco Soto became famous as a skilled Indian fighter and rose to the relatively high rank of sergeant (while his brother, Isidoro Soto, even became a lieutenant in the Mexican Army), yet most of the men, like Jose Guadalupe Cantua and the other sons of Ygnacio Cantua, remained common soldiers who guarded the missions and presidios.

Of more significance to California than the initially unchanged lives of the Spanish (now Mexican) citizens, was the effect this change of government had on the missions. As has been briefly mentioned before, the missions were the largest landowners and were thus the holders of the little wealth in California. With their thousands of acres which

were developed into rich ranches and farms by the Indians, whose lives were technically not much different than the Southern slaves, the missionaries possessed something of great interest to the officials in Mexico.

Secularization

What interested the officials of the struggling and poor government of Mexico was the potential revenue of these rich church lands. This interest developed into a fact when the Mexican government decided to secularize the mission property. This secularization of church land meant that the government would eventually appoint administrators to manage them for profit and that they would more commonly grant portions (as was mainly done in the 1830's and early 1840's) to private people to own and to develop profitably for the benefit of the citizens. This proved to be a good event for many Californios who became rich landowners. It was also, though, a sad event for the remaining Indians who in theory (under Spanish rule) were to be given the mission lands when they were sufficiently Christianized and educated.

Amongst those who benefited were members of the Soto and Cantua families. Several sons and brothers of the previously mentioned Lt. Isidoro Soto were given land grants. Some of the family members were: Joaquin Soto who was granted the one-half league Rancho Piojo in 1842 and the three league Rancho Canada de Carpentaria in 1845, Rafael

Soto who with his wife was given the one-half league Rancho Rinconada del Arroya de San Francisquito around the present day Palo Alto in 1835, and Lazaro Soto who was given the one league Rancho Canada de la Segunda in 1839. The sons of Ygnacio Cantua also were enriched by the secularization. Amongst his sons were Jose Guadalupe Cantua who was granted the one league Rancho San Luisito in 1841, Vicente Cantua who was granted the two league Rancho Nacional in 1839 and Julian Cantua who married Maria Isabel Ortega, the heiress of part of her father's Rancho San Ysidro around Gilroy. Other relatives benefited also.

These men, like the average citizens of California, were common soldiers in the Spanish and/or Mexican armies before the dismantling of the missions. With secularization they, like most who received grants, were given them because they and members of their families had been loyal soldiers. Most of the grantees settled on their property with their families to build adobes and develop the ranchos; although some of the rancheros (ranchers), like Lazaro Soto, remained in towns and had mayordomos (managers) to run the estate with the help of vaqueros (cowboys). In addition to becoming rancheros, some served simultaneously as officials in the Mexican government. Jose Guadalupe Cantua became a county judge in the Monterey district, as was his brother Vicente Cantua who also served as administrator of Soledad Mission, while Joaquin Soto also mentioned earlier was a county judge.

Mexican Days

It is from this period, with the granting of the ranchos, that we learn of the "days of the dons" and of the "pastoral" rancho life. We can picture and know from records, Rafael Soto in present day Palo Alto, and likewise his kinsman Jose Guadalupe Cantua on his Rancho San Luisito, waking early on many mornings in his secluded rancho. While dressing in order to be ready for the day's work, the wives would be busy cooking and tending to the numerous children. The Rafael Sotos were initially a solitary family on their over two thousand acres. So, "Don" Rafael would have many repairs and work with the animals to do by himself. Although he certainly would have help from neighboring rancheros when it was time to round-up the cattle and prepare their hides, many of his work days were spent alone on the land. His relative near Guadalupe, Jose Guadalupe Cantua, was more fortunate. This gentleman had a mayordomo and several Indian vaqueros to help with his responsibilities. His wife too was fortunate because she also had Indian help around the adobe! Maybe most fortunate of all were Julian and Maria Isabel Cantua because they had many of their extended family also living on Rancho San Ysidro at present day Gilroy.

Life was not all hard work and worries concerning cattle raising, selling the hides and tallow to Yankee

merchants, and fighting off wild animals. There were many celebrations, such as rodeos and fiestas, which centered around work activities and the visits of family and friends. Since most people were related to their fellow ranchers (a relatively small number of families with many children had little opportunity not to marry and become relatives to each other) there was no need of hotels when people traveled. Such a thought would not occur to the Sotos, Cantuas, and others who would welcome visits from their family and who would entertain them graciously.

Most of these men were not extravagantly rich (although there were exceptions like Don Nicolas Den of Santa Barbara). This did not stop them from entertaining well, from providing beautiful silks and clothing for their ladies, from elegantly dressing themselves and their horses, from enjoying their food, and from being kind to everyone. Entertaining visitors to the ranchos would often last for weeks. Games showing off the great skills learned from riding horses most of the day were common, as was dancing and eating in the evening. These people enjoyed the ease of their lives and the company of their friends without having to work so hard on their ranchos.

Americanization

Unfortunately though, for the Californios, another event outside of their peaceful territory was to have

significance for them. This event was the "Manifest Destiny" of the United States which lead to the Mexican-American War of 1846-1848, the subsequent American invasion of California, and the entering of California to the Union in 1850.

This American war against Mexico lead of course to American soldiers and sailors entering California because it was part of Mexico. Although the Californios were not directly involved with the causes of this war, they nevertheless suffered from it. The American invaders who came to California had the advantages of being more aggressive, having better equipment, and possibly better military skills. Yes, the Mexican Californians tried to fight the invaders at skirmishes like the Battle of Olompali, the Battle of Santa Clara, the Battle of Natividad, and others. Cantuas, Espinosas, Sotos, and their people fought in these battles. The ranchero Lazaro Soto was sergeant of the party in charge of horses and munitions at the Battle of Natividad while his cousin, Lorenzo Soto, tried to kill United States Consul Thomas O. Larkin in the same fight. Despite these and other brave efforts, the Californios lost to the Americans.

Thus began the end of the "romantic" days of the Californio dons. Most of the rancheros lost their lands after the annexation to the United States because the new government did not recognize some of their grants, because of the great expenses they incurred in court fights to keep

their ranchos, because they were not astute businessmen like many of the incoming Americans, or because it was easier to sell all or parts of their property in order to sustain indolent lifestyles (lazy at least in terms of the hardworking Yankees who mostly did not understand the easy going ways of the Californios).

Our previously mentioned Cantua and Soto friends and their heirs eventually lost their land. Lazaro Soto sold his rancho Canada de la Segunda to two Americans in 1852. He had a provision in the sales contract which stated that the mission Indians (his rancho had the Carmel Mission on it) living on the place were not to be disturbed. These friends of Lazaro Soto did not remain long. Judge Jose Guadalupe Cantua (who was also Lazaro Soto's father-in-law, Lazaro Soto married Felicidad Cantua and thus solidified the old friendship between the Cantua and Soto families) managed to keep his land until his death many years after the American take over. His children sold the rancho after he died.

These men, and their sons, who lost the lands generally became vaqueros for the new American owners. Others and later generations became Americanized. The unfortunate aspect of this was the loss of the Spanish language by their descendants, the loss of many gracious customs, and the loss of a different attitude toward life.

Most of the Californios, despite the loss of land and some mistreatment, were kind and considerate toward the many

new Americans who were entering the state. Not all were friendly. The best example of continued hostility towards the Americans was probably Joaquin Murrieta and his horse gangs. Revenge was the initial cause of this man's attacks, killings, robberies, and other crimes mainly against Americans by himself and others. Eventually Murrieta and his men were discovered by the California rangers at their hiding place, Cantua Creek. Murrieta's cruelties were thus halted. At the skirmish between the rangers and Murrieta's men two of Judge Jose Guadalupe Cantua's grandsons fought with Murrieta. Domingo Cantua was killed while his brother, Lupe Cantua, escaped and became an expert vaquero at Rancho El Tejon.

The Dona

One other fact to consider when reflecting on the lives of the average Californio is the role played by the women. As this essay shows, they had no prominence as soldiers, as missionaries, as explorers, as officials, nor really as ranchers. For the most part they were hard working frontierswomen who had endless family and household responsibilities. We can read in some books glimpses of particular lives of some of the women who inherited ranchos (like Maria Isabel Ortega Cantua) or who took control of them after their husbands died (like the wife of Rafael Soto). We can also sometimes come across small footnotes in

records which tell us some minor fact or story. One such example in the records of Mission San Juan Bautista concerns Maria Gertrudis Cantua, wife of the earlier mentioned Ygnacio Cantua. After becoming a widow she became well known and loved in San Juan Bautista (and the surrounding area) as the godmother of numerous children. Although she is little known in the annals of the history of our state, she was important to those who knew her and she must have an important place in the records kept by God.

Conclusion

The trivial events, births, marriages, etc. of families like the Sotos, the Linares', and the Cantuas is in themselves of little significance to most readers. However, it is important when we consider that what little we know about these minor incidences parallels the great moments of our state and county and that they reflect the lives of the vast majority of people who lived the history of California and of Santa Clara County. Descendants of these people, like the writer of this essay is of many of those mentioned, still reside in San Jose and other towns. They also live out their daily joys and struggles more or less like all average people in our present history and milieu.

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- San Juan Bautista Mission Records.

Espinosa and Soto Genealogy

Jose Joaquin Caytano Espinosa + Maria Serafina Lugo

Spanish soldier of 1769

Portola Expedition

Daughter:

Barbara Espinosa + Ignacio de Soto

Spanish soldier, member of Anza
Expedition, acting mayor of San Jose
in 1794

Son:

Isidoro Soto + Maria Marcela Linares

Mexican lieutenant
at Monterey

Son:

Lazaro Soto + Felicidad Cantua

Owner of Rancho Candada de la Segunda
Mexican Sergeant at the Battle of Natividad

Great-great-great-grandson:

Edward Allegretti

Cantua Genealogy

Ignacio Cantua + Maria Gertrudis Castillo

Spanish soldier, in California 1782

Son:

Jose Guadalupe Cantua + Maria Petra Maxima Lugo

Owner of Rancho San Luisito
County Judge

Daughter:

Felicidad Cantua + Lazaro Soto

Linares Genealogy

Ignacio Antonio Linares + Maria Gertrudis Rivas
Spanish soldier
Member of Anza Expedition

Daughter:

Maria Marcela Linares + Isidoro Soto