

MEXICAN LAND GRANTS IN TEHAMA COUNTY

By [Grace] Alice Jackson

In the years between Spain's claim to California and its becoming the 31st state, a great portion of California that was not claimed by the missions or the grantees of Spanish land grants was free for the asking under Mexican law. Many U. S. citizens qualified by converting to Catholicism, marrying a Mexican woman, and being willing to occupy the land, which included building a dwelling and raising livestock. Some also received grants because of military service.

According to *Land in California* by William W. Robinson, pages 63-64:

"The rancho map of California in the year 1846, when Mexican rule ended, shows rancheros owning much of the best land around the San Francisco Bay region, in what became the counties of Marin, Sonoma, Napa, Solano, Contra Costa, Alameda, and San Mateo. ... The entire coastal area from San Francisco to San Diego ... was principally rancho land. In addition, and of more recent origin, was the thin line of ranchos following the Sacramento River up from John Sutter's Fort (established in 1839) and down along the Upper San Joaquin, ... These "central valley" ranchos were held largely by men of Anglo-Saxon or other European origin who had been coming into California during the 'forties, who had become naturalized to qualify for landownership, and who disregarded the Indian menace that had held back native Spanish Californians from making use of this land. ... Among them ... were such men as William B. Ide, William G. Chard, Albert G. Toomes, Robert H. Thomas <sic>, Peter Lassen, ..."

Seven Mexican land grants, five totally within and two partially in the present boundaries of Tehama County, were granted in 1844 by Mexican Governor Manuel Micheltoarena. *Spanish & Mexican Land Grants in California* by Rose H. Avina, reprinted 1973 by R. & E. Research Assoc., indicates that approval was recorded for all but two, those of Peter Lassen and Job Dye. Six of the grantees were to men of Anglo-Saxon or European descent. The exception was a Mexican woman, Dona Maria Josefa Soto, the widow of Gilano Cano, who was chief of police of Monterey in 1836 [*Tehama County Pioneers*, compiled by Keith Lingenfelter].

Others, who may or may not have filed and just "squatted" on the land, became residents, but were not granted land. The better-known ones were William C. Moon, Henry L. Ford, and Ezekiel Merritt. They left their marks on the history of this area, too. Ford received a Bounty Grant Patent for 160 acres of land for service in the Mexican War and was co-owner with Moon of "Moon House." This building was said to have been the first timbered house in the area. It served as a tavern, saloon, and store. Moon obtained title to his land by a school warrant in 1854 and he also ran a ferry. Merritt, a cousin of Ford's, was a clerk and ferryman as well as farmer ["The Bear Flaggers", by Keith Lingenfelter, *Wagon Wheels*, February 1978, page 4, Colusi County Historical Society].

California was admitted to the Union on September 9, 1850. In 1851, the U. S. Senate and the House of Representatives passed an act to settle land ownership, especially that related to the Spanish and Mexican land grants. Claimants had only two years to present their documents and witnesses before the three commissioners

appointed by the President to review land claims. Most sessions were held in San Francisco, where the board approved about one third of the 811 claims. Others took decades to be settled, some in courts of law. If approved, they ultimately received a patent [*A Self-governing Dominion, California, 1849-1860*, by William Henry Ellison, University of California Press]. News of Toomes' patent made headlines in the *Red Bluff Beacon*, December 9, 1857.

The five grants totally within the present Tehama County boundaries are Rancho de la Barranca Colorado (Belden), Rancho de las Flores (Chard), Rancho de los Berrendos (Dye), Rancho de los Saucos (Thomes), and Rancho del Rio de los Molinos (Toomes). The two partially in Tehama County are Rancho Capay (Soto, de Soto, Cano, or Stokes) and Rancho Bosquejo (Lassen). Capay is partly in Glenn County and Rancho Bosquejo partly in Butte County.

Transcripts of proceedings to clear title to their lands in 1852 show that when Chard, Thomes, and Toomes arrived on their ranchos in early November, 1845, Lassen had established a home and planted crops on his grant.

Rancho de la Barranca Colorado (Red Bluffs): Josiah Belden received 17,707.49 acres, four square leagues of land, bordered by Red Bank Creek on the north, and the Sacramento River on the east, and Chard's grant on the south.

California Through Four Centuries, by Phil Townsend Hanna, 1935 Ferris Printing Co., p 70, tells that Belden arrived in California with the first emigrant train from mid-western United States, with Capt. John Bartleson leading a party of 32 men, one woman, and one child. John Bidwell also arrived in this group.

Bidwell was one of the organizers of the expedition, formed by a group, which met at Sapling Grove [now Kansas], called The Western Emigration Society in May 1841. The group arrived in the San Joaquin Valley in November of that year [*A History of California, The American Period*, by Robert Glass Clelland, 1922 The Macmillan Co., pages 100-107].

Belden, a naturalized Mexican citizen, did not live on the land granted to him and made an arrangement for William B. Ide [later of the Bear Flag Revolt] to establish his family on the rancho for three years and act as Belden's agent in exchange for the northern half of the land. Belden was 38 and a resident of San Jose in 1849 when he sold the southern half to Ide and his family. Belden's wife, Sarah Margaret Belden, relinquished her rights in 1851.

Ide was the eldest of these first settlers, born in Rutland, Massachusetts in 1796 and raised in Vermont. He married Susan G. Haskell in 1820. His marriage may be the reason that he did not apply for a Mexican land grant, as he was not free to marry a Mexican citizen. Ide was a carpenter, a surveyor, and taught school along the way as his family gradually migrated west, with temporary residences in Kentucky, Ohio, and Illinois. They joined a wagon train, headed by John Grigsby, in Independence, Missouri, headed for Oregon in the spring of 1845. Some of the party, including Ide, veered off at Fort Hall [now Idaho] for California, arriving at Sutter's Fort on November 1, 1845. Ide worked for a time for John Sutter then moved north and worked briefly on Peter Lassen's Rancho Bosquejo. Ide was on the Rancho de la Barranca periodically until his death, by smallpox, in October 1852 [*Inn-California*, An Online Magazine, 1997, Cristalen, www.inn-california.com/Articles/biographic/idebio.html].

Rancho de las Flores (Flowers): William [Guillermo] George Chard was granted 13,315.58 acres, three-square leagues, the smallest of the five grants. It was bounded

by Elder Creek on the south and the Sacramento River on the east. It was a sort of triangular piece going to a point to the west.

In the transcripts of proceedings of 1852 to clear title to their lands, Chard said he was born about 1808 in Columbia County, New York and came to California about 1832. He traveled from New Mexico with trappers Cyrus Alexander and Samuel Carpenter according to Keith Lingenfelter's "Mexican Land Grants of Tehama County", published in the *Red Bluff Daily News, Weekender* December 10, 1977 and condensed in the Tehama County Genealogical and Historical Society 1978 *Memories*. It is believed he lived in Los Angeles for four years, where he owned a vineyard before he moved to the Santa Barbara area.

The marriage of Chard to the daughter of Castilian Robles, Maria Esteven Robles, about 1837 is listed in Lingenfelter's *Tehama County Pioneers*.

In late 1845, he became Superintendent of the Almaden quicksilver mine in Santa Clara County, where he was employed until August 1846 according to his deposition dated December 15, 1858, for "The United States vs Andres Castillero," *De Argento Vivo*.

On February 25, 1851, he was elected an officer for the County of Colusi, parent county of the southern portion of the present Tehama County. In August of that year he was absent from the county but had submitted his tax assessment list. It was not well received as it was "so indefinitely expressed that it was utterly impossible to equalize the said lists" [*Colusa County History & Resources* by Justus H. Rogers, reprinted 1970 by *California Traveler*]. His family was listed with its five children in the 1852 state census as living in Santa Clara County.

In the 1880 *History of Tehama County* Chard's son-in-law, Edward Jefferson Lewis, wrote that Chard built the first house on the Rancho, a log cabin known as "Sacramento House," in 1846 and that:

"In 1853 he sent for his family ...he built them a home on the bank of the Sacramento, a little north of Elder Creek. The site of the house has long ago been washed away by the swift waters of the river. In 1855 or '56, W. G. Chard moved to Elder Creek, where now stands the old adobe home ... It is a comfortable one-story and a half building, arranged after the style of plantation houses in the South; is in a fair state of preservation ... (located) on the bank of Elder Creek, the site was chosen ... because R. H. Thomes ... built him (self) a home on the south bank, so the two could be neighbors." The location of the adobe home was marked "The Homestead Tract" in various deeds. On November 4, 1856, Chard was elected as Tehama County Treasurer.

On July 24, 1857, a fire that almost took the life of Mrs. Chard destroyed the Chard home. "The house was not of much value, but contained many valuable papers, some of which Mr. Chard had been in possession as far back as 24 years, when first he became a resident of California" [*Red Bluff Beacon*, July 29, 1857]. The "old adobe" on Elder Creek mentioned by E. J. Lewis probably replaced this burned home.

Chard was a businessman as well as a rancher. He and his partner, Charles Harvey, were advertising in the *Red Bluff Beacon* in 1858-9, selling buggies in Tehama. In February 1858, Chard and Daniel Finch purchased 180 acres from Toomes on the east side of the river where they ran a ferry across the Sacramento River. The deed is recorded in Deed Book A, page 446.

The account of the death, by his own hand, of William George Chard on a portion of the rancho in September 1877 appeared in the *Tehama Tocsin*, September 20, 1877. He was buried in the Tehama Cemetery on the Chard lot beside his wife, who

died March 17, 1871. He had either given to his family or sold almost all of the rancho according to deeds in the Tehama County records.

Rancho El Primer Cañon or del Rio de Los Berrendos (River of the Antelopes):

Job Francis Dye received 26,637.11 acres, six square leagues, on the east side of the Sacramento River, reaching from the Hogsback area in the foothills to the river and south to Dye Creek.

Lingenfelter, in *Tehama County Pioneers*, lists that Dye was born January 17, 1807, in Allen County, Kentucky. He joined a trapping party in Taos, New Mexico in October 1831 with Ewen [or Ewing] Young. On March 14, 1832, they arrived in "Pueblo de Los Angeles." He hunted sea otters for Mission San Luis under contract with the padre and was joint owner of an early sawmill in the Santa Cruz mountains, the first power sawmill built in California [*A History of the Winterhalder Family in Santa Cruz County*, ©Geoffrey Dunn 1996, posted on Santa Cruz Public Library website].

In 1839, Dye married Escolastica Rodriques, a niece of Governor Alvarado and a Mexican citizen. This marriage apparently ended in divorce because in 1853 in Kentucky, he married Sarah Adeline Herrall of Tennessee. There were children by both these wives [*Tehama County Pioneers*].

Escolastica F. Dye, a resident of Santa Clara County, sold and quitclaimed her interest in the ranch and other pieces of land for \$2,000 to her former husband, Job F. Dye, on July 29, 1859 [Deed Book B, page 281]. His many business activities kept him away from the rancho, but he did build a home and stock the grant. He had the first commercial peach orchard in Northern California according to *History of the Los Molinos Land Company*, by Margaret Bauer, August 1970, page 10.

In the spring of 1850 Dye was a partner in a grocery firm in Sacramento [*Sacramento County Biographies*, www.cagenweb.com/archives/Biographies/sacramento/sac-boot.htm]. He sold or lost his many interests in the rancho after the death of his wife Sarah on March 6, 1862, and the accidental drowning of their daughter Amanda July 1, 1862. He moved from Tehama County, possibly to Santa Cruz County where he married Jemima Boyce, May 19, 1873. He died there March 4, 1883 [*Tehama County Pioneers*]. His remains were said to have returned to Red Bluff for burial beside Sarah and Amanda, but there is no marker near their graves in Oak Hill Cemetery.

Rancho de las Saucos (Of The Elders): Robert Hasty Thomes received 22,212.21 acres, five square leagues, immediately south of Chard's grant and north of Thomes Creek.

This native of Cumberland County, Maine was born June 16, 1817. He arrived in California in Yerba Buena, now San Francisco, in November 1841 with the Bartleson Party, along with John Bidwell and Josiah Belden.

In a statement by Pearson B. Reading in 1852 in a transcript of proceedings to clear title to Thomes land, Thomes took possession of his ranch in 1845 and built a "substantial log house" in March 1852. The location of Thomes' beautiful residence is marked on the 1887 Tehama County map south of Elder Creek, not far from the portion of the Chard grant called "the homestead." The mansion was probably the third home on the rancho.

The City of Tehama developed on the land of Thomes' grant. It was the first county seat and the last stop for the riverboats for a few years. When the boats started going

further up the river, Red Bluff became the center of trade and the county seat according to E. J. Lewis in *History of Tehama County*.

Thomes did not marry but is said to have taken the oath of allegiance to Mexico. He may have also been aided in qualifying for a grant because of his association with Toomes as stated by Toomes in an interview in *The Stockton Daily Independent*, October 30, 1868. He died March 26, 1878. His two sisters and a brother-in-law share the Thomes monument in the Tehama Cemetery. His will mentions a nephew, Oren Scott Thomes per *Tehama County Pioneers*.

Rancho Rio de Los Molinos (River of The Mills): Albert Gallatin Toomes was granted a long narrow piece of land on the east side of the Sacramento River between Toomes Creek and Dye Creek, containing 22,172.46 acres or five square leagues.

He was born December 25, 1817, in Missouri according to his gravestone in the Tehama Cemetery. After missing a connection with the Bidwell group, he and others attached themselves to a trading caravan traveling on the Santa Fe Trail. When they reached New Mexico, they joined the Workman/Rowland party and continued to California via the Old Spanish Trail, according to *California Pioneers*, by John W. Caughey, 1953 Prentice-Hall, pages 213-214. They arrived in California about 1841.

In Yerba Buena he met Thomes, and they became partners in the carpentry business. They later moved to Monterey where Toomes married Maria Isabel Lorenzana on June 17, 1844. They had one adopted daughter, Nellie Helen, who died in Tehama September 2, 1888, per Lingenfelter in *Tehama County Pioneers*.

The *Colusa County History & Resources* states that Toomes served on the Grand Jury in Colusa County in 1852. When Tehama County formed in 1856, he was elected as one of the first supervisors and served eight years on the board [*History of Tehama County*]. According to the *Red Bluff Beacon*, July 21, 1858, he was a delegate to the Tehama County Democratic Convention, along with his neighbors Chard, Dye, and Chard's future son-in-law, E. J. Lewis. In addition to politics, he was involved with agriculture and the Tehama County Jockey Club. Horse racing was a big sport with these early settlers.

The following was abstracted from an interview with Toomes printed in *The Stockton Daily Independent*, October 30, 1868:

“...when Thomes and self got the ranchos up here from Micheltoreno and Jimena the place was out of the world...That house we built in Monterey for Governor Jimena in 1845, was one of the best jobs we ever did in our lives; for the old gentleman not only paid us well; but got us our farms without any of the trouble others had. ...When I arrived on the coast, in different parts of the county were the following old American and foreign settlers: ...At Santa Cruz; ...William Chard ...”

Basically, these rancho owners were land rich and cash poor. After they received their final patents on the land, several of them began to sell portions of their land grants. Toomes ran an ad in the *Beacon* in September 1861 listing “Some of the finest farming and grazing land in the State” for sale “At low Rates.”

Rancho Bosquejo (The Wooded Ranch): Peter Lassen received his grant of 22,206.27 acres, five square leagues, on the Sacramento River south of Toomes Creek.

Lassen was a blacksmith by trade and a native of Denmark, born October 31, 1800, near Copenhagen. Lassen emigrated in 1831, living in Boston, then Missouri. He

joined a group bound for California and Oregon in 1839. He traveled extensively before he petitioned for land on the east side of the Sacramento River in 1843 [*The Life of Peter Lassen*, a thesis by Gerald Richard Lathrop, 1974].

Lassen had built a home on his land, Rancho Bosquejo, had livestock, and had planted crops by late 1845. He is said to have traveled to Los Angeles to buy Mission grape cuttings for the rancho so he could produce wine. He may have introduced the raising of cattle to this area.

He lived on the rancho briefly and began selling his interests as early as 1847. A man named Henry Gerke purchased much of it. Lassen was killed near the Black Rock Range in what is now Nevada in April 1859 by either bandits or Indians [*The Life of Peter Lassen*] and is buried there. The rancho later became the property of Leland Stanford.

Rancho Capay (Southern Wintu word meaning stream): Josefa Soto received the largest grant of 44,388.17 acres, ten square leagues.

She may have qualified for the grant as a widow. In *A Conversation with Dona Maria Josefa Soto De Cano, First Resident of the Adobe*, which can be found online at: www.stokesrestaurant.com/About/FirstResident.pdf, Gilano [or Gil] Cano, her first husband, was a soldier in the Mexican Army.

She was a widow with four [or five] children when she married James Stokes who came to California as an English sailor in 1840. He was a doctor, druggist, and mayor of Monterey. She and James Stokes had five more children. Some of her children inherited the Capay Rancho and later deeded their interests to others [*Tehama County Pioneers*].

From *The History of Stokes Adobe*, www.stokesrestaurant.com/About/History.pdf it appears doubtful that with their busy life in Monterey that she ever lived on the Rancho. Josefa died in 1855.