

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. 68 THE BATTLE OF SANTA CLARA

PART I

The Mexican flag came down in San Jose, but a few months after the raising of the Stars and Stripes once more the Mexican colors showed themselves on the fields of Santa Clara. Much has been written about the battle of Santa Clara, the only time during the Mexican war when the Californian forces met the American. Historians differ as to the importance of the battle. Some writers take it seriously. After reading all that has been written about it, and talking with those whose friends and relatives were in the battle I feel that its importance was not great.

The conflict was precipitated by the prolonged disrespect of the Americans for the Californians' right to their own horses and cattle. The evidence shows that the first comers into California were arrogant and considered it a joke to take the horses, cattle and saddles and blankets of the Californians. Mrs. Mesa, who was born near the Southern Pacific depot, and who lived here when Fremont and his men came to San Jose, tells how they pitched their tents in the Plaza, entered houses and took anything that pleased them. She says that Fremont was an insignificant looking man, and that his followers looked like tramps.

Mrs. Trinidad Espinosa of Mayfield, daughter of Secundino Robles, who about this time lived at Santa Clara, says that an American man entered her mother's residence during the absence of her father and demanded blankets and saddles. Mrs. Robles was no shrinking Spanish woman. She knocked down the American and threw him out of the house. One cannot speak with a Californian eighty or ninety years of age and hear any other story. Most American historians of thirty or forty years ago agree that the Americans in their treatment of the Californians forgot justice.

One of the Californians who had suffered most from marauding Americans was Francisco Sanchez who owned the ranch San Pablo and who lived near what is now called Milbrae. Not only his own horses, but those of Mellus and Howard which had been entrusted to him, had been taken.

Sanchez has been spoken of by some American writers as the "free booter." In reality he came of a most respectable family. His grandfather arrived with Anza. His father was the owner of the 15,000 acre ranch Burl Burl, which now belongs to the Spring Valley Water Company. Francisco himself received the fourth grant of land in Yerba Buena. At the time that Sloat took possession of San Francisco, Francisco Sanchez was acting Comandante.

Sanchez did not like the government of Mexico. He wanted California to be for Californians with a separate government. Patiently he bore the wrongs of the invading Americans. His first resistance was

on the eighth of December, 1846, when Lieutenant W. A. Bartlett of the United States sloop of war Warren, then acting Alcalde of San Francisco, with five men, came down the peninsula seeking cattle for the supplies of the United States forces. Sanchez and a few of his neighbors captured Bartlett and his men.

Immediately there was great commotion in the American world. The Californians rallied to Sanchez. Among others who joined him were a brother, Secundino Robles; a cousin, Gregorio Sanchez; another cousin, Augustin Sanchez of Gilroy, Julio Valencia, Antonio Valencia and the Higueras of Contra Costa. His force numbered more than a hundred.

At the time Sanchez captured Alcalde Bartlett, San Jose was already in a state of war. Purser Watmough of the United States sloop of war Portsmouth and thirty-five marines had been here for several months stationed at the Juzgado, or Court House, in Market street. The marines had been reinforced by the local volunteers under Captain Charles M. Weber and Lieutenant John M. Murphy. Weber and Murphy and their men occupied an abode building in the rear of Frank Lightstone's residence in Santa Clara street. The regulars and volunteers had been stationed here to protect San Jose against the Indians, who had attacked the town in forces of a hundred. Watmough and his forces had met the Indians in the mountains and had driven them back to the San Joaquin regions.

When Sanchez captured Bartlett only the volunteers under Captain Weber were protecting San Jose. That very winter a number of American settlers, among them Joseph Aram, later one of the first nurserymen in the county, arrived. There were no vacant houses in San Jose, and so, they took up their quarters at the Santa Clara Mission. Ignacio Alviso, then major domo of the Mission gave them food for the winter. Joseph Aram, who was made a volunteer captain, proceeded to fortify the Mission building. He and the Americans built barricades of dirt and wagons. The Californians protested against Aram using the trees from the Alameda, the sacred trees planted with prayers and blessings, for the barricades, but the Americans did very much as they pleased.

In November Lieutenant Pinkney with sixty men under Midshipmen Watmough and Griffin came to San Jose. They walked from San Francisco carrying on their backs muskets, bayonets, cartridges, provisions and blankets. They made a wonderful march and camped at Alviso. They then walked into San Jose, took possession of the juzgado and threw up breastworks.