Life in Evergreen with Antonio Chaboya and family

By Colleen Cortese
Special to the Times

A ntonio Chabolla,* the first Spanish citizen of Evergreen, may have occupied the land as early as 1821, during the drought of 1820-1821. (Handy) It was during this time when the stringent restrictions of the Spanish were eliminated by Mexican independence, and trading cattle hides and tallow began with the Americans. Evergreen was considered part of the lands belonging to the Pueblo of San Jose and any private use had to be authorized by the Alcalde (mayor). Antonio received permission in 1833, and soon his cattle grazed on the Evergreen foothills. That same year Chaboya petitioned Governor Jose Figueroa for legal title to the land grant. Antonio raised his cattle along with flocks of sheep, in the fields where tall grass and natural streams kept them contented. Deer, elk, mountain lion and grizzly bear roamed the hills and valley floor while small game, being plentiful, made this a hunting paradise.

Growing herds

Although busy with his many ranch responsibilities, Antonio served the pueblo, under the rule of Mexico, as the juez de policia (police justice) in 1834 (Bancroft 1884). By 1835, he had about 3,000 head of cattle and 100 mares and broken horses, which over the next decade, grew to untold numbers (1906 Lalor). Evergreen, remote and physically protected from the storm centers of historic California changes in government, encountered little except general information filtered through from the roving traders. The Chaboyas warmly welcomed travelers, giving them shelter and food, as was the custom of the California rancheros.

Across the rolling foothills, cattle quietly grazed and prospered. At last hides and tallow would become a profitable industry for Antonio. His vaqueros (herdsmen) proudly held their charges for annual roundups when the new calves were branded and older cattle were slaughtered for hides and tallow.

The hides were stretched, sun dried and cured, then stored until the trade ships, called "hide drogers," would arrive in San Francisco or Alviso Harbor. These ships sailed by way of Cape Horn, stopping at the ports along the coast. It would take the ships two to three years to collect their loads of hides and then return on the long return voyage to Boston.

When word spread to Rancho Yerba Buena that a trade ship had landed, general excitement, in anticipation of this event, broke out across the rancho. For a short time the dreary monotony of life would be broken, celebrations and festivities would begin.

The old world of the early colonists began to change, and a new period of prosperity began as the hide and tallow trade increased.

The days of the California cattle barons would go down in history as the most romantic period recorded.

On Chaboya's rancho, long horn cattle grazed freely upon unfenced land. Ownership of the animals was often questioned as roaming cattle crossed over property lines. It would sometimes be necessary to identify the ownership by branding the cattle. Each rancho had its own branding iron, which was listed in the "libro de registro" (1929 Sanchez).

Annual rodeo

Once again, as the community leader, the Alcalde decided when and where the annual rodeo would take place. As this news reached Rancho Yerba Buena, the Chaboya family began preparations for the feast and the festival. They cooked plenty of delicious food, mended and washed their clothes and, of course, Senora Chaboya made sure to look her best for this special occasion.

Antonio's job was to gather his vaqueros together and begin driving the cattle into corrals. The new calves were lassoed and held while a red-hot Chaboya brand was pushed upon the flank. Dust rose; cattle bawled in fright; wild bulls often broke the make shift corrals and ran free.

Young men, proudly showing off their horsemanship, would thrill the young ladies. Later the American cavalier would adapt the "rodeo" and continue these same customs to the present day.

Chaboya sent his men on horseback through the fields with knives to slaughter cattle on the rancho. As they passed near a chosen animal, the knife was driven into the nerve at the nap of the neck, and it fell dead. Following the napping was the job of the peleadores (skinned), who cut up the meat into strips for drying. Tallow and lard was gathered in hide bags (1929 Sanchez). Buzzards and dogs feasted on what would remain of the slaughtered cattle.

Rancho Yerba Buena had a "Calaveras," a place of the skulls, or slaughter corral, where the cattle and sheep were killed. If so, the grizzly bears—and there were many in this area—came at night and feasted on the remains. Young brave men rode out into the moonlight, lassoed a large bear, and dragged it into the village to impress the senoritas. The strong, handmade rawhide reatas were always coiled and ready for use (1929 Sanchez).

To the ship

The carreta—with its wheels of solid wood and its flexible rawhide body suspended between the front and rear axle—was loaded with the precious hides. Pulled by the oxen, they would slowly make their way to the port. The ladies, dressed with mantilla (lace scarf), peineta (combs) and their best zapatillas (shoes) followed behind.

While on horseback Antonio Chaboya, his family and his vaqueros proudly led the way to the ship. Arriving at the dock they were ready to board the ship, which carried a department store cargo.

Inside there were silks and satins; rice, sugar or tobacco, knives for the boys and satin ribbons for the girls. The families visited with friends, wives and children gathering together while the gentlemen discussed their business on the open deck.

Groups sat around bonfires while horses and carts rushed in all directions. As the day passed and the sun began to set upon the bay, they passed around many stories. Young couples fell in love, the elders watching, knowing that soon the long road back to the Rancho Yerba Buena would separate them for another year or two until the next ship arrived.

"(The modern spelling of Chabolla is Chaboya.)"

The next article in the Paths to Evergreen history column is entitled, "Antonio Chaboya family history and descendants."

Colleen Cortese — copyright 2004

INTRODUCING

EVERGREEN HERITAGE ROOM

Preserving Evergreen's Past —
Recording the Present
Envisioning the Future

SAVE THIS DATE
Thursday, March 31
from 4 p.m. - 6 p.m.
Light Refreshments
Free Parking
Evergreen Valley College
New Library, Educational Technology Center
Cost
San Fielis ROAD entrance
For more information
contact Vicki Aherton
(408) 274-7900 ext. 6503
Victoria.Aherton@evc.edu
The new Evergreen Valley College
Library/Educational Technology Center will provide a permanent home to display and make the collection available to the public. We envision this as an opportunity to make our local history visible to all those who call Evergreen home.

PLEASE JOIN US TO CELEBRATE THE
HISTORY OF EVERGREEN