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THE ESTUDILLO HOME

by

Don Morton

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The historic Estudillo Home is situated at 1291 Carpenter Street, San Leandro, Alameda County, California.¹ It is a few blocks southeast of State Highway seventeen, known as the Oakland-San Jose road; or Washington Street in San Leandro.² The site of the Estudillo Home of the former San Leandro Rancho (1842) is nine and one-half miles east of downtown Oakland. It is located directly opposite the present site of the Catholic Church, between the San Leandro Creek and the City Hall Park (formerly "Estudillo Square").³ Transportation facilities are along East 14th Street near the City Hall, San Leandro.

According to historical records the first civilized white men to see and explore the region of Alameda County and locale of the Estudillo ranch occurred about 170 years ago. It happened when the leather-jacketed scout, Ortega, made the four-day inland observation trip from the Portolá base-camp near Palo Alto. It was during the week of November 7, 1769.⁴ They were looking for the Bay of Monterey discovered by Vizcaino (1602). But, what is believed to have been the first party of white men to explore the immediate vicinity and site of the Estudillo Home along the San Leandro Creek occurred about one year after the famous Portolá expedition. It is credited to Don Pedro Fages when he made his first exploration trip from Monterey to San Francisco in November, 1770.⁵ In recording the day's journey through land seventy-two years later to become the easterly

boundary of the Estudillo tract (San Leandro Rancho, 1842), Don Pedro Fages said in part:⁶

November 28 [1770]...Four soldiers set out to explore the country, and at night returned saying that they had traveled about seven leagues to the north; that the country was very good and level [East bay region]; that they had seen many tracts of cloven hoofs which they thought were of buffalo; that close to the hills which they passed at the right were some springs of water...

Hence, the "springs of water" (present locale of Lake Chabot) first discovered by the Fages scouts in 1770 are believed to be identical to "the five or six springs"⁷ referred to, within the Estudillo litigation trial, (1852-1857) as the easterly boundary of the Estudillo tract of land. The "drainings of the Springs" was also mentioned as the "east boundary" by Governor Alvarado at Monterey a decade earlier (1842), when he granted the San Leandro Rancho to Don José Joaquín Estudillo.⁸

The name "Estudillo" is well known in the annals of California history. It is said that it reflects the Castilian hospitality of the days that were in San Leandro. Don José Maria Estudillo was the founder of the Estudillo family in California. He arrived during the period of 1790-1800.⁹ His son Don José Joaquín was the "founder of San Leandro." The latter was a Mexican by birth.¹⁰ The father Don José Maria was a faithful soldier. His wife was Gertrudis Horcasitas. From about 1815 to 1820 Don José Maria Estudillo was known as a lieutenant. He was Comandante of Monterey until 1820. The "founder of San Leandro," Don José Joaquín Estudillo, was born in 1798.¹¹

Like his father, Don José Joaquín Estudillo was also

a faithful officer. He was in the military service for a period of seventeen years, four months, and seven days.¹² Don José Joaquín entered the military service in 1815 at Monterey. He was transferred to the San Francisco Company in 1816. He held the place as a cadet until he left the service in 1823. It is said Don José Joaquín accompanied Luis Argüello on the expedition to the far north in 1821.¹³ In 1836 he was appointed Alcalde at San Francisco. It is believed that Don José Joaquín Estudillo moved on the land that was to be the "Estudillo Home" during the period of 1832-1836. This appears substantiated from abstracts among the many official depositions made at the trial during the Estudillo land litigation proceedings held in San Francisco. José Castro testified that he had known San Leandro Rancho "from about the year 1832," three years prior to the downfall of the Spanish mission system and the secularization of Mission San José. It had been mission land. According to the deposition of José Martínez the San Leandro Rancho existed as early as 1829. The following are each of their statements. José Castro said:¹⁴

I have known the Rancho from about the year 1832 [Locale of Estudillo tract was still under supervision of Mission San José]... I was acquainted with José Joaquín Estudillo. He lived on the said Rancho from about the year 1832 until his death [1852]... Said Estudillo and Guillermo Castro both applied to Governor Alvarado for the same land and the controversy was referred to me by the Governor as Prefect... The land of Estudillo being towards the bay and Castro's toward the mountains... In 1838 there was a small Indian habitation on the land [Mission Indians; formerly home of the native "San Leandro Indians," originally known as the Saklan tribe of the Costanoan nation of Indians].¹⁵... The Governor told me they might remain on the land...

During the same day, February 4, 1853, José Martínez testified. He said:¹⁶

I am acquainted with the Rancho San Leandro and have known it from the year 1829. It was the first land on which the cattle of the Mission of San José ranged and in 1836 it was occupied by Estudillo and he has occupied it since 1853...

At first he built a house and occupied it near the San Leandro creek and toward the lower part of the land... Then he built another house a mile up the creek Present site of the Estudillo Home. Afterwards when these lands were exhausted he cultivated other lands on the San Lorenzo creek towards the upper part of the rancho and built a small house there for his servants...

The San Leandro Rancho was officially granted to Don José Joaquín Estudillo, October 16, 1842 by Governor Juan B. Alvarado.¹⁷ It consisted of one square league, or approximately ten square miles of land. It was patented July 15, 1863.¹⁸ The acreage which originally surrounded what is now the historic Estudillo Home extended between the two famous creeks, San Leandro and San Lorenzo; and from the San Francisco Bay¹⁹ inland to about Mills College.²⁰

Don José Joaquín Estudillo died in San Leandro on June 7, 1852.²¹ He left nine children. The oldest daughter Concepción married John B. Ward.²² María de Jesús became the wife of William H. Davis in 1847. Davis is the author of Seventy-five years in California. The other daughters Magdalene and Dolores married some years later. It is said Magdalene married John Nugent and Dolores married Charles H. Cushing.²³ Among the five sons of José Joaquín, Antonio remained unmarried. He continued to live in San Leandro. The other brothers Luis, Ramon, Vicente, and Jesus Maria moved to Oakland, San Francisco,

and San Luis Obispo.

There were several homes of the pioneer Estudillo family in San Leandro. It is said by José Martínez (1853) that Don José Joaquín Estudillo built his first residence about 1837.²⁴ The first home constructed on the former San Leandro Rancho stood about one mile below the present site of the landmark, "Estudillo Home." It is believed to have been located more toward San Leandro Creek and near the present estuary. The second house was built about thirteen years later (1850). Estudillo had planted and cultivated wheat some years before he constructed his second residence. His "first home" was the original ranch house during the period when he raised more than 3,000 head of livestock.²⁵ It occurred shortly after the secularization of the mission system of the late 1830's. The "home of 1837" was built by mission Indian labor. It was an adobe residence. The "home of 1850" standing at 1291 Carpentier Street within the city of San Leandro is today (1939) recognized as the registered landmark, number 279.

The Estudillo Home on Carpentier Street was constructed of adobe brick. It is said the big earthquake of 1868 severely damaged the Estudillo Home. "One of Señor Estudillo's sons was standing in the casement window in the rear of the home and the force of the shock caused he and the window casing to fall to the ground without serious injury."²⁶ In 1869 the home was reinforced with woodwork. The building consists of fourteen rooms. The first floor is situated directly on the ground. Here the kitchen and dining room were located. A large wine cellar and another store room lead off from a wide hall. One of the rooms

on the ground floor was occupied by Indian servants. There are wide steps leading to the upper story. It is surrounded by a large balcony on two sides.²⁷ The living quarters occupied the upper portion with bedrooms leading off on either side of a long hall. It is said that the room directly front on left is where "the mission Padres were wont to tarry and rest on their weary pilgrimages between the two missions San Jose and Sonoma."²⁸ Communion and wedding rites were held in this room.

Today (1939) one may still stroll around the yard and observe the colorful days that were. In front of the Estudillo Home is the large stump said to be the first pepper tree planted in Alameda County. What is believed to be one of the oldest black fig trees is located in the rear of the historic landmark. It is claimed to be more than eighty-five years old. The tree still bears fruit. The large pear tree on the west side of the home is estimated to be about eighty-two years old. It is said one of the Spanish Fathers sent it to Don José Joaquín Estudillo following the Mission period.²⁹ Other trees of historic value are the two olive trees growing on the east side of the Estudillo Home. They were imported from Assyria about eighty years ago.

There is also the colorful background of the Estudillo Hotel. It links with the story of the Estudillo Home. According to history the two are often mistaken one for the other. The Estudillo Hotel was also known as the "Estudillo House" and the "Estudillo Inn." It was built a few years after the construction of the Estudillo Home. In 1855 it stood on what is now known as the Godchaux property, southeast corner of Davis and Washington Avenue. The Estudillo House, or Hotel, was renowned during the

stage coach days. It was one of the few stage stations between Oakland and San Jose. A news article of the 1850's said:³⁰

Returning from San Jose we tarried to dine at this large and commodious hotel. Situated about seven miles from San Antonio /steamer landing, near the present Lake Merritt/upon the great stage road...

We were politely shown throughout the house by the very attentive proprietor, Mr. Veassie...
... (There are) large and airy chambers with parlors attached, with openings upon the verandah, from which you have a fine view, gives to the visitors and boarders a variety of scenery...

The "stage station" or hotel was built by Charles Ray in 1851.³¹ It was a two-story frame building. The lumber it is said was brought around the Horn. In the rear of the place grew an immense grapevine. It was planted from a slip taken from the Peralta Rancho. In advertising the Estudillo House, or Hotel, another item said:³²

Stages leave San Antonio immediately on the arrival of the boat, and return in season to meet her on her return trip...

The Estudillo title at San Leandro, is a great bar to improvement, by reason of the difficulty of adjusting it so as to have good improvements to go on. There is no finer spot of country in the world. In richness of soil, in beauty of scenery...and we would say to our city friends if you have the blues or are a little dyspeptic, go over the bay; visit the Estudillo House, and you will be restored to perfect health...

Charles McLaughlin ran the stage from Oakland via the "Estudillo Hotel" to San Jose in 1853-1854. Duncan Cameron ran in opposition to him.³³ A letter from San Leandro or San Antonio to San Francisco cost twenty-five cents. "Even from San Antonio to Oakland, the distance of some two miles, the fee was twenty-five cents. This is beyond reason; and this exorbitant rate makes the business small; for the people won't stand it."³⁴ The

two lines passed through Alvarado and Centerville. "Cameron used California bronchos for his stages and mudwagons; he tamed and subdued them to a certain extent, but they were always wild and largely unmanageable. When they started, after being held until hitched, it was almost like a Roman chariot race to see them going at full speed through mud and water."³⁵ About 1855-1856 Duncan Cameron got the mail contract from Charles McLaughlin. The stage was also driven for some time by "Charlie Parkhurst." "He," was a woman. The secret being revealed by death. It further stated that many famous bicycle races of the pioneer Oakland days started from this old hotel. At one time the "Estudillo House" was the Alameda County Court House. It was originally located in Martin's Restaurant.³⁶ "It [San Leandro] gained the county seat in 1854, but did not actually obtain it till 1856."³⁷ The town of Alvarado was the first county seat. It is said the first hanging to take place in Alameda County occurred on the site of the former Estudillo Hotel. The old hotel was razed in 1929 to make way for a modern store.³⁸

The first American settlers who took up land within the vicinity of the Estudillo Home along the present Carpentier Street were called "squatters." They arrived during the gold-rush period of 1849-1852. In 1852 they took possession of the entire plain between the site of the Estudillo Home and the San Lorenzo Creek. "What is now San Lorenzo was known as Squatterville. They found their chief attractions apparently on the Estudillo Rancho, for it was to that portion of Eden township that their attentions were principally turned."³⁹ The Estudillo tract (San Leandro Rancho) was believed to be government land.

It was not until after five years of litigation that the squatters were disabused of this belief.⁴⁰

However, from the outcome of the Estudillo litigation proceedings in 1852-1857 caused by the small land claims of the so-called squatters, it seems evident that these early American pioneers were instrumental in the opening and establishment of San Leandro in the early 1850's. It led to the incorporation of the present, beautiful flower city in 1872 wherein stands the historic Estudillo Home as an immortal-like California landmark about a century old.

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