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Paths to Evergreen

The Bernal family

By Colleen Cortese
Special to the Times

The Bernal Family history may be traced back to when Juan Bautista de Anza opened the short-lived "land bridge" from Sonora to Alta California. The de Anza expedition left from Horcasitas, Sonora in September 1775 and by March of 1776, had made their way to Monterey.

Juan Francisco Bernal, his wife, Maria Josefa de Soto and seven children came to the Bay Area as "colonists." Juan Francisco was a native of Rancho de Tule, Sinaloa, Mexico and was born about 1737. His wife, Maria Josefa Soto, was a sister of Ignacio Soto, who was also a member of the expedition. She was born about 1748 at Villa de Sinaloa, Mexico. Her parents were Juan Nicolas de Soto and Maria Juliana de Avila. (1769 Sp.-Mex)

Juan and Maria's seven children, all born in Mexico, endured the treacherous trail to California. Jose, the oldest, was 14 years old, while the youngest, Tomas, was an infant under two. (1769 Sp.Mex.) They grew up in San Francisco and would one day have the good fortune of being known as the wealthy Bernal family with property and large inventories of livestock.

Juan Francisco Bernal served as a soldier stationed at the presidio in San Francisco, as did three of his sons, Jose Joaquin, Juan Francisco and Jose Apolonario. (1958 Soberanes). At Mission Dolores in San Francisco, Juan Francisco Bernal's death is recorded as Oct. 28, 1802, at the age of 63. His son Juan Francisco died two years later in 1804.

A large Chaboya family gathering at Quimby Road. (Photo donated by Lawrence Chaboya, Ramon Chaboya's Grandson)

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A Bernal-Chaboya union
Maria Teresa de Jesus Bernal, the sixth child of Juan Francisco and Maria Josefa, was born in 1772. On Feb. 27, 1786, at the age of 14, she married Marcos Chaboya, age 30, at Mission Dolores, San Francisco.

As early colonists, the Bernal family could not have visualized what the future held for their children and grandchildren.

Land holdings and government positions, large families and generations of famous family names would go down in California history, including Alviso, Amador, Arguello, Berryessa, Castro, Chaboya, Forbes, Higuera, Moraga, Narvaez, Ortega, Pacheco, Pico, Saninsevan and Sunol.

The Bernal Family would one day claim many Mexican land grants that would include Rancho Santa Teresa, Milpitas Rancho, Rancho Canada de Pala bordering Antonio Chaboya's Rancho Yerba Buena, Rancho Laguna de los Palos Colorados in Contra Costa County and more.

The Butron, Bernal, Higuera and Chaboya families would for generations find themselves related by marriage and share friendly rancho borders along the eastern foothills of Evergreen, including Pala Rancho, Rancho Canada de Pala and Rancho Yerba Buena. Quimby Road, Higuera Road and Mt. Hamilton Road touch all the corners of these ranchos today.

Surviving the elements
The Spaniards in San Francisco, San Jose and Mission Santa Clara made special note to the governor in June and again July of 1808 when "the most severe earthquake that San Francisco had ever experienced" violently cracked the walls and crumbled rooms, causing serious damage in the area.

Marcos and Maria Teresa Chaboya may have had some serious concerns knowing their new home was centered in an unstable land where the earth moved and Indians used arrows to kill and maim their soldiers and padre.

The growing Chaboya family, cramped into a small adobe home, may have felt the quakes in terror. Now with 11 children and Teresa six months pregnant, perhaps Marco comforted his family and his small 3-year-old son, Antonio de Jesus, by telling stories of his homeland in Spain.

Survival seemed doomed in some respect considering the agricultural problems they faced constantly in the Pueblo de San Jose. A recorded drought in 1807 and 1809 would lessen the crop production. Grain disease, root worms, locusts, rats and ground squirrels were both destructive and disheartening to the farmers.

Since the Indians no longer hunted for food, the pests continued to multiply. Endangered livestock was protected by the vaqueros (cowboys) from grizzly bears, coyotes and wolves. Cattle and horses were often found killed by the roaming wild animals, soldiers and sometimes Indians. This would amount to a serious financial loss.

Wild mustard blossomed brightly across the valley floor, growing so thick that often crops were choked and lost. The mustard furnished a safe hiding place for the pests and some livestock to hide.

First chapel, schoolhouse open
Chaboya's family grew and so did the population of the Pueblo de San Jose. By 1822, a population close to 300 was recorded. The pueblo chapel was completed in 1812, where soon religious services would be offered to the citizens.

A public school was established in the Pueblo in 1811, with Rafael Vill Bicenio—described as an "infirm corporal"—as the first teacher. He was to teach reading, writing and the Doctrine, and was to receive 18 reales per annum for his services from each head of the family, to be paid in grain or flour. ["SCC History," Eugene Sawyer, 1922]

By 1818, a one-room schoolhouse opened its doors to the children of the pueblo, with Antonio Buela appointed as the teacher. Now the children of Marcos and Teresa would have the benefit of an education. Yet lack of funds and books in these early days made it a difficult time for the educators of this isolated community.

It was very hard to gather the children from their natural freedom and compel them to study in the darkness of the heavy walls of the adobe school house. Many preferred playing in the warm California sun, riding high upon a favorite horse or splashing in the cool clear water of the Guadalupe River.
They questioned their parents as to why they must learn to read or write when there would always be the Alcalde who could write those necessary notes or read whatever must be read for them. Who would they even write to and when?

Letters seldom arrived, but if ever a letter might arrive, there was little concern among the children and families. Thirty students were attending the local community school by 1826–1827.

It is possible that Marco's son Antonio may not have had the advantage of an education, because 40 years later in San Francisco, as Rancho Yerba Buena ownership papers were signed in the district court giving him legal title to the land grant, his signature was a simple cross.

**From Spanish monarchy to Mexican Republic**

In 1821, as Antonio celebrated his 16th year, the history of California would record a change of government. Mexico broke away from Spanish rule during the Revolution of 1822. The loyal Spanish subjects in California would slowly receive news of the political implications.

After the revolution, the missions were given a secularization decree for the padres to surrender their California missions and inventories. That year, nature lent a hand in the icy turn of events by dropping the normal mild winter temperatures to freezing. Frost and snow covered the Bay Area—the padre's holy water became a block of ice and mission production dropped as did the spirit of the holy Franciscan fathers.

As California changed, the gates opened slowly to increased foreign trade as Mexico removed all trade restrictions in 1821. Along with the trade ships came the new settlers and citizens of California from America, England, Ireland, Denmark, Scotland, Portugal, Brazil and more. The foreigners were welcomed, baptized into the church and would one day be the landlords of this new land.

Between 1820 and 1824, California changed from a Spanish monarchy to Mexican republicanism. Foreign visitors described the Pueblo of San Jose of 1824 where the Chaboya family lived as "pleasant homes in the midst of orchards and hedges of vines bearing luxuriant clusters of the richest grapes."

The inhabitants were thought of as handsome, healthy and contented people, enjoying large possessions of rich land where they lived free of taxes and prospered from their fields and herds. Others found the pueblo miserable, but at least containing a school, church, courthouse, jail, grist-mill and about 100 houses by 1830. (1801-1824 Bancroft)

At this time only two large private grants of land were known; Ignacio Ortega's ranch, "San Isidro" and Mariano Castro's "Las Animas." It wasn't until after the Mexican government took over California that many land grant petitions were accepted.

On May 10, 1825, the pueblo community assembled in the plaza, now the site of the Fairmont Hotel, to take the oath of obedience to the constitution of Mexico. Alcalde Joaquin Higuera administered the oath. As hands were raised and the voices of this grand community filled the spring day, the Spaniards, known as "gente de razon" or people of reason, became a part of California history.

**Marco's Chaboya's death**

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Santa Clara University archives record Marco’s death in the year 1809. Pedro Chaboya, the oldest of Marco and Teresa’s 14 children, took his place as head of the Chaboya family at the age of 19.

Known as Don Pedro Chaboya—the “Don” meaning mister or the Spanish title for gentleman—he married Gertrudis Ortega. They had 13 children with 10 of them recorded as baptized at Mission Santa Clara.

His brothers and sisters, now growing into young adults, found their place in the community and seemingly took advantage of the opportunities that existed in this lush land of plenty.

Arranged marriages joined the Chaboyas to old and prosperous families. Land grants, some exceedingly large, with pastures covered with thousands of cattle, would make the Chaboya family an intricate part of the history of early Santa Clara valley. Their mother, Maria Teresa Bernal Chaboya, died in 1830.

According to Soberanes, then 70-year-old Don Pedro was still living in San Jose in 1860. Pedro’s land grant was small in comparison to many others of that time. He was granted “Lot 6 of the 500-acre lot survey,” often referred to as “500 – Acre Lot,” “Pueblo Lot” or “Pueblo Farm Lot.” Although the land was to cover 500 acres, when surveyed for his patent, it was only 366.29 acres. (1968 Arbuckle)

This land was located along the southern edge of the Pueblo, which would now be identified as stretching from Tully Road, South First Street and Coyote Creek.

Surrounded by huge land grants on all sides, Pedro became the neighbor of Bernal’s “Rancho Santa Teresa” on the south, “San Juan Bautista Narvaez Rancho” belonging to Jose Agustin Narvaez in 1844 along the west, his brother, Antonio Chaboya’s “Rancho Yerba Buena y Socayre” on the east and the Pueblo of San Jose on the north.

The 1876 Thompson and West Atlas clearly show Chaboya property surveyed that year along Monterey Road just North of Oak Hill Cemetery and lots belonging to S. Chabolla, J.Chabolla, I. Chabolla de Ortega and Salvadore Chabolla (Chaboya).

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Marcos Chaboya–Maria Teresa de Jesus Bernal children

Marcos Chaboya and Maria Teresa de Jesus Bernal raised their large family in San Jose. Many of the children were baptized at the Mission in Santa Clara, and a few at Mission Dolores in San Francisco. Of the 14 children born to Marcos and Teresa, nine can be traced through marriage records. The other five children were baptized, but no further records have been found, so they may have died as infants.

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<th>Name</th>
<th>Baptism</th>
<th>Marriage</th>
<th>Mission</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Pedro Regalado</td>
<td>May 23, 1790</td>
<td>Dolores</td>
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<td>3. Manuela</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1818 Sant Clara</td>
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<td>4. Jose Luis</td>
<td>Aug. 26, 1793</td>
<td>Santa Clara</td>
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<td>5. Jose de la Cruz</td>
<td>March 29, 1796</td>
<td>Dolores</td>
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<td>6. Maria Guadalupe</td>
<td>Feb. 14, 1798</td>
<td>Santa Clara</td>
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<td>7. Augustina</td>
<td>Oct. 8, 1799</td>
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<td>8. Jose Loreto</td>
<td>Dec. 13, 1800</td>
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<td>9. Xavier y Antonio</td>
<td>Dec. 9, 1803</td>
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<td>10. Antonio de Jesus</td>
<td>Aug. 19, 1805</td>
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<td>11. Lugarda</td>
<td>April 23, 1807</td>
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<td>12. Francisco Augustin</td>
<td>Oct. 18, 1808</td>
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<td>13. Mariana</td>
<td>July 10, 1810</td>
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<td>14. Anastacio</td>
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