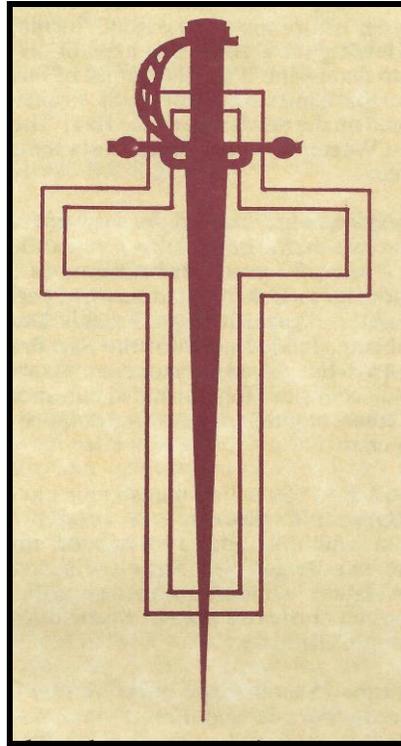


The Sword and the Cross

The Hispanic era in San Ramon Valley 1772-1830



The year was 1772. That spring Europeans traveled into the San Ramon Valley for the first time, camping overnight in Danville and continuing south to Monterey. In their diaries they noted the valley's oaks, plentiful water, and numerous Indian villages. For those Indians and others of the East Bay this visit presaged the end to their traditional way of life.

Spanish Invasion

On March 20 of 1772, this Spanish expedition, led by Capt. Pedro Fages and accompanied by Franciscan Father Juan Crespi, left the Monterey presidio and investigated the eastern and Carquinez shoreline of the Bay, turning back after viewing the Delta. The expedition was an effort to determine if the Bay could be circled on land, so that a mission honoring St. Francis could be placed on the north side of the Bay. They were the first westerners Contra Costa Indians had ever seen.

Other explorers had touched the coast of California in the years before this inland expedition. In 1542, a scant 50 years after Columbus landed, Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo had mapped part of the coast under a Spanish flag. Francis Drake, an Englishman, landed north of the San Francisco Bay in 1579 but stayed only to repair his ships. Others sighted, mapped and stopped briefly on the coast. All missed the fog-shrouded Golden Gate.

Not until the 1760s did the Spanish move to occupy Alta (Upper) California. A combination of personal ambition and a perceived threat of Russian invasion led New Spain's Visitor-General Jose de Galvez to initiate a plan to settle the northwest area of Spanish territory, including California.

In 1769 the "Sacred Expedition" led by Captain Gaspar de Portola and Father Junipero Serra traveled north, founding the first mission in San Diego mission. Fages led a light infantry of 25 Catalonian volunteers and came by sea to San Diego, while Crespi traveled with the overland group. In an era when the state and church were united, this combination of military and missionary colonization had worked for the Spanish throughout the new world.

Fages and Crespi then accompanied Portola to Monterey and points north for further exploration. A presidio (fort) and mission were founded at the Monterey Bay in 1770 and Fages was appointed commander in Alta California when Portola returned to New Spain.

On March 31 and April 1, 1772, Father Crespi, a disciplined and meticulous diarist, described the San Ramon Valley as well grown with a large variety of trees, fertile land, plenty of running water, "numerous villages of very gentle and peaceful heathen" and "very suitable for a mission". He noted that the Indians upon first meeting them had run away, "shouting and panic-stricken without knowing what had happened."

The Indians had never seen horses, mules, woven fabric, armor or guns before and their first reactions reflected their astonishment. They were relieved to see the Spanish alight from their horses and realize these visitors were human beings. These new and obviously powerful people were fascinating to the Native Americans. For their part, the Europeans were pleased to find the Indians to be friendly, at least initially. Trade began immediately with food, furs, feathers, arrows and baskets offered by the Indians and bells, fabric and beads coming from the Spanish.

Even though California Indians had a very elaborate social and economic system which had sustained them for many years, this system was not understood at all by the invaders. The Spanish felt they were civilizing

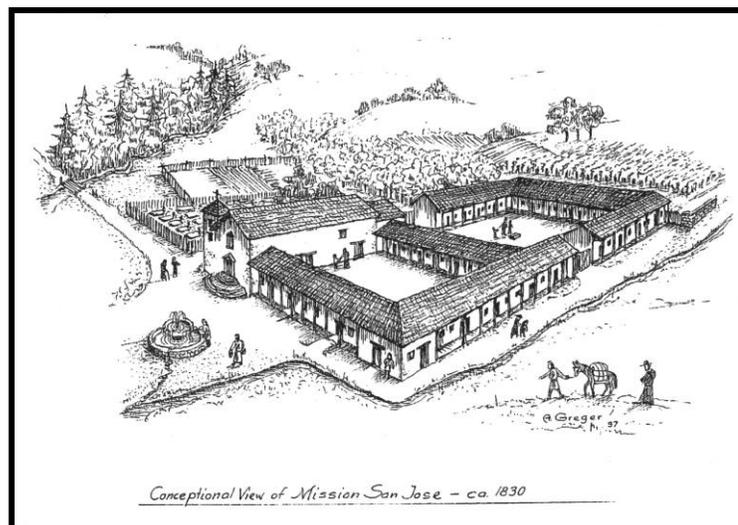
and converting a primitive, starving, pagan people who had no culture. The Indians were expected to become Spanish in language, culture and religion and provide the labor for the Spanish missions.

Bay Area Missions Begin

In that first decade two missions were founded in the Bay Area at San Francisco (1776) and Santa Clara (1777) and hundreds of Indians went to live at the Missions while others worked as day laborers. Once Indians were baptized, the missionaries kept close track of them, expected them to turn away from their old traditions, and used soldiers and the threat of force to keep them in order.

The Native Americans came to the missions for a variety of reasons. Many wanted to ally themselves with the powerful newcomers and thus have an advantage over other Indian tribes. Eventually their food supplies were damaged by the Spanish grazing and cultivation practices. Foreign diseases for which they lacked immunity decimated them. The physical, social and psychological environments of their tribes deteriorated and village life collapsed.

Tatcan Indians, probably from the Alamo and Danville area, went to Mission Dolores in San Francisco early in 1795 along with a large contingent of Lafayette area Saclans. A devastating epidemic (perhaps typhus) killed many of them in March and April. Soon after, Saclans (from Lafayette) and others left the Mission in large numbers, becoming part of a major organized Indian resistance in the East Bay. Because of this hostility Mission San Jose was located only 13 miles from Mission Santa Clara, instead of in the San Ramon or Amador Valleys.

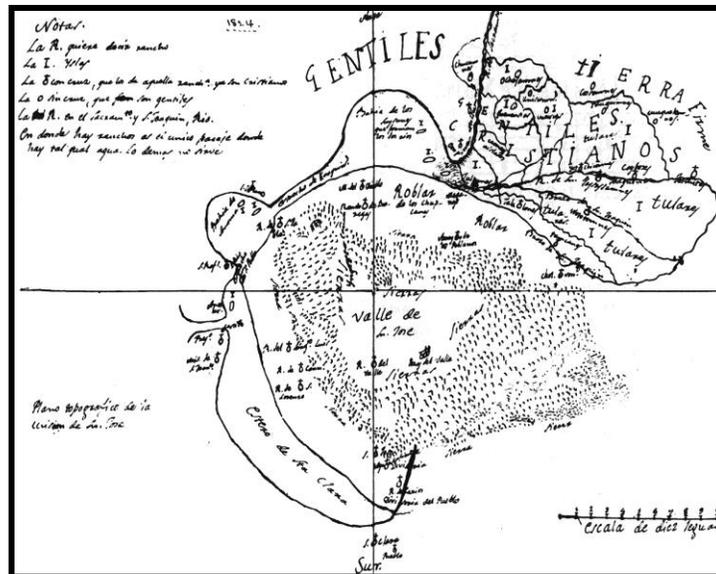


Indians from the eastern valleys began to come to Mission San Jose after it was founded in 1797, although in the early years unfriendly Indians threatened anyone who went there. By 1806 there were 662 Indians at the Mission, with a peak population of 1,886 in 1831. Most Tatcan Indians, who spoke Bay Miwok and lived along San Ramon Creek, went to Mission Dolores from 1795 to 1806. The Ohlone (Costanoan) Indians, including Seunen and Souyen from the south San Ramon and Dougherty Valley areas, are recorded as having arrived at Mission San Jose beginning in 1797. In 1805 some Seunens joined with Volvons to plot against Mission Santa Clara, but a large Spanish expedition squelched their plans.

Mission San Jose and the San Ramon Valley

Mission San Jose became one of the most prosperous in the entire 21 mission string with its excellent water supply, fertile land, many Indian laborers and location near the Bay. In addition the Mission was fortunate in its competent missionary fathers. Narciso Duran, pastor from 1806 to 1833 was an able administrator who became president of all the California missions in 1825. He initiated a renowned music program which included a large Indian orchestra and choir. He and Luis Arguello led one major exploration into the Delta in 1817.

In 1824 Duran drew an extraordinary map of the Mission San Jose territory. On the map the San Ramon Valley is called "Yngerto Canada", its original Spanish name. "Injerto" means "a graft" and, in this case, referred to a joined oak and willow tree at the Creek's origin. "Valle de San Jose" was the Mission name for the valley which stretched from Sunol to Livermore; it was the Mission's main grazing area. The map also marks the first written account of "M. del Diablo," an abbreviation of Monte del Diablo or "thicket of the devil." This referred to the thicket in north Concord where Chupcan Indians had escaped from a Spanish expedition in 1805. Later the Americans transferred the name to the mountain we call Mount Diablo.



Probably some time during Duran's tenure an Indian named Ramon had taken care of sheep in Injerto Canada. According to testimony in a land case, Jose Maria Amador said that the Creek and Valley were named for this Indian who was later mayor domo (supervisor) of the Indians at the Mission. The "San" was added to conform to the custom of the day.

The San Ramon Valley was part of Mission San Jose's grazing land and, by 1827, 9,000 cattle and 10,000 sheep were maintained in El Valle de San Jose in the summer and moved to through the San Ramon Valley to the Chupcan Indians' area in the winter or during droughts. In 1832 the harvest at the Mission included 6,400 bushels of wheat, 1,760 bushels of barley and 1,700 of corn, in addition to a wide array of other vegetables.

By 1830 the Spanish no longer ruled Mexico or Alta California. The Mexican battles for independence, which began in 1810, concluded successfully in 1821. The Mexican government policies regarding the Spanish missionaries, trade with foreigners, the disposition of mission property and the role of Alta California Governors were much debated by many Californian families. They also challenged decisions of the new Mexican government and fought among themselves. The history of this period was a turbulent one.

The San Ramon Valley sat on the outskirts of effective Hispanic control throughout this entire period, the rural edge of a sparse necklace of settlements strung along the Pacific coast. In the valley Mission livestock grazed and both Europeans and Indians hunted deer, but no permanent settlements were built. When Jose Maria Amador, Mariano

Castro and Bartolome Pacheco requested grants for ranches here in the 1830s, the Mexican Rancho era began.

Major Sources

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Pictures

**Drawing of sword and cross by John Hamel
Courtesy, Museum of the San Ramon Valley**

**1824 Mission San Jose territory map drawn by Narciso Duran, Courtesy,
The Bancroft Library**

**Mission San Jose by Al Greger,
Courtesy, Museum of the San Ramon Valley**

Written by Beverly Lane to accompany the 1993 exhibit mounted by the Museum of the San Ramon Valley: THE SWORD AND THE CROSS. Edited 2014

