

# P E R A L T A

## HACIENDA HISTORICAL PARK

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### **Rancho San Antonio** The Peralta Land Grant

A land grant was a gift of land from the governor of California. The governors who worked for the King of Spain gave out very few. But the king's last governor, Sola, gave Don Luis Peralta one of the biggest grants in California history, over 44,800 acres. It covered the modern cities of Albany, Berkeley, Emeryville, Oakland, Piedmont, Alameda, and northern San Leandro. Do you live on Rancho San Antonio land?

Luis Peralta got all that land in 1820 as a reward for 40 years of military service to the king. Not many soldiers got a land grant. Don Luis was a soldier and also a royal commissioner who took care of the town of San Jose. He worked very hard to help the people make San Jose a better place to live. He did a very good job.

Don Luis lived in San Jose until he died in 1851. He was very old then. Before he died he gave away his property to his children. He gave his three married daughters cattle for their ranchos. He gave his two unmarried daughters the family home and all of his lands and orchards in San Jose. He then divided Rancho San Antonio between his four sons, telling them to work together on the land for the good of the whole family.

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Antonio Peralta was the first to move to Rancho San Antonio. He and his family lived in what is now the Fruitvale district. They lived in the first adobe house built in the East Bay. Ignacio Peralta built his house in what is now San Leandro. Domingo Peralta's family lived in what is now Berkeley and Vicente Peralta built his family home in what is now the Temescal district of north Oakland. The four brothers, their families, the ranch workers, and their families (many of them Native people) made up the first Spanish speaking community in the East Bay.

The people of the Kingdom of New Spain grew tired of Spanish control. They, like the Americans, rebelled against their European governors. They won in 1821 and many new countries were created from Chile to Mexico. The brand new country of Mexico claimed Alta California as a territory.

When Spain ruled California the people here could only sell their goods to other people in the Spanish empire. And the Spanish rulers set all the prices. When Mexico took over, the Californios were allowed to trade with anyone they wanted to and charge whatever they could get for their goods. Foreign trade ships came from as far away as China in the west and Boston (USA) in the east.

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The traders came here to get hides and tallow from the cattle raised on California's ranchos. The hides were made into leather. Leather was used in all parts of life in those days. They made it into shoes, boots, hats, coats, hinges, aprons, holsters, buckets, harnesses, suitcases, book covers, saddles, purses, chaps, buttons, boxes, as well as lots of other stuff. It was used in making many more things: parts of stage coaches, cameras, suspenders, swords, baskets, baseballs, hatbands, tents, fire hoses, and much more. Most important for the Boston traders were the machine belts they could make from the strong California leather. The people around Boston were building water-powered factories. They used a big wheel in the water to catch the power of a river and make it turn another wheel inside. Then they moved the power from the inside wheel to the factory's machines that all had little wheels, with strong leather belts. They needed a lot of strong leather, and they paid a lot for it. The Rancheros got rich. The Californios also sold tallow. That is the fat from inside big animals. California cattle had 50 to 100 pounds of tallow per animal. Tallow made very good candles and soap. It was also used to grease wagon wheels and all those new machines. People had all kinds of uses for tallow then, even medicine – the rub-on kind.

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The Californios had lived as poor struggling pioneers for over 50 years, but in the 1830s and 40s some became very rich. Antonio built a new adobe that was twice as big as their old house. The rancheros bought beautiful clothes, nice china and silverware, fancy saddles with silver inlay. The ladies had silk party dresses and large parties called Fandangos were held on ranchos. These fiestas usually went on for days. There was feasting, music, dance, bullfights, even bear and bull fights, and always horse racing.

When gold was discovered in California in 1848 people rushed in from all around the world. For the first few years of the gold rush Rancho San Antonio made lots of money supplying beef and flour to the miners. But soon all the easy to get gold was gone and many miners began to settle down around the Bay. The Peralta sons sold some of their land to the new immigrants. But many of the immigrants simply became squatters, stealing Peralta land and cattle.

The USA promised to respect Spanish and Mexican land grants, but going to court to prove the land grant was real cost a lot of money and took a lot of time. By 1856 when the American courts finally said that the Peraltas owned the land, the sons had sold a lot of land to pay for lawyers. Then a group of squatters complained to the court and the

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Peraltas had to go to court again and lost more land just to pay the costs of going to court. The rancho was shrinking fast. The Peraltas sold some land for good prices before court costs and swindlers took it all. In 1897 Antonio's daughter Inez Galindo sold the last 18 acres of Antonio's land.

Today you can see the name Peralta on streets and avenues, on a hospital, a college district, some elementary schools, historic sites, a cable TV channel, a winery, a group of sailors, many local businesses, a press writing award, one of America's first concrete boats, a town, and all over California's phone books. The Peraltas still live in California. The Californios and Native peoples did not disappear; their families still live here with all of us newcomers. You might even know one, and not know it!