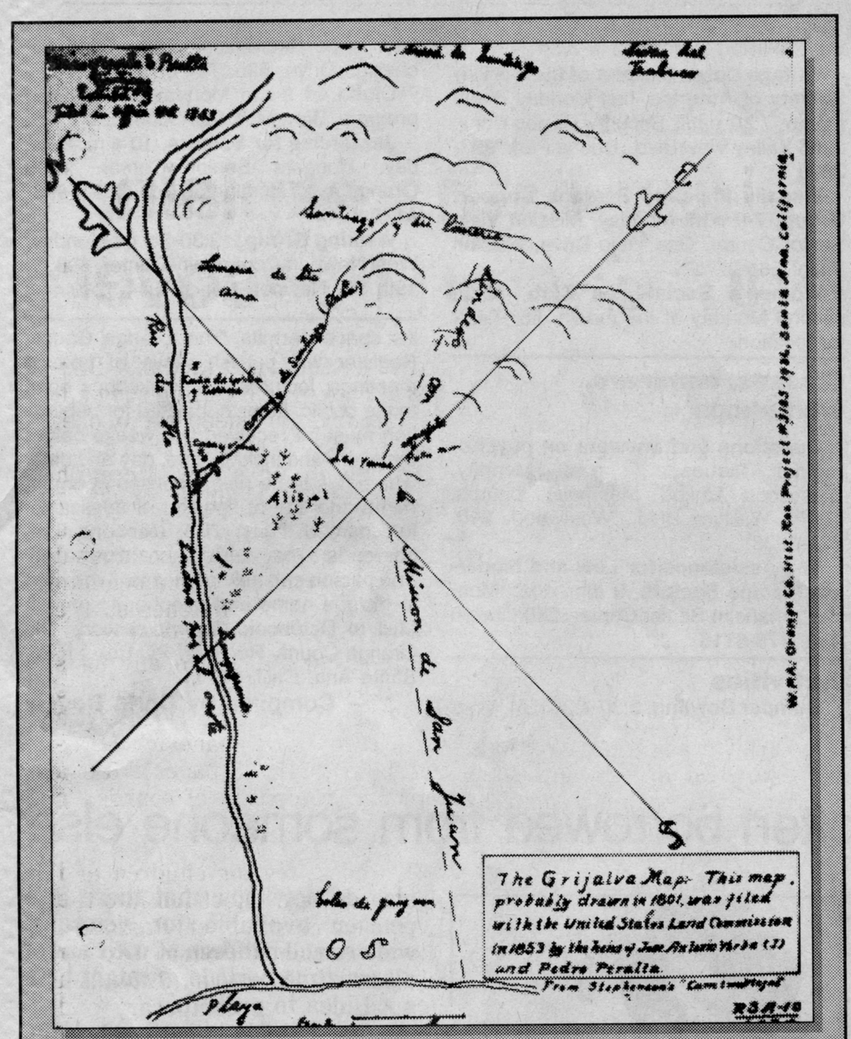
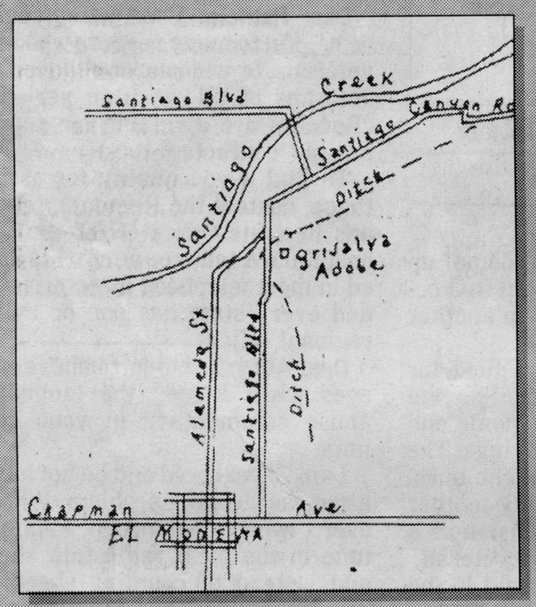
GRIJALVA: Research helps bring alive stories of ancestors





The tracks of time

Ed Grijalva used two maps to try to locate the family adobe. The map above was drawn by his ancestor in 1801. Note the use of landmarks such as "los alisos" – the sycamores – to delineate the territory. The map at left was drawn in 1935 as part of a Depression-era Works Projects Administration job.

The Orange County Register

FROM 1

stealing horses."

But as he discovered more about his family, they became to him like living people.

Now, he looks for Alameda Street, a crucial road near the adobe, on the Depression-era map. Grijalva drives out of the schoolyard and heads for Orange.

"I just want to touch it," he says. "Even if a tiny piece of the foundation is there. I want to be able to *touch* the house my family owned 200 years ago."

At a stoplight, he reads from his ancestor's original petition for the land, another clue to the location of the home:

"The distance I ask is from the banks of the Santa Ana River, toward Santiago, that portion which is along the high road embracing an extension of a little more than a league. The stream being above from there to the mountains about three leagues . . ."

"Aghhh," he says, his eyes on traffic. "It's probably going to be full of houses, just like everything else in Orange County."

■

There were no houses when Juan Pablo Grijalva came to California in 1776 as a leader of the Anza expedition, a soldier guarding the civilians. He filed in 1801 for grazing rights to the land from Santa Ana Canyon to the ocean. He built a home in a strategic location on a high hill, naming it Santa Ana Arriba. Santiago Creek, an excellent source of water, curved around the base of the home. But he died in 1806 before the Spanish monarchy acted on his request. His daughter married into the pioneer Yorba family, and in 1806, his widow granted the Yorba family permission to apply for the rights.

"Have you seen a town named Grijalva? A street? I can't understand why people have ignored Grijalva," Eddie Grijalva says.

"The Yorbas and Peraltas got the land. They got the fame. They were smarter, I think, or more aggressive. But old Juan Pablo, he was a live-and-let-live kind of guy."

■

Grijalva drives up and down Chapman looking for Alameda. Doughnut shops. Real estate offices. Mexican restaurants. No Alameda.

"I know it's here somewhere. This used to be open fields," he says. "After Sunday school, we'd walk around here kicking cans, looking for snakes."

Grijalva grew up in El Toro in an old wooden house, with no running water and no electricity. His father worked as a foreman on Moulton Ranch before it was houses. They went to church in Orange.

Grijalva gives up on finding Alameda and heads for the local library: "I'm looking for Alameda Street," he says at the counter. "I know it's here. I had a friend that used to live here."

A librarian tells him the street is still there, only it's called Hewes now.

■

Grijalva learned long ago the value of a good librarian. Back rooms of mission libraries. Dusty court files. Seminars. Grijalva has sought out sources from San Francisco to Baja. He belongs to four historical societies. When the federal government opened up a new batch of 1920 census records last month, Grijalva spent eight hours poring over microfilm.

"People say, 'Geez. How boring,'" he says. "But for me, it's become an addiction." Grijalva has traced his lineage in the Americas to 1518, before 16th century Spanish explorer Cortes visited, when Juan de Grijalva went ashore from a Spanish ship to trade with the Indians in the Mexican state of Tabasco.

■

He comes to the end of Hewes Street.

"Should be around here somewhere."

He drives up Santiago Boulevard, examining the map.

"Here's the first curve," he says. "Let's see. It says ditch." He brakes near a cement drainage canal. "That must be the ditch. I think the adobe has to be right here somewhere."

He parks the car near a hill at the corner of Hewes and Santiago Boulevard, outside a private drive, posted with a sign: The Sydlik Rancho.

"They're going to call the sheriff," Grijalva says, grinning. "There's a bunch of weird people parked in front of their house."

Stevan Sydlik, his hand wrapped around a cup of coffee, comes to the end of the driveway.

"We're just doing a little history," Grijalva says. "Five generations ago, my ancestors built a home here, and . . ."

Sydlik knows the place: "I'll tell you, it's the second house over. I've lived here 35 years and saw remnants of the adobe that far back."

"Goodness, gracious," Grijalva says. "Do you think there's anything up there?"

They scramble up the curving driveway of a Victorian house perched on top of a high hill. At its crest, a guard dog bares his teeth. The owner isn't home, but a house painter rounds up the dog. Sydlik points to where the adobe had stood. Now: a three-car garage.

"It's gone," Grijalva says. "There's nothing left. Nothing but memory."

He sits on a rough, rock wall lining the driveway.

"It must've been beautiful to live out here in the vastness of this place," he says. "All this land was grazing. They could stand here and look as far as the eye can see. It's so free. What is there around you? Serenity. Can you imagine coming home to this after riding all day?"

The house painter approaches the rock wall.

"I'm afraid I have to go now. I'll have to let the dog out, and he has been known to bite."

Reluctantly, Grijalva rises from the old rock wall. He turns back once.

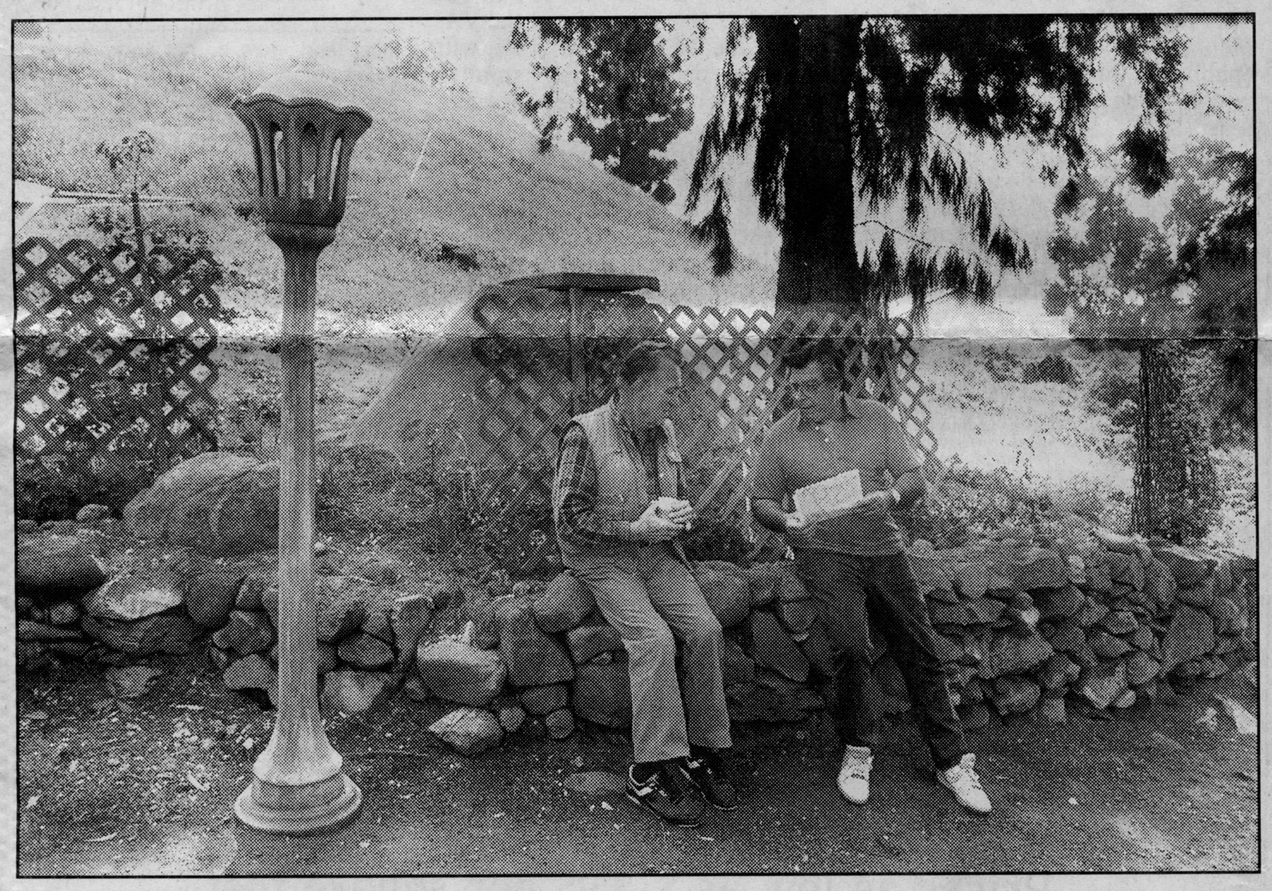
"Not even a brick. Not even a single rock left."

■

Postcript: A few weeks later, Frank DeVore, the owner of the 1887 Victorian home known as Hoyt's Hill, said there was something of the Grijalva adobe remaining.

The foundation of the adobe was part of the old rock wall along the driveway.

"All this time we're looking for my home," Grijalva said. "And we're sitting on it!"



Jebb Harris/The Orange County Register

When he met Stevan Sydlik, left, for the first time, Eddie Grijalva said, 'We're just doing a little history. Five

TIPS

Hispanics often have an advantage in capturing their family history because records have been kept through the ages by the Roman Catholic church, said Mimi Lozano, program coordinator with the Society of Hispanic Historical and Ancestral Research.

Lozano offered some tips for Hispanics researching family roots:

■ Marriage records at the Catholic churches sometimes show several generations of your family.

■ Spelling standards varied depending on whether the priests were Jesuit or Franciscan. Some letters in your family name, such as B and V, may be interchanged.

■ Don't just follow a name through history. Document with marriages and births.

■ Many men were given the name Jose and women the name Maria — an introductory name to their first name. If you can't find your grandfather Carlos, look for Jose Carlos.

Jose can be spelled Josse and abbreviated Jose., Jph. and J.; Maria can be abbreviated Ma. and M.

■ You don't have to read Spanish. With some training, you can figure out where the dates and names are.

For more information, contact the society at 894-8161 or 773-1510.

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