

## Armijo's holdings torn by ownership wars

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Last in a series

Other people began laying claim to Armijo's land as early as the mid-1840s.

The first involved a boundary dispute between the Armijo's Tolenas grant and Chief Solano's Suisun grant. Each claimed land bordering Suisun Creek. The problem was taken to Gen. Vallejo, who ruled in Chief Solano's favor by some several thousand acres. In 1847, arbitrators were called in and this time Armijo won out.

This was followed by a long dispute involving land that Armijo supposedly sold to Archibald A. Ritchie, owner of the Solano Land Grant. This was a particularly bitter battle that was fought in and out of court.

The Armijo clan had an apparently well-deserved reputation for violent battles.

Henry Martin wrote notes on the goings-on in the area. He reported on one incident in which two miners were alleged to have been killed when they were found skinning one of the Armijos' prized steers. Wrote Martin, "It was common knowledge that Antonio and 'the wild one' was able to shoot the eye out of a tree squirrel at 50 yards - either eye."

The "wild one" was Juan Felipe Armijo, Antonio's son born in 1832. He was described as a husky, handsome man. He was also "quite the devil" and known for his participation as a member of the San Francisco Vigilantes from 1852 to 1856.

Another account was documented by a historian named Bancroft. Antonio and two Americans went to Sacramento in 1847 to an Indian village to bring back laborers. They tied up the Indians to enslave them. When some tried to escape, they shot and killed 12 of them.

With mostly women and children captured, they proceeded back to Solano County. Along the way, they brutally murdered one woman's child and others also died. Antonio was tried and acquitted.

Joel Parker, who stayed with Armijo on a number of occasions, said that by 1848 the peach trees Armijo had planted had reached a good size. By then, Armijo had several

hundred acres under cultivation in grain as well as an extensive vegetable farm for his private use. A number of springs kept the land irrigated naturally.

In the fall of 1849, tragedy struck when Antonio died at the age of 47. Shortly thereafter, his widow married Joaquin Riesgo. The couple lived on the Armijo grant.

In the summer of 1850, a year after his son died, Jose Francisco Armijo died at age 59. He was buried by clergy, as he had been excommunicated from the Catholic Church 20 years earlier. This was due to his refusing to surrender books that were banned by the church. These books included works by Rousseau, works on mythology and "Pilgrim's Progress." Edwin Markham, a Vacaville poet, once described Jose Francisco Armijo as "one of those rare spirits that the years could not touch with age."

The dispute of the boundaries was now in the hands of the heirs of the old pioneer. Working and improving the land was a condition considered in determining if a grant was legal, and thus it was in 1852 that the courts ruled in Ritchie's favor, it being determined that neither Armijo nor his heirs had ever cultivated any portion of the Tolenas Rancho that now made up part of the Solano Grant. The Armijo lawyers immediately appealed this ruling and in 1857 the court ruled in favor of Armijo's heirs.

The area where Antonio's adobe were built became known as the Adobe Tract and was located where Rancho Solano is today. Lewis Story resided within the tract's boundaries. In 1855 he built a dwelling and a blacksmith shop. In 1859 and 1860, members of the Armijos family were living there, but shortly after 1860 they departed. In 1862, a man named Fagan was residing there with Capt. Waterman's permission as he now claimed these lands, though the case was still in the courts. The Solano grant became Waterman's property when Ritchie died in 1853.

By then the orchards Armijo planted had been neglected and only a few apricot trees were in evidence. After Fagan, a man named Lincoln moved in.

The battle over the boundaries was finally settled in 1868 when Armijo's land patent was recognized. It was too late to make much difference. Squatters had overtaken the land, and the laws and the courts recognition claims did little to protect those who had these origin vast land grants. It was said that, "The honest, trusting Armijos pinned too much faith in the attorney and as a result of his lethargy . . . lost much of their land and livestock."

The heirs slowly sold off what ranch land they could still claim. Among those to buy this land that was part of the original claim were William and Lewis Pierce.

In 1906, Jesus Armijo died at age 72. He had never married and died a poor man. At

age 61, he was listed as a laborer, standing 5-foot-10, dark complexion, black eyes and black hair. He ended up living at the original homestead that now belonged to his daughter Nestora Pena Rivera.

The Armijo adobe stood as a reminder of the early days, until 1892, when it was badly ruined in an earthquake. It was further damaged by Lewis Pierce's cattle. According to Pierce's foreman, Pierce finally had the remains of the adobe pulled down, as it was endangering his calves.

Somewhere on a hill west of Mankas Corner are the graves of Jose Francisco, his son Antonio, other family members and the native Indians who worked cultivating the land and as vaqueros. Some say these graves are located in the heart of the Rancho Solano Golf Course.

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