

Chapter VIII – THE SEPÚLVEDAS AND THEIR HORSES



Msn San Luis Obispo
de Tolosa, 1772



Rancho Palos Verdes 1859



Rancho Santa Margarita
(O'Neil)



J. Sepulveda
(lower Irvine Ranch)



J. Dominguez



Rancho Mission Viejo
(Bell Canyon)

A Soldier Helps Found Los Angeles

Adventure, horses, and dreams of golden treasure were inseparable in the days of the first *conquistadores*. Ships leaving Spain for the New World invariably included the horses so necessary for conquest and settlement, as well as other domestic animals and plants for propagation. The *conquistadores* brought not only the tools of their trade but the customs, foods and traditions from Old Spain to be blended with the customs, foods and traditions of New Spain. Horses! Even the "infantry", known as *soldados de cuera* were all mounted, Spanish military inspectors sneered that they were not soldiers, they were vaqueros. On the other hand, Portolá commented "Certainly, Sir, a man must have more Cowherd than Soldier in him in order to serve in this land" (Boneu Companys 1983:121). . . Horses were to become both the glory and the downfall of many a California family including some of the Sepúlvedas.

Francisco Xavier, the patriarch of the Sepúlveda family in Alta California, was born near Villa de Sinaloa, Mexico about 1742, the son of Juan José and Josefa García. In 1750 his name appears on an Easter duty list as a resident of the Rancho Palmar de Roxas y Sepúlveda (about twenty miles east of Villa de Sinaloa) of which his parents were part owners (Wittenburg 1991, SCQ:197-98). Francisco Xavier married Candelaria Redondo about 1863 near there. The couple remained in this vicinity at least until 1775.

When and why Francisco Xavier, a literate *Español*, enlisted in the Spanish army is unknown. It is known that he joined the Rivera y Moncada expedition of 1781 to found Los Angeles, serving under José de Zúñiga as escort from the time of the party's origin in Alamos, Sonora. By

the mid 1770's it had been decreed that not only colonists, but also soldiers enlisted for service in Alta California, were to be married and bring their families with them. These were hardy folk who made the trip through inhospitable country frequently with small children and perhaps a pregnant wife. Note that Francisco's youngest child was born in October of the same year in San Diego.

Francisco's wife, María Candelaria de Redondo, born about 1746 in Villa de Sinaloa, accompanied the expedition as did five sons and one daughter. Their children included:

- Juan José, born about 1764 Villa de Sinaloa, married first Tomasa Gutiérrez 8 January 1786 Capistrano, married second Mariana Díaz Lorenzana 20 May 1804 San Diego, buried 16 October 1808 San Gabriel;
- Rafael, born about 1766 Villa de Sinaloa, buried 4 January 1802 San Diego Presidio, unmarried soldier;
- Sebastian, born about 1768 Villa de Sinaloa, married Luisa Botiller 31 January 1799 San Gabriel, buried 22 October 1811 Santa Clara;
- Manuel, born about 1770 Villa de Sinaloa, married first Apolonia Cota 17 January 1796 Santa Barbara, married second Dolores Cota 20 August 1798 San Fernando, buried 30 December 1800 Santa Barbara;
- Teresa, born about 1772 Villa de Sinaloa, married Juan de Dios Ballesteros 10 February 1787 Capistrano, buried 30 December 1829 Plaza Church;
- Francisco, born about 1775 Villa de Sinaloa, married Ramona Serrano 19 October 1802 San Diego, buried 13 May 1853 Plaza; and
- (Francisca) Antonia María, baptized 11 October 1781 San Diego Presidio, married Juan Mariner 6 September 1797 San Diego Presidio, buried 28 May 1831 Plaza.

Francisco served in the San Diego Company from 1781 at least until 1786, but at the time of his burial 26 January 1788 at San Gabriel, he was recorded as a resident of Los Angeles, implying that he had left the military service. Candelaria Redondo had gone to Santa Barbara to assist her daughter Teresa in the birth of her first child, whom Candelaria baptized, in danger of death, on 24 December 1787. The child survived, but Candelaria having heard of her husband's death the following month, remained in Santa Barbara even after Teresa and her husband Juan de Dios Ballesteros were transferred to Monterey about 1789. By 1793 Candelaria was living in the San Diego Presidio with her eldest son Juan José, a soldier there. It appears that when he was transferred to San Gabriel by 1802, he took her with him, as she was buried at San Gabriel on 12 August 1804.

Francisco Xavier Sepúlveda's eldest son, Juan José, and fifth son, Francisco became the progenitors of the two Southern California branches of the family. Juan José's descendants settled in the areas of Los Angeles, Palos Verdes, Santa Monica, Santa Barbara and San Bernardino, while Francisco's descendants spread from Los Angeles southward along the coast to San Diego.

Juan José Sepúlveda in 1786 married Tomasa Gutiérrez at Mission San Juan Capistrano. Tomasa had been born about 1771 probably Culiacán, Sinaloa, the daughter of José Gutiérrez and Feliciano Arballo, who had enrolled in the Anza Expedition. Tomasa was buried 16 April 1798 in the San Diego Presidio. The only known children of this marriage were three sons:

Patricio (José Antonio Vicente), baptized 19 March 1789 San Diego, married Antonia Lugo 25 February 1810 Ventura, buried 9 February 1864 Santa Barbara;

José Enrique (Anselmo), baptized 24 April 1791 San Diego, married first Soledad Valdez 22 November 1812 San Gabriel, married second Bernarda Alanis 19 June 1825 San Fernando, married third Matilde Trujillo 10 April 1842 San Gabriel, buried 9 June 1844 San Carlos; and

José Dolores, baptized 25 March 1793 San Diego, married Ignacia Avila 8 November 1813 San Gabriel, buried 23 February 1824 Purissima.

Juan José, while stationed at the San Diego Presidio in the mid-1790's, enrolled the two elder boys in the Presidio school, where after seven months of attendance were both still in the first reader.

Juan José, after the death of his first wife, married in 1804 at San Diego Mariana Díaz Lorenzana, born about 1786 in Mexico City, another of those orphans who had been brought to Alta California in 1800. Their only child was:

Joaquina Ana, baptized 29 July 1806 San Gabriel, married first Juan de Jesús Polloreña 14 July 1824 San Gabriel, married second José Trinidad Urquidez 10 April 1873 San Gabriel.

After Juan José's burial 16 October 1808 at San Gabriel, Mariana then married at San Gabriel 6 December 1809 Ursino Tapia, who may have assumed the rearing of the younger orphaned Sepúlveda children. Mariana, again a widow, was still living in 1851 in the home of one of her Tapia sons near Downey.

The eldest son of Juan José Sepúlveda and Tomasa Gutiérrez, Patricio, entered military service and was in the Santa Barbara Company by 1810, when he married María Antonia Lugo, who had been baptized 31 March 1793 at Santa Barbara, the daughter of Luis Gonzaga Lugo and Perseverancia Cortez. Patricio and Antonia had eleven children, none of whom enter into the story of Orange County. Patricio lived to the age of nearly 75 years, being buried at Santa Barbara 9 February 1864.

The second son of Juan José Sepúlveda and Tomasa Gutiérrez, Enrique, was recorded as a soldier of the Company of San Diego, when he married Soledad Valdez in 1812 at San Gabriel. She had been baptized at Santa Barbara 28 March 1797, the daughter of Eugenio Valdez and Sebastiana Quintero. Their only child was:

José Dolores, baptized 7 October 1813 at San Gabriel, married first Josefa Ruíz 1 May 1844 San Gabriel, married second Refugio Félix 20 July 1870 Plaza, buried 24 July 1876 Plaza.

After Soledad's burial on 16 October 1824 at San Gabriel, Enrique married Bernarda Alanis four months later. Only two years older than her stepson, she had been baptized 22 May 1811 at San Gabriel, the daughter of Nicolás Alanis and Fernanda Tapia. This marriage was more fruitful, with nine children before Bernarda was buried 15 September 1841 at Plaza:

Casilda, baptized 9 April 1826 Plaza, married Ramón Duarte about 1845, buried 26 December 1891 Los Angeles;

Manuel de Jesús, baptized 1 January 1828 Plaza, married Dolores Serrano 2 July 1846 Santa Barbara;

María Engracia, baptized 17 April 1830 Plaza, buried 21 August 1831 Plaza;

Lucas Vicente Ferrer, baptized 21 October 1832 Plaza, buried 11 January 1833 San Gabriel;

Pedro Alcantara, baptized 17 October 1833 Plaza, married Soledad Domínguez 28 November 1857 Plaza, died after 1872;

María de los Todos Santos Vicenta, baptized 3 November 1835 Plaza, married Tomás Velarde, buried 8 May 1868 Plaza;

(Vicente) Anastacio, baptized 17 August 1837 San Gabriel, living in 1851;

María Micaela "Matea", baptized 21 September 1839 Plaza, married Ignacio Reyes 9 January 1861 Plaza, buried 25 February 1863 Plaza; and

María Dominga, baptized 16 May 1841 Plaza, married Eduardo Lisalde 9 January 1860 Capistrano, buried 4 December 1871 Plaza.

Enrique was not however a quiet homebody. He seems to have been involved in various disturbances and troubles around town. The most serious of these landed him in jail in 1835, after a quarrel with Juan Jenkins, whom he killed. His sentence was short, and he continued as a *ranchero* with his brother. In 1838 he was imprisoned again, having been captured by Castro's forces, during one of the many insurrections. In 1842 a complaint was filed against Enrique for beating Tomás, an Indian servant of José María Aguilar.

After Bernarda's death in September 1841, he married in April 1842 María Matilde Trujillo, the daughter of Manuel Lorenzo Trujillo and Dolores Archuleta. Matilde had been born about 1820 in New Mexico, and had come with her parents in the 1841 Workman-Rowland party to settle Agua Mansa, which is now in the northern part of the city of Riverside. Matilde was left a widow, when Enrique was buried 9 June 1844 at San Carlos, having died of smallpox on a business trip to Monterey. In the 1844 census, she appears as a 24 year-old widow with seven of Enrique's children by Bernarda and also newly wed José Dolores, Enrique's son by his first wife. Matilde Trujillo remarried at San Gabriel 16 March 1849 Antonio Valdez and is recorded living with her father in 1851. The younger Sepúlveda children were then living with their eldest sister and her husband.

The Rancho Palos Verde

The last son of Juan José Sepúlveda and Tomasa Gutiérrez was José Dolores, born in 1793. He married at the early age of 20, very young for those days, María Ignacia Avila, barely six months his junior. She had been baptized 7 October 1793 at San Gabriel, the eldest daughter of José de Santa Ana Avila and Josefa Osuna of Chapter III.

José Dolores Sepúlveda and Ignacia Avila had five sons and one daughter, all of whose baptisms should have been recorded at San Gabriel. Unfortunately most of the pages of the San Gabriel Baptismal Register from 1815 to 1820 are missing. Therefore this family as so many others have baptisms recorded before and after this period, but the children in "the gap" have to be reconstructed from other records, such as census data. The six children of this couple were:

- Juan Capistrano, baptized 23 October 1814 San Gabriel, married first Felipa Alanis 1 May 1837 San Gabriel, married second Susana Ruíz 8 July 1868 Plaza, reportedly died 1896 San Pedro;
- José Loreto, baptized 11 December 1815 San Gabriel, married first Juana Cesaria Pantoja (*informaciones* 6 January 1835) San Gabriel, married second Teodosia Gonzales October 1875, buried 15 February 1881 Plaza;

Ygnacio Rafael, born about 1817 San Gabriel, married Teresa de Jesús Villa 25 June 1842 San Fernando, reportedly buried 8 January 1847;
José Diego, born about 1819 San Gabriel, married Francisca Lisalde (*informaciones* 14 June 1843) San Gabriel, buried 25 April 1869 Plaza;
Juan, baptized 26 June 1821 San Gabriel, and buried 7 August 1826 Plaza; and
María Teresa, baptized 15 October 1823 San Gabriel, married Nathaniel Pryor (*informaciones* 1 October 1837) San Gabriel, buried 5 September 1840 Plaza.

José Dolores had gone to Monterey to press his claim to Rancho Palos Verdes, and returning, stopped overnight at the Mission La Purisima. He was killed there by an Indian arrow during the 1824 general Chumash revolt. His burial at Purisima was recorded on 23 February 1824. His widow Ignacia Avila, who then married second Antonio Machado 11 April 1825 at San Gabriel, was buried 22 October 1855 in the cemetery of the Plaza Church.

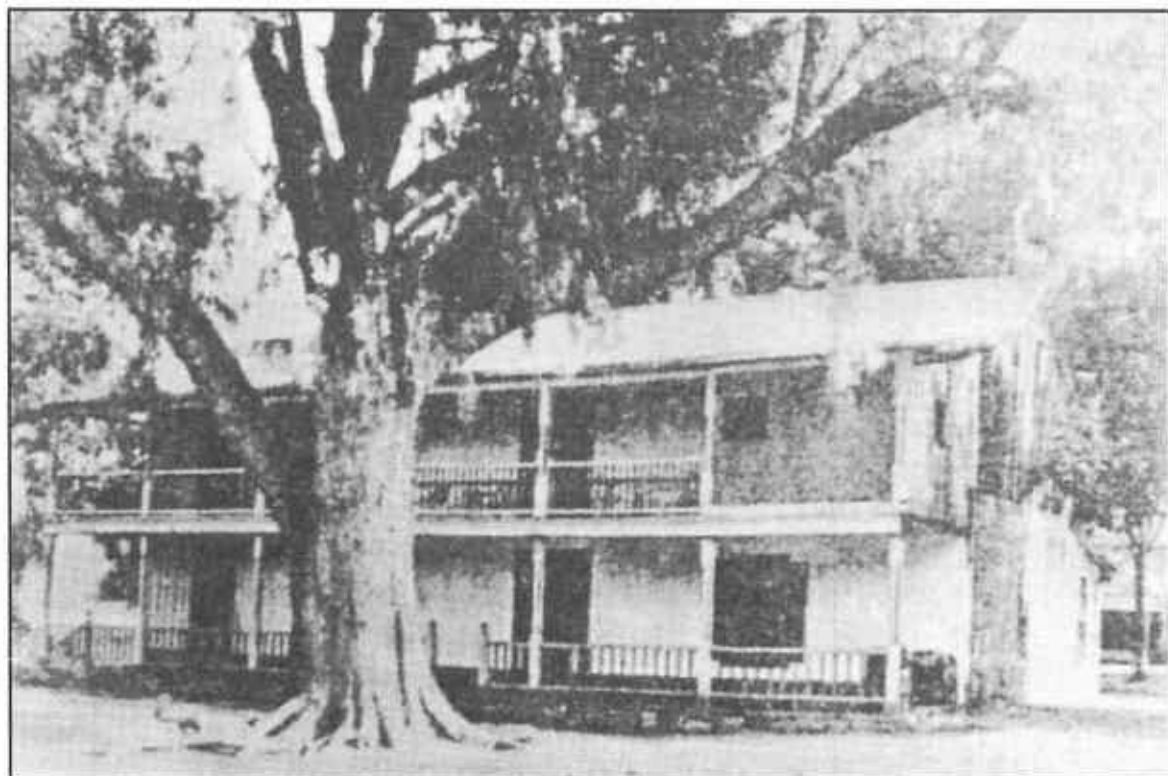
The three sons of Juan José Sepúlveda reportedly very early had received permission to graze cattle on a portion of Rancho San Pedro. In 1822 the youngest son, José Dolores, apparently applied for a grant for a portion of the great rancho. Cristóbal Dominquez disputed this and the governor upheld him and Dolores was ordered to remove his stock. Dolores was killed on his way home from Monterey supposedly to press his case. Some sources say the Sepúlvedas were again running stock there in 1827, and probably had never removed them at all. It has been reported that some title was given by Governor Gutiérrez, who was in office in 1836. Final title was issued in 1846 to Dolores's son, José Loreto, et al., a grant of 31,000 acres covering the point of land jutting into the ocean south of Los Angeles. This was Rancho los Palos Verdes.

Since hospitality was as much a duty as a privilege instilled by their Spanish forebearers, these San Pedro dons frequently held *fiestas* which enticed guests from all over the southland. Women took advantage of the festivities to wear their prettiest frocks, though their clothes were scarcely as flamboyant as those of the menfolk. Changing from their riding outfits, young feminine guests invariably wore a party dress with a lace bodice, embroidered sleeves, and a full skirt that barely hid a flounced petticoat complemented by velvet shoes. *Rebozos* covered dark, plaited hair, and a hint of rice-flour powder and berry-juice lip coloring accented their beautiful complexions. A lace mantilla or costly shawl might be worn if the weather dictated, especially in the evening when the dancing occurred in the tiled patio.

Juan Capistrano Sepúlveda, eldest son of José Dolores and Ignacia Avila, inherited one-fifth of his father's ranch as did his sister and each of his surviving brothers, as was the usual practice in those days. Juan married in 1837 Felipa Alanis, baptized 1 May 1815 San

Gabriel, another daughter of Nicolás Alanis and Fernanda Tapia and sister of Bernarda, who was the second wife of Juan's uncle, Enrique. Their children included:

Juan María (Julian), baptized 25 March 1838 Plaza, living in 1851;
Francisca, baptized 20 April 1840 San Gabriel, living in 1851;
(Josefa) Dolores, baptized 19 March 1842 Plaza, living in 1851;
María Juliana Sara, baptized 9 January 1851 Plaza; and
María Guadalupe Concepción, baptized 18 April 1854 Plaza.



Diego Sepúlveda Home on Rancho Palos Verdes
(Title Insurance and Trust)

By 1844 The household also included Eugenio, born about 1832, and Francisca, born about 1834. Their relationship to Juan has not been established. Vicente, their godson and son of Enrique, had also joined the family by 1851.

Interested in political life, Juan served as *juez de campo* at Palos Verdes in 1840 and was elected second *alcalde* at Los Angeles in '45 as well as *alcalde* in '49. He served as County Supervisor in 1854 and as County Assessor in '57 and '58. His first wife, Felipa, died in 1865, and in 1868 he married Susana Ruíz, baptized 17 March 1852 Plaza, daughter of Francisco Ruíz and Apolonaria Varelas. Their children may have included:

Bruna Eliza, baptized 2 December 1869 Plaza;

Alberto, baptized 9 October 1870 Plaza;

María Leonides, born about 1871, married Arthur W. Day, died 24 November 1941; and reportedly

Dolores, Juan and Andrew all living in 1936.

Their father died in 1896, but the mother lived until 31 May 1923.

José Loreto, the second son of José Dolores Sepúlveda and Ygnacia Avila, was the one who filed in 1852 for the Rancho Palos Verdes in the name of "José Loreto, et al.", based on the grant given in 1846 by Pío Pico. Loreto served as *juez de paz* in 1842, second *alcalde* 1846 and 1848, and was member of the council in 1850. He had married Cesaria Pantoja in 1835. She had been baptized 27 February 1819 at San Gabriel, an *hija natural* of Francisco Pantoja and Juana Uribes. She was buried 3 May 1874 in Wilmington. They are said to have had a family of fourteen, but only eleven are known. Among them were:

José Dolores de Jesús, baptized 25 December 1835 Plaza, married María Antonia Lugo 25 August 1862 Plaza, died after 1873;

María Petra Dolores del Pilar, baptized 21 May 1837 San Gabriel, married Juan Tomás Lanfranco 8 November 1853 Plaza, buried 10 January 1877 Plaza;

Luisa Gonzaga, baptized 30 June 1839 San Gabriel, married first Joseph Bryant 29 June 1860 Plaza, married second Rafael Poggi 27 August 1866 Plaza;

Juan Bautista, baptized 13 July 1841 San Gabriel, living in 1851;

Francisco, born about 1843, married first Modesta Alipas 6 April 1868 Plaza, married second Basilia Flores 5 February 1877 Plaza;

José Ramón, baptized 26 September 1845 San Gabriel, buried 16 May 1889 Plaza;

José Guadalupe Loreto, baptized 2 February 1848 Plaza at the age of 2 months, living in 1851;

José Gregorio Nazareno, baptized 4 August 1850 Plaza, buried 17 January 1887 Plaza;

Consolación Clara, baptized 13 August 1852 Plaza, married Charles A. Ketler 26 March 1876 Plaza;

Constantino Isidro, baptized 18 July 1855 Plaza; and

Luis Napoleon Octavio, baptized 9 January 1861 Plaza.

The third son of José Dolores Sepúlveda and Ygnacia Avila, Ignacio, sold his share in the Rancho Palos Verdes to his brother-in-law, Miguel Pryor. Ignacio married in 1842 Teresa Villa, who had been baptized 15 October 1812 Purísima, daughter of Vicente Villa and Rita Valdez. The marriage was a short one as Ignacio was killed on 8 January 1847 during the Battle of San Gabriel River while resisting the invading forces of the United States Army as they marched on Los Angeles. He left two small children:

Fernando, baptized 29 May 1843 Plaza, confirmed 15 September 1850 Plaza; and Mariana de la Cruz, baptized 18 August 1845 Plaza.

As a widow, Teresa returned to the home of her mother. Neither of the children are listed with her in 1851. She later married Gabriel Ybarra of Mazatlán 10 January 1852 Plaza, and died between 1854 and 1864.

José Diego, the fourth son of José Dolores Sepúlveda and Ygnacia Avila was the epitome of the true California gentleman. In addition to his inherited two leagues of land, 2,300 head of cattle, and 300 head of horses from Rancho Palos Verdes, he along with three Lugo brothers received a grant to Rancho San Bernardino. He established a home by 1844 in Yucaipa Valley, and remained there until 1851 when the ranch was sold. Apparently after the sale, José Diego returned to Rancho Palos Verdes with his wife, María Francisca Lisalde, then 33, and their young family.

María Francisca Lisalde, baptized 25 May 1817 at the San Diego Presidio, daughter of Diego Lisalde and Eugenia Silvas, had married first Antonio Ignacio Rosas, a great-grandson of the Los Angeles *Poblador* Basilio Rosas. Left a widow, Francisca's and Diego Sepúlveda's intentions to marry were approved 14 June 1843 at San Gabriel. By 1844 their family consisted of Francisca's two children from her first husband: Vicente Rosas, born about 1836, and Modesta Rosas, baptized 23 June 1837 San Gabriel; and their own children. Diego and Francisca had the following known children:

Teodosio, baptized 24 May 1840 San Gabriel, buried 28 January 1857 Plaza;
Esperanza, born about 1842, married Juan Bautista Bandini 15 November 1860
Plaza, buried 31 May 1866 Plaza;
Francisco, born about 1844, living in 1860;
(José Dolores) Epifano, baptized 23 August 1846 San Gabriel, living in 1860;
María del Refugio Rudecinda, baptized 22 March 1848 Plaza, living in 1851;
José Darío Espiridion, baptized 28 November 1850 Plaza, probably died soon;
Aurelio Guillermo, reportedly born 28 September 1852, and perhaps married
María Ramos 18 December 1882;
José Dolores Ramón, baptized 17 September 1854 Plaza (born 8 August), buried
24 December 1854 Plaza;
María Gumesinda/Rudecinda, baptized 25 January 1857 Plaza (born 27
September 1856), reportedly married James Dodson, and died 1885; and
Diego Ladislao, baptized 25 December 1861 Plaza, buried 1 January 1870 Plaza.

After the death of Diego Sepúlveda in 1869, Francisca Lisalde then married a third time 18 March 1870 at Plaza Andrés Rubio. She reportedly died in 1890 on Rancho Palos Verdes, and was buried in the San Pedro Harbor Cemetery.

The Pryors Go to Capistrano

Teresa, the only daughter of José Dolores Sepúlveda and Ygnacia Avila, accepted Miguel (Nathaniel) Pryor for her husband in 1837. Their intentions were filed on 1 October of that year, but they were not married until 2 February 1838 at San Gabriel. He was born about 1805 Louisville, Kentucky, the son of Michael Pryor and Mary Davis, according to his baptism into the Catholic faith on 20 January 1836 at the Plaza Church; and is said to have come by way of New Mexico. Her marriage proved to be short-lived, for she passed away in September in 1840 in Los Angeles. She was another of the very few buried within the Plaza Church. Her husband, Miguel, married again to Paula Romero in 1848, but survived only two years, being buried at Plaza 11 May 1850.

Miguel Pryor's and Teresa Sepúlveda's brief marriage produced only two known children, one being Manuel, who was buried 19 June 1840 at Plaza. Their son Pablo, baptized 8 February 1839 at Plaza, claimed the interest in Rancho Palos Verdes which his father had purchased earlier from Pablo's uncle, Ignacio Sepúlveda, but later sold it. Pablo Pryor married at Capistrano on 14 January 1864 Rosa Modesta Avila, who had been born about 1834, daughter of Juan Avila and Soledad Yorba. With his wife, Pablo and his family occupied the "Hide House" of Mission San Juan Capistrano after his father-in-law Juan

Avila, bought Rancho de la Playa near the mouth of San Juan Creek for him. Today the "Hide House," one of the area's oldest structures, is more frequently referred to as the Pablo Pryor Adobe. Pablo's and Rosa's children included:

Juan Miguel, baptized 22 June 1864 Capistrano in danger of death, married Emiliana Burruel about 1883;

Teresa, baptized 17 May 1866 Capistrano, married Miguel Yorba (son of Miguel and Josefa Bermúdez) 22 May 1898 Capistrano;

Reginaldo, baptized 26 March 1868 Capistrano, living in 1899;

Alberto, baptized 9 June 1872 Capistrano, married Natalia Leonis, living in 1896; and

Pablo, baptized 3 April 1874 Capistrano, buried 11 April 1875 Capistrano.

Pablo himself was buried at Capistrano on 3 August 1878. It was his sudden death from accidental poisoning which caused Rosa to move with her children to the home of her widowed father. When the Avila adobe was practically destroyed by fire the next year, the family moved in with a sister, Guadalupe Avila de Forster, at the Rancho Santa Margarita y las Flores. In 1882 the family returned to San Juan Capistrano to reside in the new Marcos Forster home. Of the many families descending from Juan José Sepúlveda, the Pryors were one of the few to transplant their roots from the green hills of Palos Verdes to the foothills of Saddleback.

Joaquina Ana Sepúlveda, the only child of Juan José and his second wife, Mariana Lorenzana, married at San Gabriel 14 July 1824 Juan de Jesús Polloreña, who in 1836 was a servant in the home of Antonio Ignacio Avila. Juan de Jesús had been baptized in San Diego on 15 April 1792, the son of soldier Pedro Polloreña and his wife Rosalía Ochoa. Their children were:

Eduardo, baptized 10 April 1825 San Gabriel, married Antonia Sánchez-Colima 30 September 1850 Plaza;

Juan Felix, baptized 19 November 1826 Plaza, married Petra Cota 23 August 1853 Plaza;

Cesaria, baptized 25 February 1830 Plaza, married José Patricio Sánchez-Colima 17 June 1849 San Gabriel;

Gregorio, baptized 25 May 1832 Plaza, married María Trinidad Moreno of Sinaloa 22 January 1868 San Gabriel;

José Dolores, baptized 10 February 1834 Plaza, confirmed 2 March 1843 Plaza;

Juan de Jesús, baptized 28 December 1835 Plaza, buried 3 January 1836 Plaza;
Juana Eloísa, baptized 12 March 1837 Plaza, married first José de Gracia
Sánchez-Colima 17 December 1854 San Gabriel, married second Antonio
López 28 August 1862 San Gabriel;
María Magdalena, baptized 26 July 1838 Plaza, married first José Ramón Lira of
Chile 4 April 1861 San Gabriel, married second Antonio Alvarado of
Hermosillo 7 March 1866 San Gabriel;
José Inocente, baptized 2 November 1840 Plaza;
José del Refugio, baptized 6 November 1843 at San Gabriel; and
Juan Francisco, baptized 7 January 1845 San Gabriel.

Several of these children may have died young as no further record of them has been found. After Juan de Jesús Pollorena's death, Joaquina Ana Sepúlveda married second the widower Trinidad Urquidez 10 April 1873 at San Gabriel.

Francisco Xavier Sepúlveda's and Candelaria Redondo's eldest daughter Teresa was married 10 February 1787 at San Juan Capistrano to Juan de Dios Ballesteros, a soldier who had been born about 1762 in Mexico City, son of Josef Ballesteros and Josefa Cosio. Juan de Dios Ballesteros was buried 24 December 1826 at Plaza and Teresa followed him on 30 December 1829. Although they had fourteen children, only five lived to maturity, of whom only two are known to have married.

Juan Antonio, baptized 24 December 1787 Santa Barbara, married María del
Carmen Figueroa 27 November 1818 San Gabriel, buried 17 February 1840
Plaza;
José María Serafino, baptized 29 August 1789 San Carlos, buried 6 November
1789 Santa Clara;
Josefa Rafaela Francisca, baptized 20 January 1791 San Carlos, living in 1844 in
the Los Angeles area;
Juana, baptized 23 December 1792 San Antonio, buried 24 December 1792 San
Antonio;
Juana María, baptized 20 March 1794 San Luis Obispo, married Anastacio Avila
(discussed in Chapter III) 8 January 1809 San Gabriel, buried 27 July 1859
Plaza;
Juan de Dios, baptized 11 January 1796 San Carlos, listed in the 1850 census as
an "idiot", probably buried 11 December 1856 Plaza;

Francisco Xavier Antonio, baptized 22 August 1797 San Juan Bautista, buried 23 September 1797 San Juan Bautista;
José Francisco Antonio, baptized 13 December 1798 Santa Clara, buried 13 July 1799 Santa Clara;
Francisco Xavier Domingo, baptized 6 August 1800 San Gabriel, living in 1844 in the Los Angeles area;
José Ignacio, baptized 30 July 1802 San Gabriel, buried 31 August 1805 San Gabriel;
María Apolinaria Fructuosa, baptized 10 February 1805 San Gabriel, buried 28 June 1812 San Gabriel;
Romualdo, baptized 28 February 1807 San Gabriel, perhaps buried 22 December 1870 Plaza;
Lucia, baptized 14 December 1810 San Gabriel, buried 30 May 1812 San Gabriel;
and
José, baptized 25 March 1812 San Gabriel, buried 21 June 1817 San Gabriel.

Antonia María was the last child of Francisco Sepúlveda and Candelaria Redondo and the only one born in Alta California. She and her mother were living in the San Diego Presidio with her brother Francisco, when she met and in 1797 married the Catalan Volunteer Juan Mariner. He had been born about 1764 Villa de Plana, Cataluna, Spain, son of José Mariner and Elena Salvatierra. By the time Antonia was buried on 28 May 1831 at Plaza, there were eight children, two of whom are known to have married:

María Rafaela Julia, baptized 14 April 1801 San Diego, living in 1839;
María Candelaria Leona, baptized 28 July 1802 San Diego, married Antonio María Silvas about 1826, buried 23 April 1852 San Gabriel;
(Juan Fermin) Filomino, baptized 7 July 1805 San Diego Presidio, listed as an "idiot" in the 1850 census living with Fernando Sepúlveda;
María Asunción, baptized 8 May 1807 San Diego, buried 22 January 1808 San Diego;
María Josefa, baptized 19 March 1809 San Diego Presidio, living in 1836;
Andrés Corsino de Jesús, baptized 5 February 1813 San Diego, buried 24 May 1816 San Diego Presidio;
María (Justa) Antonia, baptized 21 July 1815 San Diego Presidio, *informaciones* to marry Desiderio Velarde August 1836, San Gabriel, living in 1842; and
Fruto José Cristóbal, baptized 25 October 1818 San Diego Presidio, living in 1836.

After Antonia's death, Juan Mariner married at San Gabriel on 7 January 1832 Eulalia Perez, reputedly the longest lived Californian. Early accounts claimed that when she was buried in 1878, she was 140 years old. Later research has "debunked" this claim, and probably she was only about 110.

Francisco Sepúlveda was a boy of six when he arrived in San Diego with his father who was assigned to the company of the San Diego Presidio after he had escorted the *Pobladores* to found the Pueblo of Los Angeles in 1781. Francisco married in 1802 Ramona Serrano, who had been baptized at San Gabriel with the full name of María Teodora Ramona on 10 November 1787, the daughter of Francisco Serrano and María Balbaneda Silvas. Also a soldier, Francisco Sepúlveda was stationed at San Gabriel, Santa Barbara and briefly at Santa Inez. Francisco left the army and became a settler in Los Angeles in 1815. He became *regidor* and acting *alcalde* in 1825. In the summer of 1831 *alcalde* Vicente Sánchez, on the orders of Governor Victoria imprisoned Francisco Sepúlveda along with others as suspects in the beginnings of the uprising against Governor Victoria. Francisco was released from prison by the insurgents the day before the battle of Cahuenga, but did not reach the battlefield until it was over. He was appointed an administrator of the ex-mission San Juan Capistrano for 1836 and 1837.

After Francisco was replaced by Santiago Argüello as administrator at San Juan Capistrano, the family divided their time between their townhouse in Los Angeles and the Rancho San Vicente and Santa Monica. Francisco Sepúlveda had been granted a provisional title to Rancho San Vicente in 1828 by Governor Echeandía. Something of Francisco's character is revealed by the many legal battles over what should be included in Rancho San Vicente and Santa Monica. In 1839 Francisco Marquéz and Isidro Reyes were granted Rancho Boca de Santa Monica based on the claim that they and their predecessors had occupied the land since 1828. Francisco Sepúlveda had complained as early as 1833 about the boundaries of his grant. Three weeks before Governor Jimeno confirmed the Marquéz-Reyes grant, Francisco filed a petition with the *ayuntamiento* requesting title to San Vicente and Santa Monica. Their decision was that Francisco had no claim to Santa Monica, but clear title would be granted for San Vicente.

There followed a long period of petitions to the Governors by Francisco, a request by the officials for a map of his original grant which he refused to forward, a surveying party which he rejected, and several demands that he present himself with his papers to official hearings which he refused to attend. In his later claims Francisco continued to expand his boundaries, infringing on his other neighbors. On 8 June 1846, Governor Pío Pico issued a final grant which excluded the lands of all the other neighbors including the Marques-

Reyes grant. Sepúlveda, however, had so long claimed the greater area that the Rancho carried the name of San Vicente y Santa Monica.⁵⁰

Francisco Sepúlveda was buried at the Plaza Church 13 May 1853, and Ramona Serrano on 10 January 1870 also at Plaza. At least fourteen children were born to this couple:

José (Antonio Andrés), baptized 4 November 1803 San Diego, married Francisca Avila (of Chapter III) 24 June 1825 San Gabriel, died 17 April 1875 Caborca, Sonora;

María Encarnación, born about 1805, married first Francisco Avila 8 November 1822 San Gabriel, married second Juan Gallardo about 1848, buried 4 March 1855 Plaza;

Ramona, baptized 21 July 1808 Santa Barbara, married Agustín Machado (*informaciones* 29 January 1827) San Gabriel, died 5 February 1891 Palms, California;

(María Dolores) Ysabel, baptized 28 February 1811 Santa Barbara, married Seferino Covarrubias 28 May 1852 San Gabriel, buried 19 January 1877 Yorba Chapel;

Emigdia, baptized 29 January 1813 Santa Barbara, buried 6 February 1813 Santa Barbara;

Bernardo "Fernando", baptized 16 February 1814 Santa Barbara, married Rafaela Verdugo 20 February 1844 San Fernando, buried 16 February 1875 Plaza;

Vicenta, born about 1816, married first Tomás Yorba (of Chapter VI) September 1834 San Gabriel, married second Ramón Carrillo February 1847 San Gabriel, buried 10 May 1907 Anaheim;

Petra Ascensión, born about 1818, married Francisco de la Guerra 16 February 1839 San Gabriel, buried 3 August 1844 Santa Barbara;

José del Carmen, born about 1820, married Josefa Gallardo 5 June 1852 Plaza, buried 22 February 1883 Plaza;

Manuel de los Dolores, baptized 24 December 1822 San Gabriel, married María Dolores Serrano 2 July 1846 Santa Barbara;

Juan Catarino, baptized 9 March 1825 San Gabriel, buried 20 March 1825 San Gabriel;

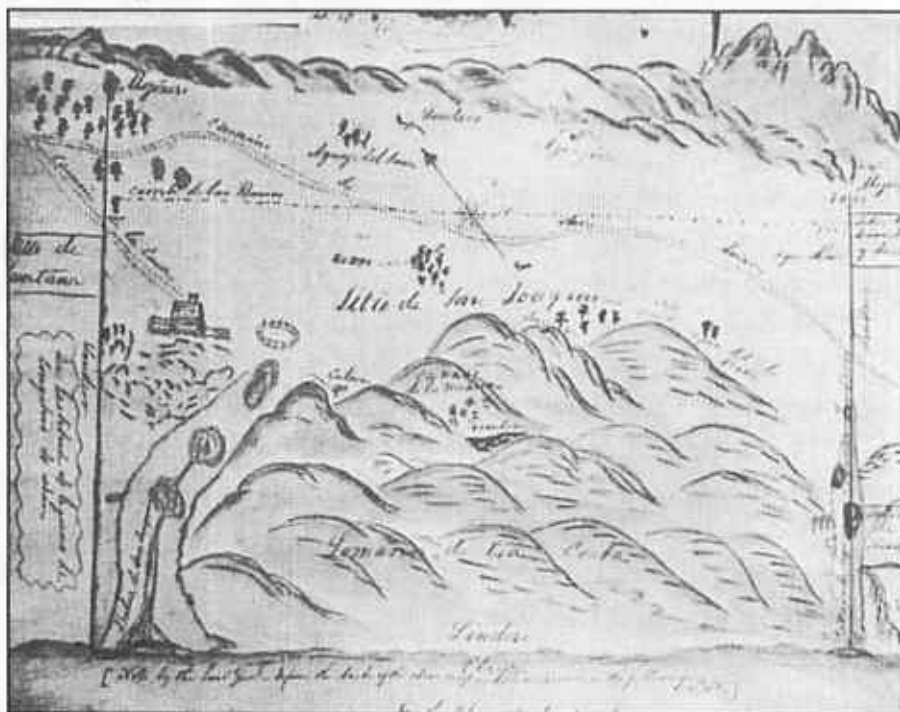
José Dolores, baptized 2 April 1826 Plaza, married Luisa Domingo 2 December 1857 Plaza;

⁵⁰Wittenburg 1991, SCQ, pp. 209-216.

Juan María, baptized 9 December 1828 Plaza, married María de Jesús Alvarado 1 December 1850 San Diego, buried 3 October 1868 at Plaza; and María Concepción, baptized 30 November 1831 Plaza, married Francisco de la Guerra, widower of her older sister, buried 15 August 1896 Ventura.

The Rancho San Joaquín

José Sepúlveda, the eldest son of Francisco, like his father was politically active and litigious in his land transactions. In 1833 he was elected *regidor* of Los Angeles. Some of the actions of the City Council during his term cast an interesting light on life in those times. A new school teacher was hired, showing again that education was not totally absent. An ordinance was also passed that a license had to be obtained to hold a *fandango* within city limits on any occasion other than a national holiday or a wedding. Furthermore, sale of liquor on holidays was to be limited to 8-11 a.m. and 4-8 p.m.⁵¹



Map of Rancho San Joaquín filed in 1861
(First American Title Company)

⁵¹Ibid, p. 222.

In 1836, José was involved in a decidedly illegal proceeding. The general regulations of the Mexican Government had provided for regional tribunals to try felony crimes, however the Central Government had failed to establish such a tribunal for California. Therefore the allegations of all serious crimes had to be forwarded through channels to Mexico City with the result that prisoners had to be held for years and justice was not swift nor orderly. The murder of Domingo Félix by Gervasio Alipas and his mistress María del Rosario Villa had so outraged the public sensibility that, after observing Holy Week, action was taken. José Sepúlveda was part of the vigilante committee under Juan Temple who took over the city jail, removed the prisoners and executed them (Bancroft 1880, XXVI:63-66).

In 1836 and 1837, José Sepúlveda was again elected to the *ayuntamiento*, and also second *alcalde*. He offended other members of the Council for some of his independent autocratic actions. In 1837 two prisoners having confessed to a murder, he did not bother with a trial and ordered their immediate execution. The Council countermanded this and insisted that proper procedures be followed. Also in 1837 he was involved in the revolt against Governor Juan Bautista Alvarado, sometimes as a supporter and sometimes as an opponent in a bewildering display of changing allegiances.

In 1836 José Sepúlveda filed for the Rancho Cienega de los Ranas but his application was not forwarded and nothing came of that. Next year José again filed, this time directly with Governor Alvarado, who forwarded the application to Los Angeles who approved it with "unusual dispatch"⁵² and his grant was confirmed 27 April 1837. In May 1841 Father Zalvidea, pastor and administrator of San Juan Capistrano complained that Sepúlveda had extended his herds beyond the limits of his grant and was encroaching on the lands where the ex-mission were pasturing their herds on the Rancho Trabuco (Engelhardt, 1922:131-133). Sepúlveda claimed that *alcalde* Luis Arenas had extended the grant in 1837. The matter was returned to *Prefect* Santiago Argüello who reported that the map submitted was inaccurate, the juristical possession was not witnessed, and therefore Sepúlveda's grant was reconfirmed only for the Rancho Los Cienegas. On 10 August 1841 José Sepúlveda filed a petition for Bolsa de San Joaquin. When the matter was referred to Santiago Argüello, he reported to the Governor that⁵³:

José was both crafty and dishonest; a person who had deliberately tried to mislead the lawful authorities. Indeed, in his recent petition

⁵²Ibid, p. 232.

⁵³Ibid, pp. 234-235.

Sepúlveda had described the proposed grant as being four leagues square; in reality this measurement was at least a league shorter than the Bolsa's true length. Moreover the scale of the map which he had filed at the same time as his petition was so distorted that the ranch appeared to be only about one-tenth as large as it actually was. Furthermore, Argüello noted, since Santiago Johnson and Juan Forster had petitioned for the same grant and had filed the necessary papers before Sepúlveda had even drafted his request, the two men had prior claim to the land. Moreover, Sepúlveda, instead of keeping within the boundaries of his original grant as the governor had ordered him to do in his decree of June 21 1841, had "extended himself to as far as the eye can reach" and expanded his holdings from one extremity to another, unto the beach in a southerly direction and unto the mountains in the north." Lastly, Argüello concluded, the grant, even as it was described on José's map, amounted to sixteen square leagues of land, which was five more than the maximum amount the law of the Republic allowed.

Nonetheless, Alvarado approved the grant 13 May 1842. The survey was run in June 1842 for the entire grant which was then known as Rancho San Joaquin. The ranch extended from the Pacific Ocean on the south to Red Hill on the north, with Rancho Santiago de Santa Ana as the western boundary and Ranchos Niguel and Los Alisos on the east, that is roughly from Newport's Back Bay to close to San Juan and Trabuco Creeks. When Sepúlveda filed with the U.S. Land Commission, his claim was nearly 49,000 acres.

In 1854 Domingo Yorba sold Rancho del Refugio to José Sepúlveda. Within these miles of unfenced, rolling hills and broad plains grazed as many as 12,000 head of cattle and 3,000 head of horses while the land near the Sepúlveda hacienda was put into gardens and fields of grain. Don José maintained an establishment which was the epitome of Spanish elegance and hospitality. He became famous for the extravagance of his *fiestas* and the excellence of his race horses. Money from his productive rancho, particularly from cattle drives north to the gold fields, flowed into his hands but flowed out again almost as quickly, thanks to his penchant for gambling and unrivaled hospitality.

José Sepúlveda established a country house at Rancho Cienega de los Ranos several years after his marriage in 1825 to Francisca Avila, who had been baptized 4 April 1807 San Gabriel, daughter of Antonio Avila and Rosa María Ruíz. The family probably resided mainly in his townhouse at the corner of Eternity and Virgin streets, a few blocks from Los Angeles Plaza. José and Francisca are known to have had at least twelve children:

María Francisca Leona, baptized 11 April 1826 Plaza, married first Antonio Carrillo 13 May 1846 San Gabriel, divorced in 1854, married second James Thompson 10 June 1869 Plaza;

José Miguel, baptized 8 May 1827 Plaza, buried 18 January 1848 Plaza;

María Tomasa Canuta "Teresa", baptized 19 January 1829 Plaza, married Francisco Rico about 1846, buried 22 October 1870 Plaza;

José Mauricio, baptized 24 September 1830 Plaza, married Dolores Lugo 21 July 1851 Plaza, died in San Francisco, buried 15 August 1865 Plaza;

Ramona, baptized 27 October 1832 Plaza, married John Salisbury Haley 31 October 1854 Plaza;

Francisco del Rosario, baptized 4 June 1834 San Gabriel, buried 17 July 1849 Plaza;

(Bernabe) Antonio, baptized 13 June 1836 Plaza, married Guadalupe Manríquez 22 August 1864 Capistrano, buried 4 July 1870 Plaza;

José Marcos "Joaquín", baptized 1 May 1838 Plaza, married Eloísa Martínez 13 December 1856 Plaza, died after 1877 Capistrano;

Andronico Encarnación, baptized 30 March 1840 Plaza, married Clotilde de la Guerra, (later Treasurer of Los Angeles County);

(Antonio) Ygnacio, baptized 1 July 1842 San Gabriel, married first Honora Anderson by 1869, married second Herlinda de la Guerra 13 December 1883 Mexico City, buried 3 December 1916;

María Ascensión Jacinta, baptized 23 September 1844 Plaza, married Thomas Dillingham Mott 21 December 1861 Los Angeles, buried December 1923; and

Tranquilina Germana, baptized 30 May 1849 Plaza, living in 1910 in Capistrano, probably never married.

Long after the Rancho San Joaquin had passed out of the family and José Sepúlveda had moved to Sonora, a few of his children and their families lingered on in Capistrano. Mauricio Sepúlveda, the oldest surviving son of José, married in 1851 Dolores Lugo. She had been born about 1834, the daughter of José María Lugo and Antonia Rendon, and the granddaughter of Antonio María Lugo (see Chapter X). Her burial was recorded at Plaza on 7 January 1873. Their children were born in many parts of the state including three in present day Orange County:

Eduardo Faustino, baptized 5 November 1852 Plaza;

María Florentina, baptized 24 March 1854 Plaza;
María, baptized 31 March 1858 Capistrano;
Mauricio Carlos, baptized 30 November 1859 San Carlos;
José Alberto, baptized 24 November 1861 San Carlos;
Miguel, baptized 7 June 1863 Yorba Chapel; and
Josefa, baptized 30 April 1865 Yorba Chapel.

The next son of José Sepúlveda, Bernabe Antonio married at San Juan Capistrano in 1864 María Guadalupe Manríquez. She had been baptized 30 January 1847 Capistrano, the daughter of Manuel Manríquez and Vicenta Basualdo. The Manríquez' were living next door to Bernabe on the Rancho San Joaquin in 1870. Bernabe's and Guadalupe's two known children before his death in 1870 were:

María Vicenta Romana, baptized 16 September 1866 Capistrano; and
Francisco Fidel, baptized 28 May 1869 Capistrano.

Near by in 1870 was José's son, Joaquín and his wife Eloísa Martínez whom he had married in 1856 at Plaza. Their only known child was María Concepción Rosa, baptized 6 December 1857 Plaza. Joaquín also had a longstanding relationship with Delfina Manríquez who was baptized 11 April 1852, (the sister of Guadalupe above), by whom he had:

(Manuel) Adolfo Alonzo, baptized 29 July 1871 Capistrano, married Aurora Yorba, daughter of José Antonio and Catalina Godines, 2 August 1913 Capistrano;
María Nympha Peregrina, baptized 27 November 1872 Capistrano;
María Manuela Griselda "Paula", baptized 3 September 1874 Capistrano;
José Bernabe, baptized 23 June 1876 Capistrano; and
Vicente Joaquín, baptized 24 February 1878 Capistrano.

Ygnacio Sepúlveda, José's youngest son, became one of the most distinguished members of the Sepúlveda family. He and his elder brother, Andronico, were sent East for an education, where Ygnacio earned a law degree from Harvard University. On 6 September 1863 Ygnacio was admitted to the District Court Bar. The next year he was a member of the State Legislature. He served as County Judge from 1870 until 1873, District Judge 1874 to 1880 and Superior Court Judge from 1880 to 1883. He resigned his judgeship to accept a position as representative of Wells Fargo in Mexico City. Judge Ygnacio Sepúlveda was

honored by the Mexican government when he was elected to membership in the Academy of Jurisprudence and Legislation. Sepúlveda Avenue in Mexico City was named for his family. He returned to Los Angeles two years before his death 3 December 1916.

Ygnacio Sepúlveda married in a civil ceremony Honora Anderson who was baptized into the Catholic faith on 5 June 1870 the day that she died. Their only known child was:

Anita Honoré, baptized 6 June 1870 Plaza, the day of her mother's burial.

The Sepúlvedas, as all Californio Rancho families held many a *fiesta*, for marriages, baptisms, or even a housewarming, when a new hacienda was built. Such occasions were commemorated by such things as cockfights, roping contests, bull and bear fights, and innumerable horse races. Always there seemed to be a horse race!

A Kingdom for a Horse

In 1851 racing talk of Southern California centered about the perennial winner, "Sarco." The pride and joy of his owners, Pío Pico and Teodosio Yorba, this gray stallion had won every race in which it had been entered. Californians boasted that Sarco, of Arabian and Barb blood, with long lines, and a tremendous stride, was the greatest horse in the world. Pico had a standing offer to race him against any contenders.⁵⁴

José Sepúlveda thrived on challenges. "A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a really great horse!" Could the Australian mare just bought by him in San Francisco be the answer?

As Leo Carrillo relates the story, Sepúlveda and his trainer Guillermo Brady were on hand when the ship carrying "Black Swan" arrived in San Francisco (Carrillo, 1961:117). Don José was satisfied and told Brady to take her to Los Angeles and "to treat her like a princess". Brady rode Black Swan the entire way home.

Both the long sea voyage and the 450-mile ride from San Francisco had taken their toll. Black Swan looked gaunt and tired, and the Sarco supporters were sure that Sarco would win. Pico and Sepúlveda met to settle the terms of the race; the date, the stakes, the conditions, and the course. The date was set for three months hence. During the interval, as news of the coming event spread all over the southland, Black Swan was carefully conditioned, regaining her weight, and secretly trained on Rancho San Joaquin. Sarco's training, on the other hand, was the usual for Californian horses, none at all.

⁵⁴Ginsburg 1991, *The Californians*, Vol 9, No. 2.

Finally, the momentous day arrived: 21 March 1852! Anyone within 100 miles north or south of Los Angeles was there. Half of Southern California had a wager on the race. Long before dawn every road leading to Los Angeles was clogged with travelers, including passengers off a special ship from San Francisco which had anchored at San Pedro. Bets included anything that was negotiable; ranches, houses, horses, furniture, and what have you? Never had so much money and so much enthusiasm rested on a single race.

Just before the race Doña Francisca Sepúlveda appeared seated on a gilt chair in her *carreta* surrounded by a retinue of retainers, friends and admirers. She carried an enormous bag filled with \$50 gold pieces which she distributed to those around her to wager on her husband's entry.

Reputedly stakes between the principals amounted to \$25,000 in octagonal gold slugs, 500 mares, 500 heifers, 500 calves, and 500 sheep. The animals were corralled nearby so as to be readily available after the race. The gold was deposited in waiting *carretas* to be awarded to the winner.

There were few conditions. Both sides could have outriders to whip the horses, and no restrictions were placed on the amount of weight to be carried. The race took place on the road to San Pedro which later became Alameda Street. The starting point was about where Seventh Street would cross Alameda, near the heart of Los Angeles. Nine miles was the distance - four and a half miles of straightaway, then around a stake and back to the starting point.

Sarco's rider turned out to be an average-sized Mexican boy mounted in a typical, heavy, high-horned vaquero saddle. Much to everyone's surprise, the rider of Black Swan was a small Negro lad astride a light-weight English saddle. The Sarco supporters were surprised and there were twinges of fear, but minutes later the cry of "*!Santiago!*" silenced all objections in a roar of approval as the horses were off and running.



Antonio Ygnacio Sepúlveda
(Security First National Bank)

Judge Thomas D. Mott, Don José's son-in-law and a witness to the race wrote later that not much of it could be seen except for the start and finish because the wild mustard plants stood high on both sides of the road. Therefore many spectators after the start of the race leaped on their own horses and followed on to near the halfway mark and then galloped back to the finish in order to see.

The two horses thundered down the course. Sarco was whipped by his outriders and he looked as though he would take the lead, but Black Swan sped ahead, and slowly opened the gap. At the halfway point the mare was ahead by 150 yards. On the return track Sarco narrowed Black Swan's lead to five lengths. Sarco was straining every muscle but could not gain enough to win. Black Swan pounded across the finish line still ahead of Sarco. Suddenly pandemonium broke loose. The crowd couldn't believe it! Black Swan had beaten the "winner." Never before had the stallion lost a race. José Sepúlveda had bet "a kingdom for a horse" and won. Much of the joy of the victory was lost, however, when his champion died of lockjaw [tetanus] scarcely a year later.

Among the losers at the great race was Pedro C. Carrillo, grandfather of motion picture personality Leo Carrillo. He bet on Sarco and in a few minutes lost the savings of a lifetime. The loss made such an impression upon his son, Juan José, only ten years old when he witnessed the race, that he swore never to gamble. The story became a family legend. More than a hundred years after the race Leo Carrillo wrote in his memoirs (Carrillo, 1961:126): [As a boy], "I swore I would never become a gambler, and I never have, all because of a horse I never saw."

A tale of the excellent horsemanship of the brothers Sepúlveda is told by Major Horace Bell who found out first-hand just how proficient they were. In 1853 Major Bell was at Rancho San Joaquin for a rodeo when a messenger arrived from Los Angeles informing the Sepúlvedas that their father Francisco, was dying. Wrote Bell (1927:302):

The arrival awoke me and my companion, and upon learning the matter and that Don José and his brother were to depart instantly, we ordered our horses and resolved to ride with them. Some one suggested that we would not be able to keep up, but as Don José was near sixty years of age we scouted the idea, and at four o'clock we were on the road at a full gallop, which we continued to the Santa Ana, the two Dons rising the west bank when we were in the middle of the river. We failed to come up with them, notwithstanding we put our chargers to their mettle, and before reaching Los Nietos they were out of sight. When we ascended the western bluff of the San Gabriel we could faintly discern the flying figures of the two horsemen eight miles ahead of us. We were badly beaten, notwithstanding we made the forty-two miles in a few minutes over three hours.



José Andrés Sepúlveda
(Courtesy of Bowers Museum)

The Loss of Rancho San Joaquin

Not every minute could be given to his 3,000 horses. Certainly Don José Sepúlveda spent considerable time and money proving his land claims and not until 11 December 1856 did he receive U.S. confirmation of title. Continuing his extravagant way of life, eventually horses and gambling debts forced him to mortgage the Rancho San Joaquin. In the early 1850's he borrowed money at 4 to 7% per month interest rates, and twice he mortgaged Rancho San Joaquin, but paid off both times. Finally in the winter of 1860-1861 he again issued two mortgages but an unforeseen disaster struck - the drought of 1863-64.⁵⁵

⁵⁵Wittenburg 1991, SCQ, Vol. LXXIII, pp. 240-241.

The rancheros never imagined how scorched the hills and valleys surrounding Old Saddleback could become; even the moist, green areas near the Swamp of the Frogs were dry. The gardens around the homes were invaded by the livestock in search of food. Cattle crazed by thirst even tried to drink the salt water in the Bolsa or Upper Bay. A newcomer to the southland recorded that it was an eerie feeling to drive a wagon along the road in the darkness and hear the crunching bones of the dead cattle beneath the broad wagon wheels.

Needless to say, José was unable to make any payments on his mortgage. In May of 1864, two foreclosure judgments were entered against him. Determined to keep Rancho San Joaquin, he summoned his ranch hands and instructed them to skin out each animal as it died even though a hide brought only a dollar or two. Instructions were also given to kill and skin thousands of others that were dying of starvation. Since this drastic action failed to raise the needed \$19,000, José called upon his friends for loans. For the moment, at least, he managed to stave off his most pressing creditors.

But in order to repay his friends, at last Sepúlveda decided to sell the Rancho San Joaquin. He received \$18,000 for his eleven square leagues - roughly 35 cents an acre. The deed of sale recorded 7 December 1864 states that James Irvine bought one-half of the ranch while Llewellyn Bixby and Thomas Flint each purchased three-twentieths and Benjamin Flint four twentieths. In 1876 James Irvine bought out his partners and became the sole owner of what henceforth would be known as the Irvine Ranch.

El Refugio and its acreage were not sold at the time, and it is presumed that José Sepúlveda spent some of his remaining years there as well as some days in his townhouse. El Refugio was deeded to Asención Sepúlveda de Mott before 1868. In 1873 he deeded away the rest of his property and moved to Caborca, Sonora.

Particularly appropriate, since horses played such a major role in his life, is the famous portrait of José Andrés Sepúlveda preserved in the Bowers Museum at Santa Ana. The artist, Henri Penelon, captured Sepúlveda's likeness astride one of his favorite, ornately-saddled mounts.

José Sepúlveda spent his last days in Caborca, Sonora, Mexico. Surely, the hours were spent reminiscing about the colorful, fabulous years spent on Rancho San Joaquin within sight of Santiago's peaks. Perhaps a smile touched his lips as he pictured his grandchildren astride their own mounts straining to see the action as they heard the shout, "*!Santiago!*". On 17 April 1875 at Caborca, death took Don José on his last ride.

"!Adios, caballero!"

