

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. 77 DEMASIO BERRYESSA'S WAKE

Demasio Berryessa, the son of Jose Do los Reyes Berryessa was lynched in the early fifties by a posse from San Jose one Saturday morning and his body dangled from a limb of an old oak tree which stood until about two years ago in Tenth street. Demasio's "wake" was held the following night at the residence of Antonio Matlo Pico who lived on the site of the Garden City Bank near the Postoffice. There is much reason to believe what the Berryessa family have always maintained that Demasio was innocent of murdering Alexander McClure, who was "squatted" on the Berryessa land near Almaden. The family say that Santiago, brother to Demasio, did the killing.

Mrs. Adelalde Soto, who lives at 33 Twenty-third street, San Jose, was present at the "wake" of Demasio Berryessa. Mrs. Soto was born in Napa, but her mother was a Bernal, the daughter of Jose Cipriano Bernal, who lived back of the City Hall on property that later passed into the hands of the Hoffmans. Mrs. Soto was a connection of the Berryesses. Indeed Demasio Berryessa was related to all the best educated and most important Spanish families of his time. His mother was a Bernal, a sister of Mrs. Antonio Sanol and of Mrs. Antonio Maria Pico. The Picos had the largest house in the pueblo. Mrs. Soto remembers it well.

The Pico house, says Mrs. Soto, was a one-story adobe rambling leisurely over the lot. A porch was on all sides of the house. The living room was toward the postoffice. At the side nearest St. Joseph's Church was a gate and pear tree. A ditch, one of the several in town to drain water in case of the perennially threatening flood, passed the rear of St. Joseph's Church and the front of the Pico house. Here was a bridge and on these little bridges spanning the ditches the children liked to hop and skip.

Mrs. Soto was very young at the time, but she remembers the dozens of black-robed, sad-eyed Spanish people in the Pico dwelling. They tried to comfort the sobbing young widow, Beata Rodriguez Berryessa. No friend nor relative was absent this night of grief, for the old Spanish-

Californians did not lack that quality of the genuine aristocracy, moral courage. Whether the fair-haired dead young man was innocent or guilty, all assembled in the big plainly furnished living room where he lay. Kneeling by his side on the adobe floor which had never seemed so chill these sad people, whose fate every year grew blacker, more than ever clung together, more than ever tried to have faith in the low murmured prayers, more than ever tried to think that the crucifix would help them. In that candle-lit room all night remained the relatives and the holy fathers. In the morning the friends of Demasio Berryessa took his body, carried it through the Alameda followed by fearfully wailing women and buried it at Santa Clara.

Of the lynching of Demasio Berryessa the Telegraph of San Jose said: "On Friday night one of those dreadful deeds was done in this city, shocking to all our moral sensibilities and our notions of social duties and rights but which too often occur in new and ill-regulated communities, and among a people over whom a faithful and vigorous administration of the law has not yet attained a corrective agency in the punishment of heinous offenses. Early on Saturday morning a man was seen suspended by the neck to the limb of a tree in the southeastern part of the city. His hands were tied behind him, his tongue, discolored, was protruding from his mouth, and the whole appearance of the unfortunate victim of a misguided sense of duty, indicated that he had been dead for an hour or two. On this terrible tragedy being communicated to Justice Murdock, he repaired to the spot and summoned a jury of inquest, who found that the name of the deceased was Demasio Berryessa, whose residence was near the New Almaden mine, and that he came to his death by being hung by the neck from a tree with a rope by persons to the jurors unknown.

"Demasio Berryessa was a young man about thirty years of age; a wife, three small children, a mother, and several brothers survive him. * * * The particular grounds of guilt which led to this man's fearful end at the hand of a secret association we have not been

able to learn, but rumor alleges that it is on account of supposed participation in the murder of Alexander McClure."