

When San Jose Was Young

A Series of Interesting Articles of An Historical Nature Prepared Especially for The News by a Well Known Author and Journalist.

NO. 56 THE BULL FIGHT PROMOTER

One of the most picturesque figures in the history of San Jose and Santa Clara was Secundino Robles, bear hunter, bull fighter, miner, rancher and manager of bull fights. He was an excellent type of the hidalgo of the twenties, thirties and forties.

Jose Antonio Robles, father of Secundino and Teodoro, came from Zacatlán. He married one of the Merlojes family. They lived at La Villa de Branciforte, which flourished for a time near the Mission of the Holy Cross, otherwise Santa Cruz. There were born Secundino and Teodoro, the brothers so well-known in Santa Clara County.

The Robles were cousins of Father Antonio and Father Real of the Santa Clara Mission. Their uncles, Antonio Garcia and Antonio Robles, were attorneys for the fathers. Secundino became the mayordomo of the Mission. Next to the fathers he was the most important man. He managed all their property, and conducted their trading.

Mrs. Espinosa, who is more than 80, and is still living in Gilroy, is the daughter of Secundino. She beats out Hall, who says that Secundino Robles was the first white man told by the Indians of the location of the New Almaden mine. Robles became an eighth owner of the mine.

Later he sold his interest for the great ranch, the Santa Rita, near Mayfield. Joseph Pena was the purchaser. Diego Forbes, the first real estate man in the county, conducted the sale. How much Pena paid in gold varies in estimate from \$15,000 to \$75,000. Robles was an inveterate gambler, and it is said that he lost most of the gold in a night.

Near Castroville Teodoro Robles erected the finest adobe in the county. Robles also had the first divorce, July 30, 1856. On the Santa Rita ranch Secundino Robles built one of the few two-story adobe houses in the county. Here always was a shrine to Our Lady of Refuge. Today nothing remains of the house. A vegetable garden is on the site. Long before Robles died the property passed out of his hands. Judge W. T. Wallace and Mr. Ryland of San Jose and Jeremiah Clarke of San Francisco became owners of his ranch. Robles became very poor. A part of Stanford University stands on the Robles ranch.

While Robles was in his youth and middle age, he was unforgettable in his bright Spanish clothes, serape at his waist. Neither he nor others could believe that this reckless, daring, live-today-for-tomorrow-never-comes Cal-

fornian could be a ward of the county. He was more than six feet tall, wiry as an Indian, and as quick. He could shoot like an Indian, as fast as one could think. The Indians had great fear of him. And so had bear.

Mr. Martin Murphy of San Jose says that when Secundino Robles was an old man he used to dine every Sunday at the ranch of his grandfather, the late Martin Murphy. The present site of Sunnyvale is a part of the Murphy ranch. Mr. Murphy says that even when eighty Robles was so strong in the saddle that two or three men pulling at a mata fastened around his waist failed to unhorse him. Years of bear hunting and bull fighting had developed Robles' muscles to an amazing degree. As an old man Robles was as fleet of foot as an Indian. At the Murphy ranch Robles used to run foot races with men years younger than himself. He won them, too.

When Secundino Robles first moved to Mayfield his fortune was at its flood. All who passed that way, Mexicans or Americans, were entertained at the Santa Rita ranch. No money was taken for the hospitality. Such an offer would have been spurned.

When the gringo mortgages began to cover the Santa Rita, the ranch was turned into a road house. Mrs. Secundino Robles had 29 children. Some had died at birth, but those who lived worked. On the roof of the Robles' house was a place for dancing. The Robles girls were extremely pretty. They were always becomingly dressed. The ranch house became a popular stopping place for travelers.

In the very early days of the Santa Clara Mission, Secundino Robles organized bull and bear fights. In the log corral on his ranch at Mayfield he continued the amusement. Now it was for profit. He asked \$1.00 for seats in the shade, and 50 cents for seats in the sun. After the discovery of gold during the great rush of the Americans to Yerba Buena in San Francisco, he organized bull fights at the Mission Dolores which were largely attended.

Secundino Robles died about thirty years ago. His widow followed him a few years later. At the time of the Robles' death their grandchildren numbered more than a hundred. Of their children five survive: Mrs. Louisa Mesa of Sunnyvale, Mrs. Trinidad Espinosa of Mayfield, Mrs. Miguel Espinosa of Gilroy and Mr. Nicholas Robles of Mountain View.