

**The Battle of Santa Clara and
The Mexican-American War in Northern California.**

**An Essay
Presented to
the California Pioneers
of Santa Clara County**

by

Nathan Tom

**2890 Westgate Avenue
San Jose, CA 95125**

(408) 265-6510

CALIF
SAN JOSE PUBLIC LIBRARY [0]

Table of Contents

	Page
Introduction	1
Prelude to War	2
Beginnings of War in California	4
Weber's Raids	4
Retaliation for Raids by Californios	7
American Actions in Return for Retaliation by Californios	8
Battle of Santa Clara	10
Aftermath of Battle	11
Battle of Santa Clara Plaque	13
Appendices	14
Endnotes	20
Bibliography	22

Introduction

The Mexican-American War was fought between the years of 1846-1848 and allowed the United States to gain the territory which today includes the states of California, Arizona, and New Mexico. During this war, Santa Clara saw its one battle in the midst of the fighting between the two forces. Also known, as the Battle of the Mustard Stalks, the Battle of Santa Clara was the only campaign in the Northern California District between the Californios and the United States forces during the Mexican-American War.

Prelude to War

Both the United States and Mexico were fairly new countries at the beginning of the Mexican-American War. Each had been able to drive off a larger mother country through revolution. The United States had declared its independence in 1776, which made it seventy years old at the beginning of the Mexican-American War, and Mexico had received its independence in 1821, which would have it only twenty-seven years old. Each country was just beginning to root itself in its government and economy.

At the beginning of the Mexican-American War, the United States' population was largely European. Most of the Europeans were political, economical, or religious refugees. These individuals often felt morally and religiously superior to the natives who seemed to be uncivilized. Also the United States' industry and transportation was quickly growing to accommodate for the drive for expansion that Manifest Destiny brought to the pioneers.

The population of Mexico, on the other hand, was largely Spanish and Mexican. The Spanish population was still large since Spanish control of Mexico had been relinquished only twenty-one years before. The new Republic set up in 1821 was disrupted by political revolutions for its first twenty-five years, and the state treasury was often in a state of near bankruptcy. Different factions or political groups tried to gain control of the government. In addition, the shaky government caused great confusion and instability which damaged the economy and industrial development. Thus, many of the communication, transportation, social, and economic ties between the provinces of Mexico were limited.

There were many events and conditions between the two neighboring countries which created immense tension that eventually led to the war. First, the United States feared that Mexico's government was so weak that a European country might come back and retake Mexico

and then pose a threat to the United States.(1) The United States felt that if they took enough land away from Mexico, then there would be little danger if Mexico was indeed taken over by a foreign power.(2)

Secondly, there was the desire of many Americans to gain more territory. This drive was referred to as Manifest Destiny and took place during the 1840's. A lot of tension was created when the United States claimed land that Mexico still felt they owned. This was especially so when Texas declared its independence after Santa Anna's forces were defeated, and was made to sign the Treaties of Velasco on May 14, 1836. The treaties recognized that Texas was independent from Mexico. The annexation of Texas in December of 1845 created even greater animosity toward the United States.

Thirdly, Mexico could not pay the United States two million dollars for damages claimed by United States citizens during periods of conflict between the two countries.(3) At the time President Polk knew that the Mexican treasury was near bankruptcy, and he consequently asked to have New Mexico and California, instead of the two million dollars in damages.(4)

The fourth and final act which started the war was between the United States and Mexican armies. General Zachary Taylor built a fort along the Rio Grande, but the Mexicans still considered that their land and saw it as an act of war.(5) Then on April 15, 1846, Taylor ordered a naval blockade of the Rio Grande.(6) A week later a United States patrol was ambushed by Mexican Cavalry which resulted in sixteen United States casualties.(7) General Taylor's and General Mariano Arista's armies fought against each other in the Battle of Palo Alto and the Battle of Resaca de la Palma, on May 8, and May 9. On May 13, 1846, after years of confrontation, the United States Congress finally declared war on Mexico.

Beginnings of War in California

Even before the Battle of Santa Clara, many other acts of independence were the result of United States citizens. On June 10, 1846, John Charles Fremont instigated a band of Americans to take over Sonoma after actions he had taken to free California. This was the center of the Bear Flag revolt, which proclaimed California independent from Mexico. The men who fought in the Bear Flag revolt were called the Bear Flaggers and allied themselves with Fremont after the revolt. Then on July 7, 1846, Commodore John Drake Sloat, who was in command of the United States Navy Pacific Squadron, hoisted the American Flag over the Monterey Customs house. He proclaimed that all Californios, all those who lived in California, had the rights and privileges of a United States citizen. Only five days later Captain Thomas Fallon raised the American Flag over the Juzgado, (courthouse), in San Jose. After the war, Fallon would become the first mayor of San Jose. Interestingly, none of the leaders of the events knew at that time that the United States Congress had declared war on Mexico. Each event would have been an act of revolution according to the leaders of the time.

Weber's Raids

In the northern part of California, where Mexican control was weaker, many Californios accepted American rule without much resistance as they believed that they could not defeat the American army.(8) On July 7, 1846, Commodore Robert F. Stockton combined the Bear Flaggers and Fremont's force into the California Battalion, and Fremont was named the lieutenant colonel. Once Fremont got his battalion he went north to what is now Sacramento.

A lot of food and supplies were needed to supply Fremont's army and Carlos Maria Weber was the man who was able to supply Fremont's battalion. Weber was a Prussian immigrant who was named sergeant in command of the San Jose militia by Commodore Robert

Field Stockton. Weber's militia was supposed to have only ten militiamen, but he raised a company of sixty-five.(9)

Once Weber heard that Fremont needed supplies he dropped all militia responsibilities and began to acquire supplies. No documents actually state that Weber had any authority to collect horses, cattle, or supplies.(10) Yet, he claimed when pestered by those he was taking from and even to some Navy officers that he acted under Fremont's orders.(11) Fremont , however, stated that he considered Weber a volunteer who collected horses under Navy orders.(12) Weber's first raids occurred on October 25, 1846, when he and forty-five other men went to San Juan Bautista to acquire horses and then stripped all the ranches in southeast San Jose of their horses. Then he ravaged the prosperous ranches on the San Francisco Peninsula. Soon every ranch between San Jose and Yerba Buena was searched for supplies and horses. Weber even raided many ranches in Contra Costa area. On some of Weber's raids not only horses were taken, but guns and saddles as well.(13)

Many Americans cared about the way many of the ranchers were being treated on Weber's raids. Even Lieutenant Washington Allon Bartlett, who at the time was the San Francisco district alcalde, complained about the raids. An alcalde is the chief administrative and judicial officer of a Spanish town. Bartlett sent a letter to Captain John Berrien Montgomery complaining that Weber's raids were making it very difficult to obtain meat. Montgomery was the Commandant of the Northern Department of California who was in charge of the area of San Francisco, San Jose, Sonoma, and Sutter's Fort in Sacramento. A letter to Montgomery from Bartlett on November 5, 1846 stated:

...Mr.[John Casimiro] Fuller in the employ of W.A. Lienesdorff returned last night from the opposite side of the Bay[Contra Costa]...Mr. Fuller went over to get a bullock or beef, and could not obtain any, the people telling him that all their horses were taken and they would not make any effort to get him one hence he returned without any.(14)

Montgomery hearing about the raids asked to have Weber accompany the California Battalion to help stop the fighting in the Southern end of California. Weber refused because he never officially joined the California Battalion. In actuality, Weber was still a Mexican citizen. So Montgomery could not force Weber to leave, but he did ask Weber to not increase the size of his force in San Jose beyond twenty five men.(15)

By late November, the California Battalion was ready to march south toward Monterey. Fremont's Battalion still needed many horses for the long march. Fremont even had to beg to Weber on November 19, 1846, to give his battalion horses.(16) Amazingly Weber gave Fremont almost 300 horses. Although Fremont needed horses and supplies, he disliked the responsibility for the crude methods employed to acquire them.(17) Fremont even wrote a letter to Captain William Mervin denying any responsibility for Weber's actions. Then on November 28, the California Battalion left for the South toward Monterey.

On November 20, 1846, Lieutenant Robert F. Pinkney was ordered to command and protect the Pueblo de San Jose, which translate into the people of San Jose. Pinkney, two officers, and fifty sailors and Marines left Yerba Buena, a city near today San Francisco, for San Jose on November 21. The men went to the Juzgado, where they stationed themselves. Pinkney was then able to quickly build communication with Weber and his force.

Many rumors in December were circulating that a Mexican invasion or uprising might occur. Weber and his militia were sent to Monterey to reopen communications. On Tuesday, December 8, 1846, Weber and his men found an abandoned musket in the road. It caused Weber to conclude that a Californio force had passed recently. Then Weber went on a search, with

other military officials of the Salinas river. Weber returned to San Jose on December 15, 1846, with no evidence of any enemy.

Retaliation for the Raids by Californios

On December 11, 1846, a Mexican force had supposedly landed outside of the Golden Gate. Though it was only a rumor many officers felt that the Mexicans were going to invade. Alcalde Bartlett thought he would be able to determine the strength of the Mexican invasion force by disguising himself as a civil servant procuring cattle. He could thus go into the country and seek out military information. Bartlett's proposal was agreed upon by Captain Joseph Bartine Hull, the commander of the *U.S.S. Warren*, who took over Captain Montgomery's position as Commandant of the Northern Department. Bartlett and six volunteers from one of the ships in the San Francisco harbor, named the *Warren*, left to visit Mission Dolores, a small mission that was a few miles out from San Francisco, on Monday, December 14, 1846.

At Mission Dolores, Bartlett met Jose de la Cruz Sanchez, who was Manuel Sanchez's oldest brother. Manuel Sanchez, along with Ramon Aguila, was charged for being a spy for Mexico and was confined aboard a United States ship. Jose de la Cruz Sanchez was at the mission with Bartlett and said he would give Bartlett twenty or thirty cattle.(18) So on December 15, 1846, Bartlett and his party traveled to Rancho Buri-Buri, which was about half way down the San Francisco Peninsula. Jose de la Cruz Sanchez, when asked by Bartlett for the cattle, thought of a reprisal for his brother's arrest, which was to capture the American party. He stalled Bartlett and his party long enough for his plan to spread through his family at the ranch. On December 16, 1846, Bartlett and his company rode to the ranch's stone corral and left their arms at the corral since their host seemed so kind. Thus, without their arms the American party was easily captured by the Sanchezes.(19)

The Sanchezes' capture of the Americans sparked a broad protest by angry Californios at many recent abuses by the United States military. Almost every rancher in the area had lost livestock and property; many were beaten and also threatened. Even after the California Battalion departed, raids and mistreatment continued. Some of the ranchers even complained and petitioned to commanding officers of the United States, but nothing was done about them. Also many quick imprisonment of Californios aroused anger toward the United States. Californios from the Bay Area quickly congregated after hearing about the Sanchez's family actions. Soon about one hundred Californios came to Sanchez's aid. Leading the newly made force was Francisco Sanchez, who was a Captain in the Mexican army.

The American hostages were first taken to Francisco Sanchez's ranch, Rancho San Pedro, which was near the Pacific coast. Then they were moved to an area around San Jose. Then for the rest of December, Sanchez and his force traveled from ranch to ranch seeking shelter from friendly ranchers. Then on December 31, 1846, Sanchez's force came in sight of the Mission Santa Clara. Immigrants who were staying at the mission barricaded the mission for they feared the Californios would come and attack the mission. On the next day Sanchez and his force moved to the west of the mission at the edge of an oak wood. The following day the captured Americans were moved to the coastal foothills. Sanchez's plan for the prisoners was to extract a treaty with the Americans that protected the Californio's property and put an end to the raids.

American Actions in return for Californio Retaliation

On the American side, the commanders of the Northern district did not get word of Bartlett's abduction until December 17, but it was not officially noted that the party was seized

until December 21.(20) On December 21, Manuel Sanchez was also released from being held as a spy.

Back at San Jose, on December 15, 1846, Weber and his militia returned from Monterey, and on December 18, 1846, Pinkney received a letter that said that sixty or seventy Californios were advancing toward San Jose.(21) It was also not until the twenty-first that Pinkney learned of the captured American forces. On the twenty-first, Pinkney wrote to Hull that he was sending Weber and his company to Jose de la Cruz Sanchez's ranch. Without a reply Weber left for Yerba Buena. On December 24, 1846, they arrived at Sanchez's ranch, but no military representative from Yerba Buena was present. Weber decided to ride to Mission Dolores, then to Yerba Buena itself. There Weber and Captain William Mervine had a meeting on December 25, 1846. After a meeting Mervine instructed Hull to organize an expeditionary force against the renegade Californios. The Santa Clara Expeditionary Force was composed of 101 men, with two officers and thirty-three men from the United States marines, three officers and twelve men from the United States Navy, three officers and thirty-three men from the infantry, and four officers and eleven men from the Yerba Buena Company.(22) Also Captain Ward Marston was appointed the Commander of the Santa Clara Expeditionary Force.

During the time the American forces were arming an expeditionary force, another tactic was tried to get back the prisoners. James Alexander Forbes, acting as a British Counsel at Santa Clara, took a small English flag in his hands, and visited the Californio camp to try and negotiate the release of the American prisoners. Sanchez was willing to let Bartlett go with Forbes, but only if the Americans handed over Weber in Bartlett's place. Forbes communicated the proposition to the Commander of San Francisco and waited for a reply. While he was waiting for a reply, Forbes brought Bartlett and his party to Santa Clara. Word came quickly back that

Sanchez's proposition would not be entertained. So Bartlett was returned back to the Mexican camp.

Then on December 29, 1846, the Santa Clara Expeditionary Force left to find the renegade force of Californios somewhere in the area between Yerba Buena and San Jose. At Mission Dolores they combined with Weber and the San Jose militia. By New Year's day the roads were muddy and slippery from the winter rains and made it almost impossible to drag the cannon they recieved across the roads in search of the Californios. The force decided to just head for San Jose, since it was impossible to look for the Californios and still drag the cannon along.

Battle of Santa Clara

On the same day that the force decided to head toward San Jose, Marston allowed for a group of men to go get horses for the company. They returned to say that the Californios were only a few miles away from the location of their camp. The next day, a Saturday morning, on January 2, 1847, the force moved toward San Jose and the Californios. Soon a scouting party sent ahead to find the location of the Californios, sighted them a few miles from Mission Santa Clara. The force marched through a forest of deciduous valley oaks and stately evergreen coastal live oaks, into a large open plain. This area today that saw most of the battle was in a great triangle of territory, now surrounded by State Highway 82, Lawrence Expressway, and the Southern Pacific Railroad.(23) Here the Americans got their first sight of the Californios in Francisco Sanchez's force a couple of miles from the Mission Santa Clara.

Both forces had about the same number of men. Although, the Californios were able to move around more quickly with their horses, the better weapons held by the American force kept the Californios in check. The American force stayed stationary on a road that led to the mission,

while the Californios stayed at a safe distance around the American force. The Americans were able to fire their six pound artillery gun only three times before it sank into the mud and fell off its support. When the Californios saw this they rode in closer, but were quickly driven back by musket fire. The Californios tried to attack the American force time after time, but each time they were turned back. Then after only two hours of fighting the Californios retreated to their camp that was in sight of the mission. The Americans extricated their one cannon and traveled to the mission and did not pursue the enemy further. During the battle many people at the mission were startled by the artillery and musketry discharges. Many of the people in the mission ascended to the roof top of the mission and viewed the battle from there. The casualties of this battle were minimal; on the American side, two fighters were injured and on the Californio side, one horse was killed and only a few men were injured.

Aftermath of Battle

The same night of the battle, a messenger said that the Californios wished to talk with American leaders. The next day on Sunday, January 3, 1847, Martson and three officers rode out to meet the Californio leader Francisco Sanchez, Jose de la Cruz Sanchez, Domingo Feliz, and Bartlett. Francisco Sanchez stated that the Californios were not against the United States, but they were objecting to their property being taken without proper considerations. Also he stated that they considered Weber to be the principal culprit of the misdeeds. Many wished him dead, but they would be satisfied if the United States would revoke his position as leader of the San Jose Militia.(24)

Marston could not directly make any agreement so he arranged an armistice while he transferred the Californios' grievances and complaints to Hull. Later that day an unknown mounted party rushed against the Californios. The force had been sent from Monterey in case

the Californios would escape south. After that, two days of armistice continued between the Californio camp and the American inhabited mission, and on the fifth, Assistant Surgeon J. Marius Duvall and other Americans went to check on the American prisoners. Then two days later on January 7, 1847, Martson and other officers rode to where the two parties had met before to give the Californios an ultimatum. The ultimatum stated that the Californios would be protected in person and property by the coverage of the law and justice. It also stated that the government reserved the right to take all arms when it was necessary for public tranquility, and to take horses, saddles, and anything else that was required for services and the Californios would be given receipts for the full value of what was taken. Also any who had property or livestock taken would be paid for in full if they showed the necessary proof of ownership.(25)

The American representatives insisted that all of the Californios agree to the terms. It took a lot of persuading, but soon all the Californios agreed to the terms. No treaty was actually signed, but Martson added it to the ultimatum which he translated into Spanish, because many of the Californios only knew Spanish. The ultimatum provided that the Californios would release the hostages, give up all their arms, and turn over any horses not belonging to them. In the future, any horses required by the United States Government would be asked for respectfully and receipts would be given. Californios would not be molested; any Californio who had not broken a law could present complaints to officers, and all Californios were to immediately return to their homes. Also the Californios were allowed to keep their own saddles, Americans would only keep horses with American or Weber's brands, and amnesty would be granted to all Californios who had taken up arms in protest. Also Francisco Sanchez was not to be imprisoned.(26) A formal ceremony was held in the late afternoon of January 7, 1847, with 175

Americans and 100 Californios and spectators.(27) Thus ended the battle often referred to as the “last” and the “only” battle of the Mexican-American War in Northern California.(28)

Battle of Santa Clara Plaque

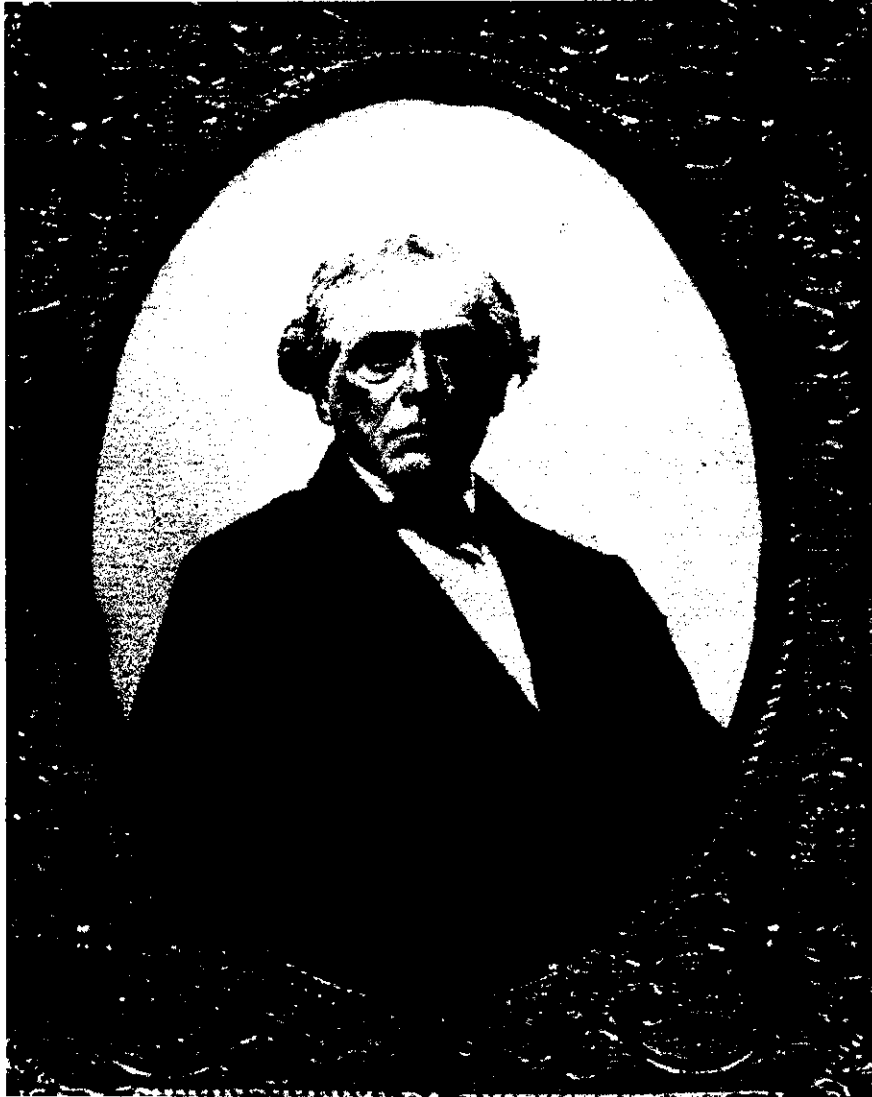
Today a plaque is dedicated to the Battle of Santa Clara. It is located in the City of Santa Clara, and was originally placed at 2780 El Camino Real in 1962, by the California State Parks Commission in cooperation with the Santa Clara Historical Landmarks Commission. It was relocated to the southwest corner of El Camino Real and Bowe Avenue, between San Tomas Expressway and Kiely Boulevard and was dedicated on October 14, 1978, by the Mountain Charlie Chapter No. 1850. E Clampus Vitus.(29) This is a group which places plaques and monuments at historical sites throughout California to ensure our heritage and history.

It may not have been a bloody battle or a world-changing event, but the Battle of Santa Clara was able to keep the peace in Northern California. It is in the record books and will always be there to remind the people of our county of our part in history. Many may feel that it was not a battle at all, but in the midst of war many little scrimmages can help decide the bigger picture. The Battle of Santa Clara is the only battle in history that has taken place on the county’s soil and the only campaign in the Northern California district during the Mexican-American War.



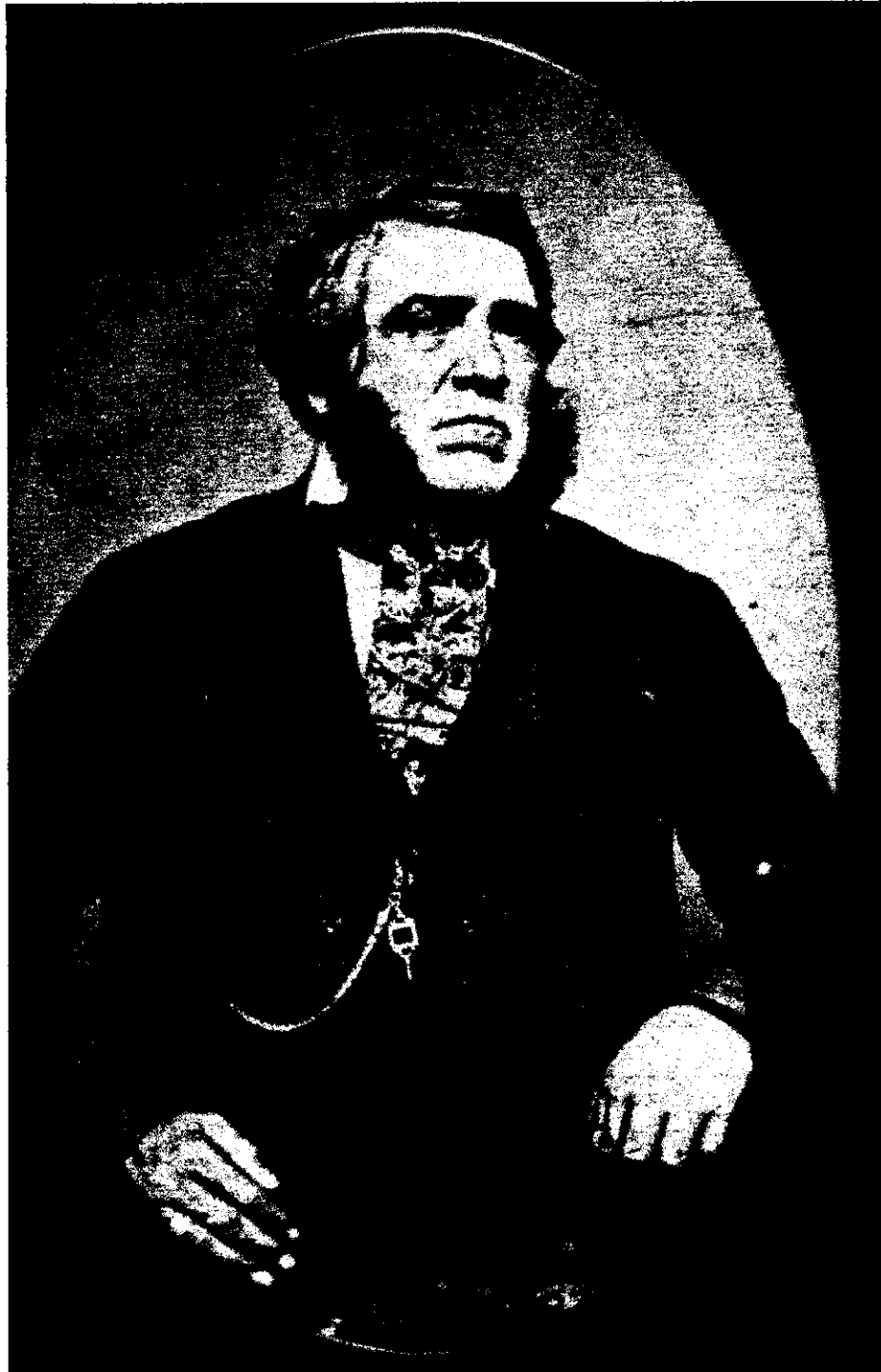
Carlos Maria Weber

Dorothy F. Regnery, The Battle of Santa Clara (San Jose, California: Smith and McKay Printing Company, 1978), p. 3.



Jose de al Cruz Sanchez

Dorothy F. Regnery, The Battle of Santa Clara (San Jose, California : Smith and McKay Printing Company, 1978), p. 30.



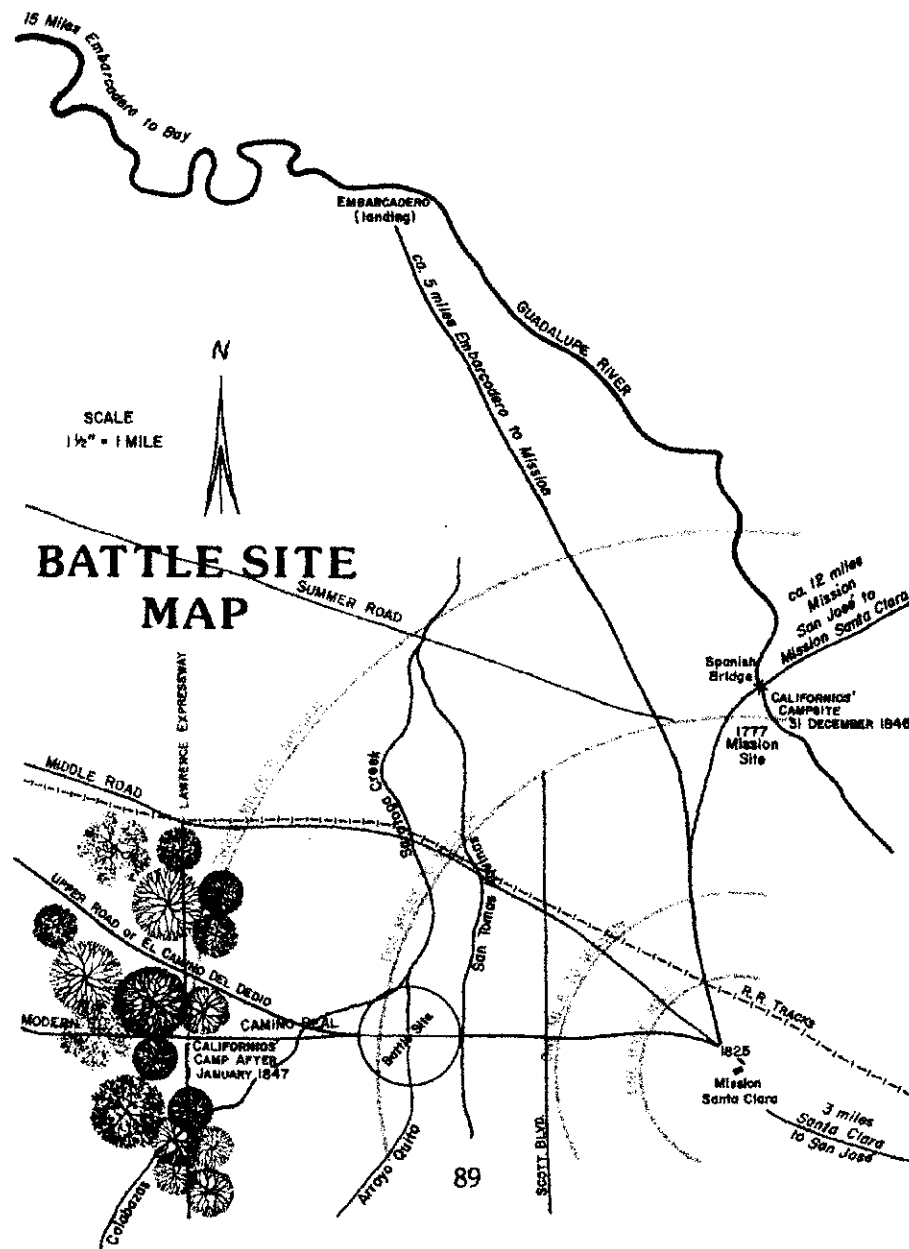
Francisco Sanchez

Dorothy F. Regnery, The Battle of Santa Clara (San Jose, California : Smith and McKay Printing Company, 1978), p. 33.



Lt. Washington Allon Bartlett

Dorothy F. Regnery, The Battle of Santa Clara (San Jose, California : Smith and McKay Printing Company, 1978), p. 12.



Battle map of the Battle of Santa Clara
 Dorothy F. Regnery, The Battle of Santa Clara (San Jose,
 California : Smith and McKay Printing Company, 1978), p. 89.



Top picture: Plaque of the Battle of Santa Clara

Bottom picture: Nathan Tom with the plaque of the Battle of Santa Clara

Taken at the southwest corner of El Camino Real and Bowe Avenue, between
San Tomas Expressway and Kiely Boulevard.

End Notes

1. Mark Crawford, Encyclopedia of the Mexican-American War (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, Inc.,1998), p.xvii.
2. Ibid., p. xix.
3. Ibid., p. xix.
4. Ibid., p. xix.
5. Ibid., p. xx.
6. Ibid., p. xx.
7. Ibid., p. xx.
8. Patricia Smith,"The neighborly California War : Santa Clara's part in the Mexican-Americon was short."(San Jose Mercury News : November 4, 1987), p. Article was a clipping and page number could not be found.
9. Dorothy F. Regnery, Battle of Santa Clara (San Jose, California : Smith and McKay Printing Company, 1978), p. 22.
10. Ibid., p. 27.
11. Ibid., p. 27.
12. Ibid., p. 27.
13. Ibid., p. 31.
14. Ibid., p. 32.
15. Ibid., p. 36.
16. Ibid., p. 37.
17. Ibid., p. 37.
18. Ibid., p. 61.
19. Ibid., p. 63.
20. Ibid., p. 70.

21. Ibid., p. 73.
22. Eugene T. Sawyer, History of Santa Clara County California (Los Angeles, California : Historic Record Company, 1922), p. 53.
23. Clyde Arbuckle, Clyde Arbuckle's : History of San Jose (San Jose, California : Smith McKay Printing Co., Inc., 1985), p. 353.
24. Regnery, Op. Cit., p. 97.
25. Ibid., p. 112.
26. Ibid., p. 114.
27. Ibid., p. 114.
28. Arbuckle, Op. Cit., p. 353.
29. City of San Jose. Plaque commemorating the Battle of Santa Clara. Located at the southwest corner of El Camino Real and Bowe Avenue, between San Tomas Expressway and Kiely Boulevard.

Bibliography

Bancroft, Hubert Howe. History of California. Vol. V. San Francisco: The History Company Publishers, 1886.

Barrett, Dick. "Spot to Shops." San Jose Mercury News, p. Article was a clipping and page could not be found, August 4, 1957.

"Battle of Mustard Stalks May get a State Marker." San Jose Mercury News, p. 4, November 19, 1956.

City of Santa Clara. State of California Sesquicentennial: Prelude to Statehood. [Online] Available <http://cho.ci.santa-clara.ca.us/41036.html>. February 20, 2001.

Clyde, Arbuckle. Clyde Arbuckle's: History of San Jose. San Jose, California: Smith McKay Printing Co., Inc., 1985.

Foster, Lee. California: The Silicon Valley Origins. [Online] Available <http://www.fostertravel.com/CAJ053.html>. February 20, 2002.

Furlow, Jack. Ecu1850 Plaque #10 Battle of Santa Clara. [Online] Available <http://www.geocities.com/mountaincharlie1850/plaque10.html>. February 2002.

Hanel, Mary. Santa Clara History a Bibliography & Timeline. Santa Clara: City of Santa Clara Library, 1994.

Harlow, Neal. California Conquered : Annexation of a Mexican Province 1846-1850. Berkely, California: University of California Press, Ltd., 1982.

"Historical S.C. Battle Plaque is Rededicated." San Jose Mercury News, p. 77, July 9, 1969.

Hoover, Mildred Brooke and others. Historic Spots in California. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1953.

John M. Murphy. [Online] Available <http://sccsheriff.org/history/murphy.htm>. February 20, 2002.

Loomis, Patricia. "Battle of the Mustard Stalks." San Jose Mercury News, p. 53, January 3, 1975.

Regnery, Dorothy F. Battle of Santa Clara. San Jose, California : Smith and McKay Printing Company, 1978.

Sawyer, Eugene T. History of Santa Clara County California. Los Angeles, California: Historic Record Company, 1922.

Smith, Patricia. "The Neighborly California War: Santa Clara's part in the Mexican-American War Was Short." San Jose Mercury News, p. Article was a clipping and page number could not be found, November 4, 1987.

Watkins, Howard. "It was a Great Fight, Ma, We Won California." California Today, p. 58, October 19, 1969.

Willow Glen High School
Advisor: Mrs. Kathryn C. Philip