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Sourisseau Academy

Smith-Layton Archive presents:

El Centro:

The Mexican History of Downtown San José

c1797-1960

by Margo McBane & Suzanne Guerra

Les Amis (The Friends)

August 2016

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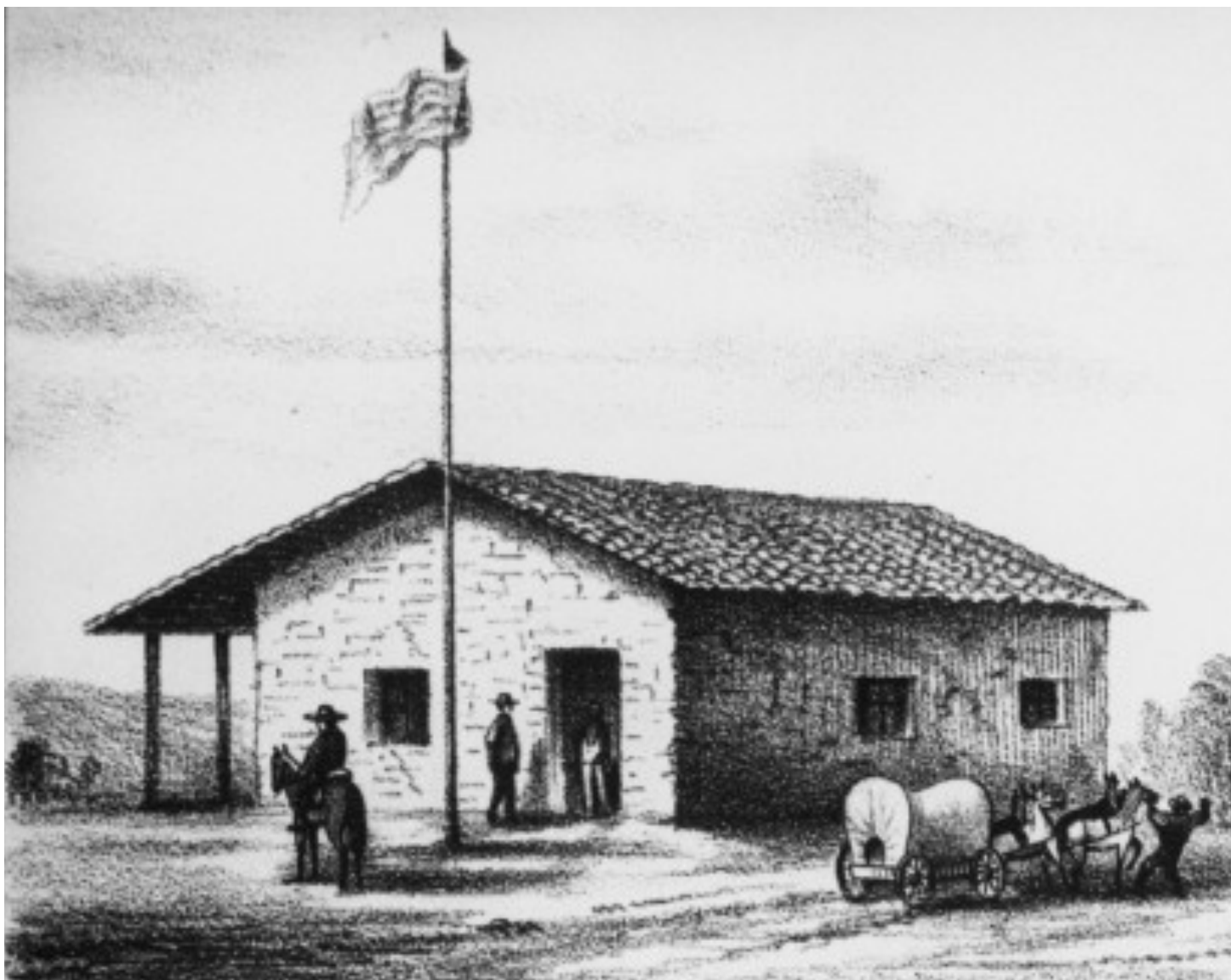
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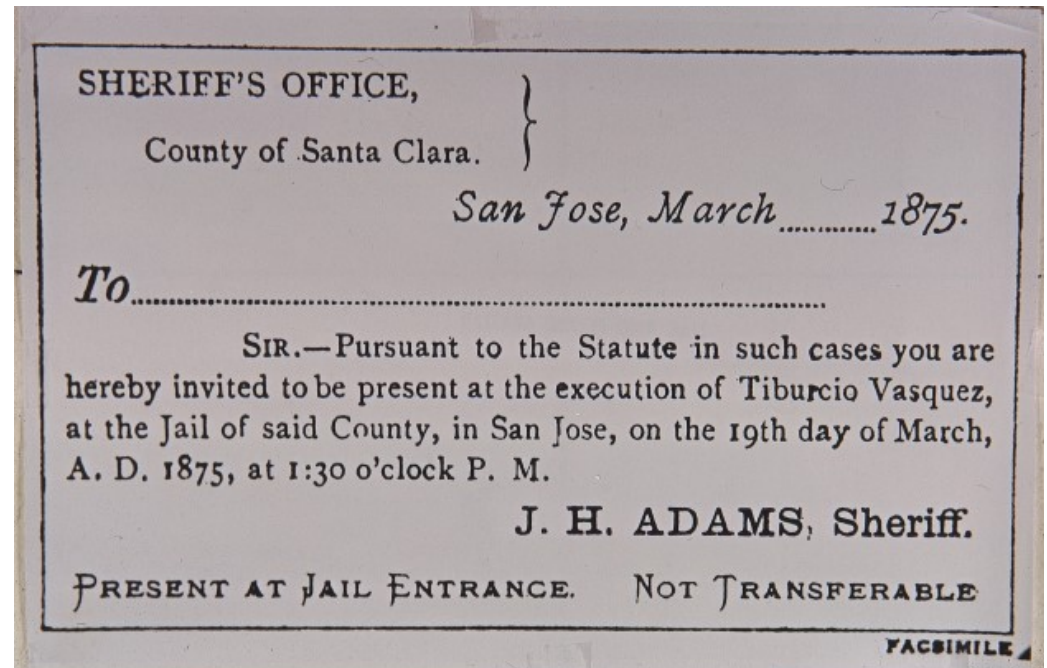
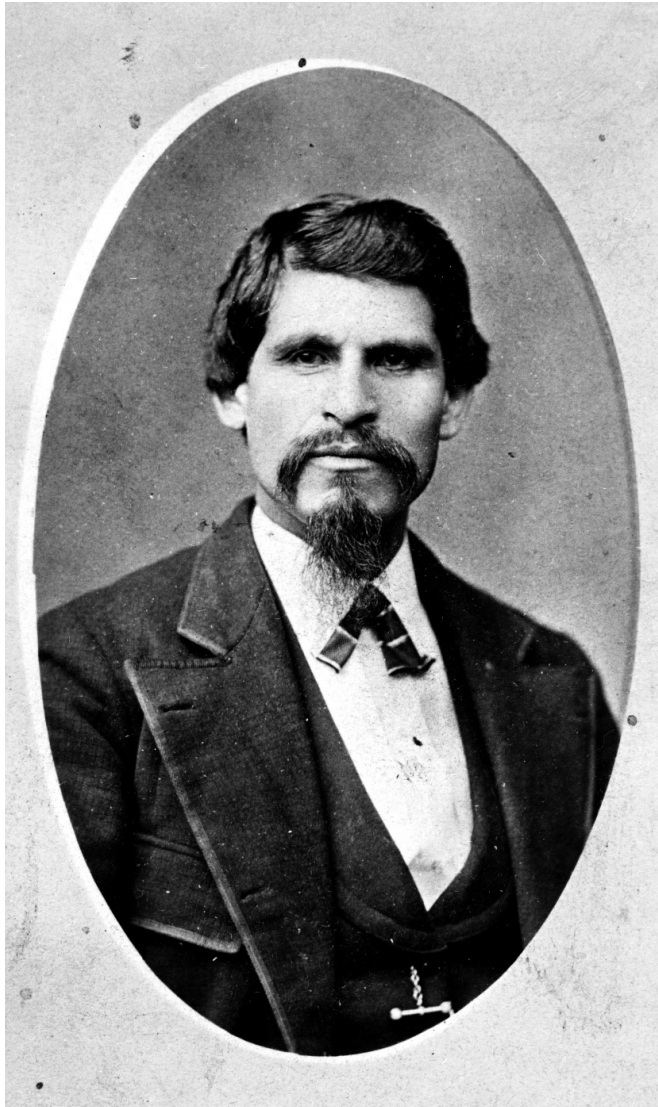
[104] **The Founding.** The 1775 Juan Bautista de Anza expedition established the first *pueblo* (civilian settlement). *El Pueblo de San José de Guadalupe* was founded in 1777 on the east bank of the Guadalupe River near Hobson Street. It was relocated due to flooding by 1797 to S. Market Street between San Carlos and St. John Streets. *El Pueblo* offered food, tradesmen, and markets to the *presidios* (military forts) in San Francisco, and land for retired soldiers. The Peralta Adobe, last of the original *Pueblo*, was built about 1797 by Apache *poblador* (settler) Manuel Gonzalez and restored in 1975. Sergeant Luis María Peralta, who acquired the adobe in 1804 upon Gonzalez's death, served as *Pueblo Comisionado* (military deputy) from 1807-1822. The adobe, located at 184 W. St. John Street, was restored in 1975 as pictured here.



[105] **Placing God at the Center.** In 1777, Mission Santa Clara was established on the west bank of the Guadalupe River, near the north end of present Mineta International Airport, to minister to and train the local native populations. The first parish church in Northern California was established in the center of *El Pueblo* in 1803 by the Franciscan Order. Most permanent buildings were constructed of adobe at that time, so the church was severely damaged in the 1818 and 1822 earthquakes and rebuilt in 1836. After American statehood, administration was turned over to the Jesuit Order in 1851. This photo shows the third St. Joseph's Church, in service between 1868 and 1875. The present St. Joseph's Cathedral was constructed in 1875 at 80 S. Market Street.



[106] **Opportunities and Transitions.** The settlers of *El Pueblo* were a New World mix of *mestizos* (Spanish and Native), *mulattos* (African and *mestizo*) and *indios* (Natives), few could claim *pureza de sangre* (pure Spanish blood). Manuel Gonzales (Native Apache) became the second *alcalde* (mayor) and occupied the *juzgado* (jail, town hall and court), built in 1798 at the intersection of Market and what is now Post Street. Spain had restricted foreign commerce and, when Mexico gained its independence in 1821, *El Pueblo* embarked on the foreign hide and tallow trade. When the U.S. flag was raised over the *juzgado* in 1846, it signaled another transition.



[107] **Californio Mexicans Reaction to American Discrimination.** As Americanization proceeded, the *Californios* faced a deteriorating economic, social and political status. In the late 1800s, banditos arose to avenge the harassment that Mexican residents endured from vigilante groups, race laws, and discriminatory practices. One bandito was Tiburcio Vasquez, an educated, bilingual member of an upper class *Californio* (early Spanish/Mexican) family. Some *Californios* considered him a “Robin Hood,” fighting against Anglo atrocities and for Mexican civil rights. Accused of crimes committed from 1854 to 1874, he was tried and convicted for one murder and executed by hanging in 1875 in the jail yard behind Santa Clara County Court House across from St. James Park.



[108] **American Economic Hegemony: The Establishment of Capitalist Agriculture.** Anglo Americans, viewing the *Californio* cattle-based hide and tallow trade as wasteful, concentrated on intensive agriculture, initially dry wheat farming (1850s-1870s). Following early experimentation with horticulture, the canning industry, established in 1872, accelerated the production of irrigated specialty fruit crops while railroads now accessed broader markets. Many *Californios* having lost land to squatters, fraud or bad debts, became wage laborers. While the availability of low cost migrant farm labor facilitated the expansion of fruit ranching in the Santa Clara Valley, the construction of new packing houses and canneries west of the Guadalupe River, north of Jackson and south of Keyes Street, drew Mexican laborers into those areas of San José. With Americanization, the commercial center of San José moved from the Spanish/Mexican *Pueblo* center on Market Street between San Fernando and St. John, to First Street in the 1850s between St. John and San Fernando.



[109] **Mythologizing the Past in the Midst of the Present.** The Fiesta De Las Rosas Parade, established in 1926 by the San José Chamber of Commerce, was one of many efforts to re-imagine California's Spanish Colonial past. In 1927, the Fiesta merged with the 150th celebration of the founding of *El Pueblo de San Jose de Guadalupe*, with the "Exposition of Progress." Anglo Americans dressed in Spanish garb rode horses, or the 91 rose covered floats, down The Alameda to San Jose. Descendants of Spanish *Californio* families were recognized as founders. Lost to them was the Mexican population that, escaping the 1910-1920 Mexican Revolution, now worked in the Santa Clara Valley.



[110] **New Visions of Home.** From the 1950s-1980s, Mexican films were shown at the former Liberty Theatre, 67 S. Market Street. Constructed in 1914 as a movie theater, silent films were accompanied by a Morton pipe organ until the "talkies" arrived. In the mid-20th Century it became The National, a foreign film venue, and in 1976 was renamed The Mexico to reflect the Spanish language movies screened by local exhibitor José Borges. San José was a major venue, and local events featured live music and guest stars at a variety of films from Latin America. The Mexico Theater closed in 1980 and was demolished in 1982.

Images on file at the Smith-Layton Archive, Sourisseau Academy for State and Local History
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[111] **Bailamos/Let's Dance!** *El Excentrico* was a bi-lingual Mexican American entertainment magazine published in San José from 1949 to 1981. San José was the regional entertainment mecca according to the *El Excentrico Magazine and Photographic Project*: "...Walking the streets of downtown San Jose in the 1950s on a Saturday night, was like walking down Broadway in New York. There were bright lights, sidewalks crowded with Mexican families, a guy who would take your picture and a month later, recognize you on the street and offer to sell you a copy. *El Excentrico* Shops were located at 195 Devine Street and 274 Terraine Street. (Photo courtesy of Zamora Family Personal Archive)



[112] **The Cultural Landscape of Integration.** Ballrooms and dance halls were often segregated until 1972. The Palomar Ballroom, opened in 1947 at 47 Notre Dame Avenue, was the first integrated ballroom in San Jose. For nearly sixty years it welcomed an integrated audience and diverse performers from Latin American and the United States with Big Band Swing, Afro Cuban and Latin Jazz, rock and roll concerts, Disco and emerging Norteño and Chicano performers. The Palomar hosted family, political and social events for two generations of Mexican Americans. Demolished in 2005, the exhibit pictured was installed on the wall of the new Axis condominium. (Photo courtesy Guerra & McBane LLC Archives)



[113] **Zoot Suit Riots, San José Style.** The Zoot Suit style originated with urban African American youth and was popularized by musicians. During World War II, it was adopted by young Mexican, Chicano, Filipino, and Italian Americans. Suits featured high-waisted, wide-legged, tight-cuffed, pegged trousers, a long coat with wide lapels and wide padded shoulders, worn with an oversized hat. Associated with luxury and extravagance, those who wore them were stereotyped as rebels, criminals or *pachucos*. The Los Angeles Zoot Suit Riots of 1942 resulted from racial tensions between white U.S. Navy sailors and Mexican American youth. Similar tensions arose in San José during WWII and resulted in an altercation in St. James Park. (Zoot Suit photo courtesy of Chavez Family Personal Archive)



[114] **Fruits of Their Labor.** In 1916, several local canneries merged to become the California Packing Company (Calpak). The San Jose Fruit Packing Company, 801 Auzerais Street, became Plant #3. Calpak continued to use the California Packers Association's Del Monte label, the first nationally advertised brand, and in 1967 the corporate name was officially changed to Del Monte. While most Mexican Americans worked in orchards prior to World War II, due to labor shortages Mexican women began working in canneries and Mexican men in warehouses and storage facilities. After WWII, higher paying cannery jobs enabled families to purchase homes in the Auzerais neighborhood. During the late 1960s, urban renewal and freeway construction demolished most of these worker neighborhoods. Plant #3 closed in 1999 and was demolished.



[115] **Man of Fire!** Paseo de San Antonio walkway connects San Jose State University to Plaza de César Chávez. Embedded quotes about Ernesto Galarza lead to an art installation. Ernesto Galarza emigrated from Mexico with his family, working as a child laborer in San Jose in the 1920s. With a doctorate from Columbia University, he served as a government researcher on labor issues. A labor activist in post-World War II San Jose, Galarza worked for the National Farm Labor Union documenting abuses of the Bracero Program. As an activist, scholar, author and educator, he was known as the “grandfather” of the Mexican American Civil Rights/Labor Movement. (Photos from Guerra and McBane LLC)



[116] **Post World War II Mexican American Civil Rights.** WWII Latino veterans created two significant civil rights organizations, the American G.I. Forum (AGIF) in 1948 in Texas, and the Community Service Organization (CSO) in Los Angeles in 1947, to advocate for urban ethnic communities. The AGIF addressed discrimination on behalf of veterans and advocated for the GI Bill of Rights. The AGIF San José Chapter, established in 1949, is located at 322 S. First Street. In 1952, organizer Fred Ross established the San José Chapter of the CSO, at 1402 1/2 E. Santa Clara Street, recruiting and training residents of the Sal Si Puedes neighborhood. WWII veteran César Chávez became Vice President of the local chapter, then President of the national CSO, leaving to unionize farm labor through the creation of the United Farm Workers of America.