

Charlene Duval, Executive Secretary

cduval@sourisseauacademy.org

Leilani Marshall, Archivist

lmarshall@sourisseauacademy.org

Phone: 408 808-2064

Sourisseau Academy

Smith-Layton Archive presents:

FIESTA DE LAS ROSAS

by Thomas Layton

Les Amis (The Friends)

May 2015

Your donations help us purchase historic photos. Thank you!

<http://www.sourisseauacademy.org/>



[46] The year was 1969, and there was to be a magnificent celebration marking the 200th anniversary of the expedition of Spanish soldiers and Franciscan Padres who brought Spanish rule to Alta California and the Santa Clara Valley. No one imagined that the newly revived *Fiesta de las Rosas* would provoke a battle between Hispanic protesters and the San Jose Police. How could this have happened?



[47] From its inception in 1896, what was at first called the Carnival of Roses celebrated the beauty and bounty of the Santa Clara Valley, wherein each local town and civic organization was encouraged to parade from Santa Clara to San Jose.



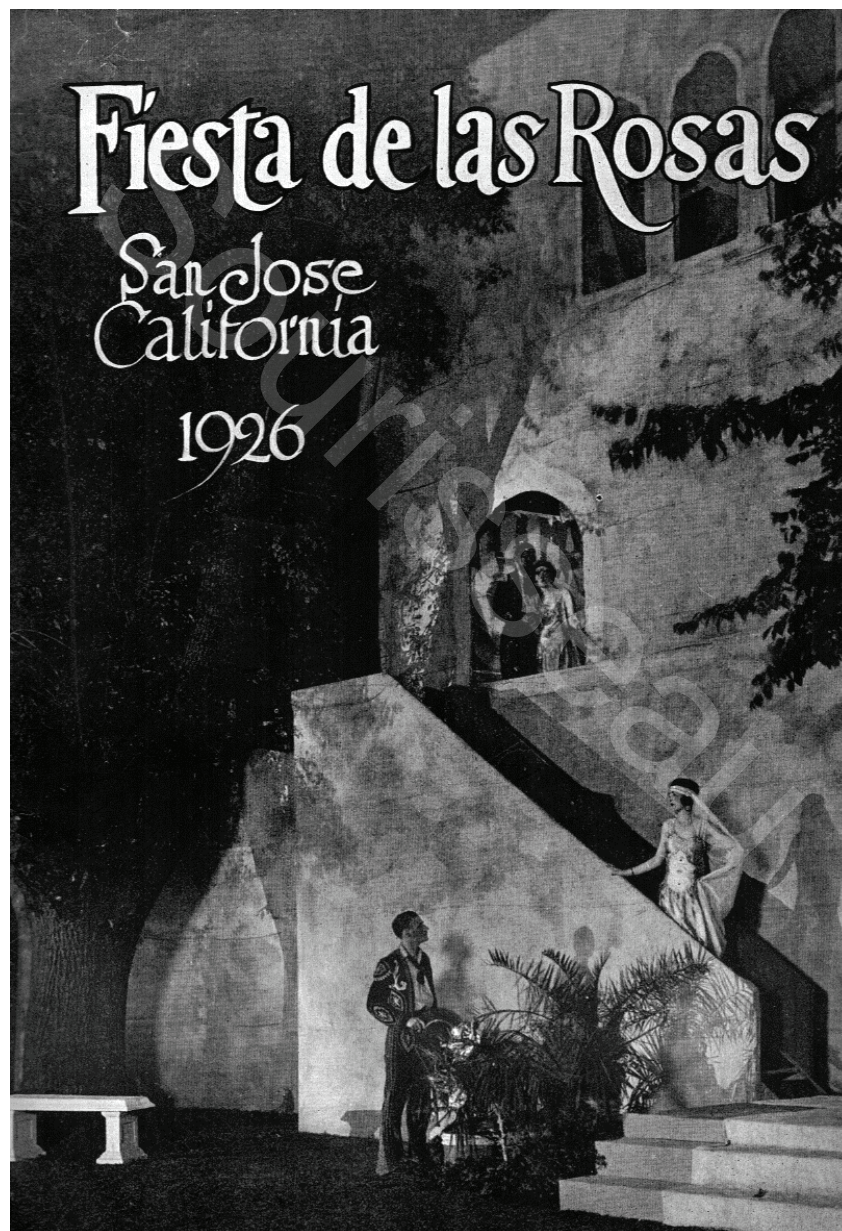
[48] In 1901, the honored guest at San Jose's Rose Carnival was President William McKinley. Four months later, he was assassinated, and in 1903 his statue was erected across from City Hall.



[49] By 1905, an assortment of exhaust-belching and flower-bedecked automobiles had joined the parade of horse-drawn floats. Since shatterproof safety glass had not yet been invented, these elegantly coiffed ladies and their uniformed chauffeur, unhampered by seatbelts or shoulder restraints, were actually far safer without a plate-glass windshield.



[50] The last Carnival of Roses was staged in 1910 — partly because the May celebration was too close to the equally important 4th of July Independence Day celebration, and partly because other towns in the valley were beginning to schedule their own festivals.



[51] With the end of World War 1, and a return to prosperity, the San Jose Chamber of Commerce was eager to re-establish a festival that would advertize the town. In 1926, they settled on a Spanish theme and a new name: *Fiesta de las Rosas*.

Images on file at the Smith-Layton Archive, Sourisseau Academy for State and Local History
May 2015



[52] In 1927, the *Fiesta* celebrated the 150th anniversary of the founding of Pueblo San Jose de Guadalupe with a parade featuring 91 floats, 19 bands and 587 riders.



[53] The Grand Marshall of the *Fiesta* parade, upon his palomino horse, led a corps of mounted Dons wearing broad-rimmed hats, bright silk cummerbunds and Californio-inspired satin suits embroidered with bright floral designs.

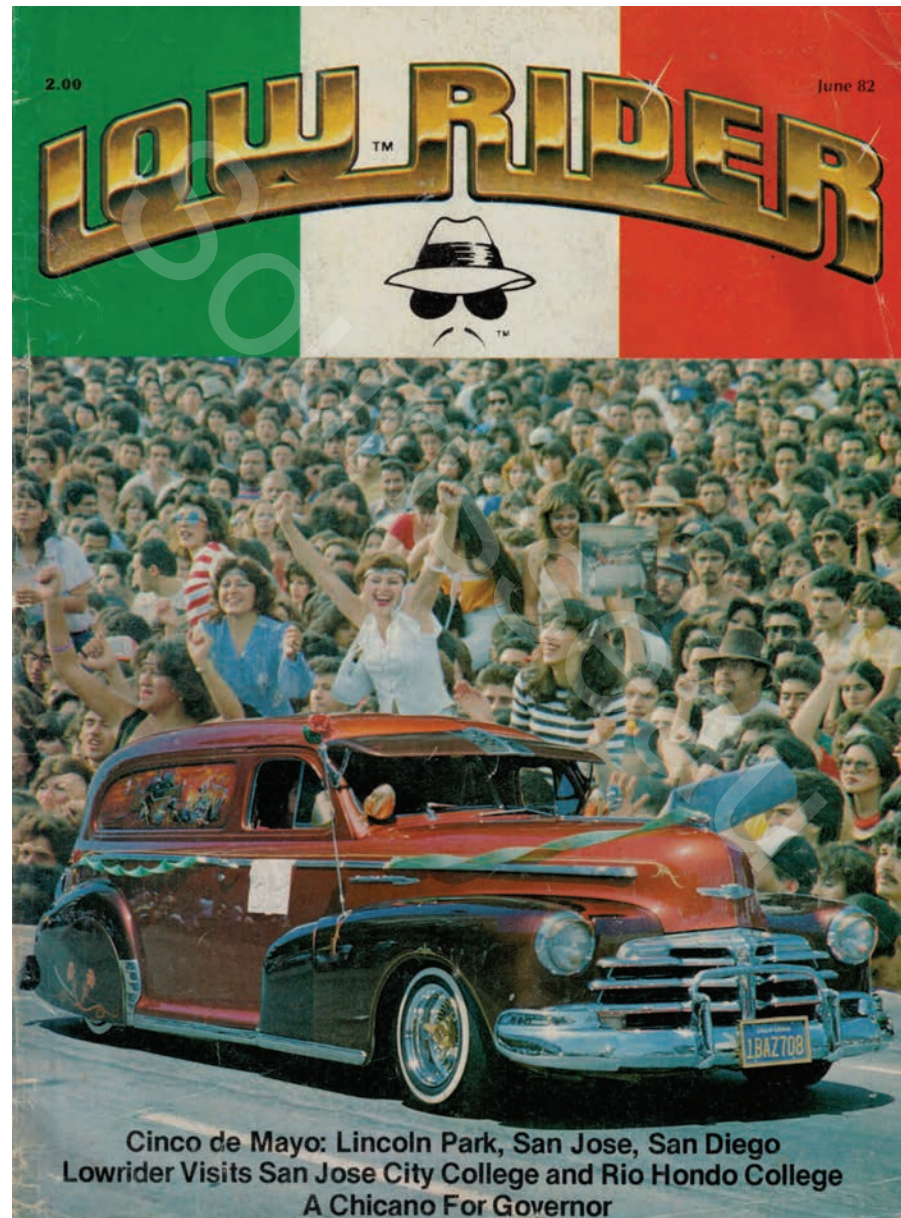


[54] Some of the men sported newly grown goatees. This Spanish Grandee achieved the "look" with pasted-on mustachios and black greasepaint applied to his chin. Señasoras and Señasoritas wore flowing shawls, lace mantillas and flowers pinned to their hair. The Normal School wrote and acted the "Nightingale and the Rose," featuring a Castle in Granada, three Moorish Princesses and three Spanish Cavaliers. The *Fiesta* was staged annually until 1933, when it fell victim to the economic downturn of the Great Depression.



[55] And that brings us back to where we started. The organizers of the 1969 *Fiesta de las Rosas* were unaware that their Spanish-Californio theme excluded and offended the fast-growing Mexican-American community who saw the Spanish soldier and the Padre, stamped on the Fiesta medallion, as symbols of their oppression by the Conquistadores who had enslaved their ancestors. To them, it was "celebration of exploitative colonialism." And, that was the end of the *Fiesta de las Rosas*. The bloody battle on Santa Clara Street, with 23 arrested and many more injured, changed San Jose forever.

Images on file at the Smith-Layton Archive, Sourisseau Academy for State and Local History
May 2015



[56] The 1969 *Fiesta* was a pivotal event, giving voice to newly empowered Chicanos and the *Confederation de la Raza Unida*. It also marked the germination of *Cinco de Mayo* — the Mexican Army's 1862 victory over French invaders — as a local celebration of Mexican-American pride, as shown on this festive 1982 cover of *Low Rider* magazine published right here in San Jose.



[57] Now, almost half-a-century later, we seem to have reached common ground. San Jose celebrates *Cinco de Mayo* at about the same time as the old *Fiesta de las Rosas*, while merchants along The Alameda have created a fully inclusive July 4th *Rose, White & Blue Festival*, blending iconography from the old Rose Carnival and the *Fiesta* with an American Independence Day parade. *Cinco de Mayo* has not only become an accepted celebration of Mexican-American heritage, but — as suggested by the subtle iconography of the Hard Rock Cafe — it has also achieved a place in American pop-culture.