

# 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.

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## THE FIRST RACE TRACK

Don Antonio Sunol, the first postmaster of San Jose, gave the first race track to the city. It was where the Hanchett Tract now is. He also gave the site of St Joseph's church to that congregation. Don Antonio was a man of tireless energy. He it was who first worked the Almaden mine in 1824. He thought it contained silver, but he found out after a year's work that he was mistaken.

In the forties and fifties the race track was a scene of many thrilling events. Both men and horses ran on the track. In those days the great hero among the athletes in San Jose was Francisco Zelaya. He was a Mexican, and he ran 100 yards in 8 seconds. Zelaya used to race his own famous horse Tordio on the course. Zelaya ran with his horse, his own neck tied to the animal with a light string. He ran even faster than the horse. When the Americans came they brought runners from the East to defeat Zelaya. All the Spanish men and women wagered vast sums on the Mexican hero. When the two men tested their strength before a great throng the Spanish women in their brilliant gay clothing were wonderful to see. Zelaya did not disappoint them. The gringos had conquered California, but they could not defeat Zelaya.

Zelaya's horse Tordio in the early days ran the greatest race probably ever seen in this valley. A horse was brought from Mexico to defeat Tordio. The two animals ran from Warm Springs, or as it was called then, Agua Caliente, to Oak Hill Cemetery and return, a distance of 48 miles. Tordio defeated easily the Mexican horse. After the great runner died, Don Pedro Chaboya examined the horse and he found that perhaps his tirelessness came from having no spleen. Zelaya's Tordio was a native horse caught by him in the San Joaquin Valley and trained.

Another famous horse in the old days was an animal called Buckskin belonging to Don Pedro Chaboya. He was the color of a coyote, and he was also known as Coyote. He had been brought from the old Purissima Mission, near Santa Barbara. He raced for 25 miles on the old track. Other famous horses were two belonging to

Don Antonio Bernal. One was called the Camplon. Bernal used him in catching grizzly bears. Bernal's Bola de L'Oro was one of the most attractive horses and one of the most remarkable ever seen in the valley. Bola de L'Oro (Ball of Gold) was surely worth his weight in gold. He was bright yellow, and he had a white mane and tail. He was a mustang caught in the San Joaquin valley.

At the age of 14, Don Antonio Bernal rode Bola de L'Oro hunting elk. Bruno Bernal, Don Antonio's father, was a Spartan. He sent his son out into the wilds on Bola de L'Oro and told him not to return till he had three elk. Young Bernal, with no saddle on his horse, fastened only with a reata to Bola de L'Oro, armed with a knife, often rode from the Santa Teresa ranch to what is now called Morgan Hill, but which was then called the Sero or Devilsadero, which means the lookout point. This mountain was the home of the elk, and down its steep sides young Antonio Bernal fearlessly rode, plunging his knife into the hind leg of the elk, wounding the animal, and then capturing him with a reata.

Don Antonio Bernal was one of the most daring men among the Spanish Californians. Once when he was riding Bola de L'Oro he found a wild bull that the vaqueros had been unable to conquer. Six had tried and failed, as the six reatas on the bull's neck showed. This wild bull aroused all the sporting blood in Don Antonio. He liked to succeed where six had tried and failed. He threw his reata on the bull and lassoed him, but the bull showed quickly why six men had tried to capture him and failed. He was quicker than Bola de L'Oro. In a flash Don Antonio found himself, back up against an oak tree. His father, looking on, felt that it meant death to both horse and man. He cried to his son, "Let your horse go. The bull will kill you both. Swing up into the old oak tree and save yourself."

But Don Antonio felt the quick beat of Bola de L'Oro's heart. He could not give the animal to death. With Bola de L'Oro, he took a chance for life, a chance for which Bola de L'Oro's

heart seemed to plead.

Thrusting spurs into the animal's side, looking the bull in the eyes, Don Antonio lifted the horse into the air over the bull's head, and landed safely in the rear of the bull. With this advantage gained, the two Bernals with the reata caught on one of the bull's feet captured him.