

When San Jose Was Young

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ALVARADO'S WEDDING

The most fashionable wedding ever celebrated at Santa Clara Mission in the old days was that of Governor Juan Bautista Alvarado and Senorita Martina Castro on August 24th, 1839. Senorita Castro was the daughter of Don Francisco Castro of the San Pablo Rancho. Her mother was Gabriel Herrejoera.

The San Pablo Rancho was one of the largest grants in California. It was long in litigation. It included Castroville and the present Mare Island (Isla de la Llagua). A mare (llagua) jumped from the San Pablo stock boat and swam to the island now bearing its present name.

Martina Castro and her sisters were famed beauties in their day. Their father had been commandante at Yerba Buena, and he was a great Indian fighter as well. Alvarado was the nephew of General Vallejo, and so, when these two important young people decided to wed, for many leagues was the province excited.

Alvarado himself was a strong man, but at times very weak. He drank much, and in his later years his vice nearly wrecked him. But always he was an individual. As a boy when all the California youth wore their hair long, to the honor of his mother Juan Bautista refused to conform to the fashion. That refusal gave other boys courage to revolt, and so, the rebellion of Alvarado changed California from a long haired into a short haired community. As a man Alvarado always had his own way. The Mexican government tried to replace him with other governors, but he stood his ground and held his power. The beautiful Martina Castro was desired by many suitors, but Alvarado carried her off from others.

After the wedding day was fixed Alvarado presented his betrothed with jewels, linens and beautifully embroidered gay Chinese shawls suited to the future wife of the governor. When it was decided that the wedding would take place at Santa Clara the musicians who played in those days at christenings and marriages began practicing their choicest selections. The musicians were Leandro Rochin, Mariano Romero, Jose Sepulveda and Angel Alviso. Their instruments were the violin and the guitar. The Indian band at the Santa Clara Mission also prepared to distinguish themselves, and their leader, Joaquin, gave the flayers many a sharp blow on the head when they made a mistake. In the mission band was the clarinet, the flute, the cello, cymbals, the bass and small drums.

A day or two before the wedding a terrible rumor spread in the community. Messengers from Monterey said that the governor was ill. At first it was said that the wedding would be

delayed. Others feared that Mariana Castro was to be jilted. Others thought it was far worse. It was commonly said that the governor was not ill, he was intoxicated. This may have been an error, but it has always been believed that Alvarado was too drunk to go to his wedding.

Whatever the truth was, drunk or ill, the governor was a man of honor. He sent his power of attorney with the authority to wed Senorita Martina Castro to his future brother-in-law, Ramon Estrada, who had married Maria Castro, the greatest beauty of Northern California.

Preparations for the wedding went on as planned. At the entrance to the Santa Clara Mission were arches of white muslin decorated with bright ribbons, flags, streamers. As the bridal party approached the church people were so lost in the beauty of the bride that they forgot that the bridegroom was absent. Fire-crackers snapped. Cannon boomed. Musicians met the party at the door, and there remained until the ceremony was over, when they again played.

The Reverend Father Gonzalez performed the ceremony.

After the marriage the wedding party, consisting of the Castros and the Estradas, set out for Monterey. Then the real festivities began. The governor's bride felt herself a queen when the troops came out from the Presidio to meet her. At the governor's residence were distinguished officers, friends, relatives. Among the relatives present were General Jose Castro and General Vallejo. There was feasting, dancing and toasts. As soon as Governor Alvarado was himself once more he gave a great ball, to which came guests from Sonoma to San Diego. Then Martina Castro took her place as the first lady in California.