

Rancho Times

In the San Ramon Valley

FOCUS:

To understand how land grants rewarded loyal soldiers who served Spain and Mexico. Land grants helped encourage people to settle here.

To understand that the Mexican government granted two San Ramon Valley ranchos to Bartolome Pacheco and Mariano Castro (Alamo-Danville) and Jose Amador (most of San Ramon).

MAIN IDEA:

To use the information provided to learn that:

- Land grants were a means to reward the loyal service of Spanish (later Mexican) soldiers.
- There were two original ranchos in the San Ramon Valley which grazed cattle and sheep.

VOCABULARY:

brand
adobe
fiesta

land grant
corral



Student Pages

Fiesta Time on the Rancho

It was **fiesta** time on the rancho. The many children of this Spanish family ran excitedly through their two-story **adobe** home. They played games with each other, while anxiously waiting for the guests to arrive. The adults made the last minute preparations in the open court patio where



candles were lighted and torches blazed. Here the guests would eat steaks sizzling from the barbecue. There would be corn, beans and other foods served from the family gardens. It was a chance to visit, dance and sing late into the night.

Fiestas were the celebrations that brought neighbors and friends together. **Fiestas** created a welcome change for the families who lived on isolated ranchos, miles away from each other.

During Catholic holidays and at the times cattle were slaughtered and **branded**, **fiestas** were always planned to help people keep in touch and celebrate their Spanish heritage.

Land Grants and Ranchos Were the First Developments in the San Ramon Valley

There was a long war between Mexico and Spain that ended in 1821. Mexico became independent, created its own government and made its own decisions. While the Spanish supported large mission lands and grazing

territories with Indian laborers, the new Mexican government turned missions into parish churches with no ranches to manage. The government gave large **land grants** to retired soldiers. The new Mexican land owner had to describe how the land looked and create a map which showed the hills, rivers, and mountains that formed the rancho's borders. They also had to prove no other citizens owned the land.

The northern part of the San Ramon Valley was granted to Mariano Castro and his uncle Bartolome Pacheco. The Castro-Pacheco land was named Rancho San Ramon Valley. However, neither of these families actually lived on their rancho land. They chose to live elsewhere because the Indians released from the missions were hostile and dangerous. Jose Maria Amador was granted the enormous San Ramon Rancho south of present-day Crow Canyon Road. His headquarters was in Dublin where he built **corrals** and a two-story house out of **adobe** bricks



On these ranchos, large herds of cattle and horses grazed freely. This became a problem; since there were no fences, Indians would steal or kill the herds for trade or food. The families had round-ups where they would gather and **brand** the cattle with the rancho's mark. Cattle would be butchered for



meat. Tallow and hides from the cattle were used to trade with western ships for clothing and things the Pacheco or Amador family needed and could not produce themselves.

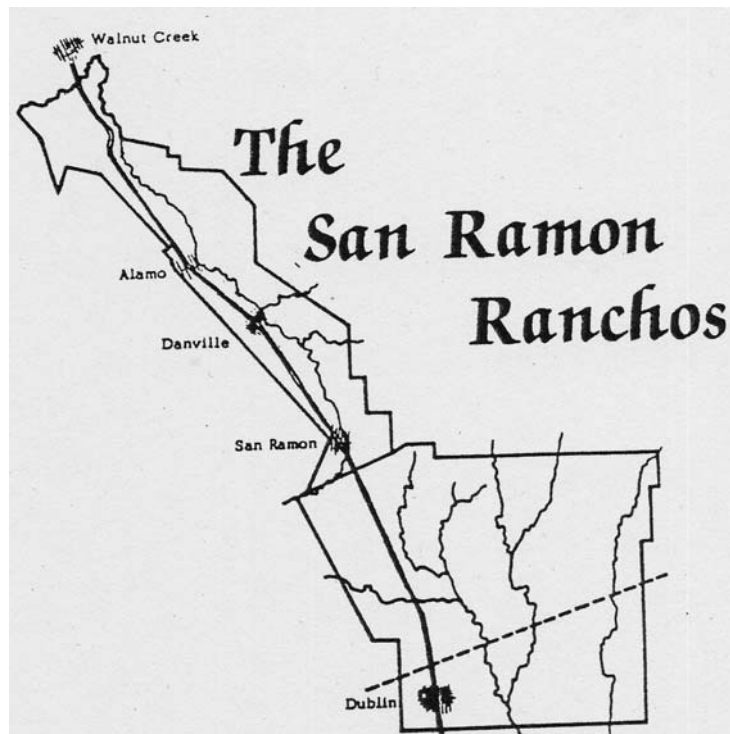
Rancho life was simple with many activities taking place outside. Amador constructed several buildings at his rancho, all made out of **adobe** clay. **Adobe** is a kind of soil found here in the San Ramon Valley. This soil is mixed with dry grass and formed into the shape of bricks. These bricks were baked in the sun. The houses usually were built around an open patio.

Corrals were built to enclose the animals, including the fine horses which Amador liked to have. Small gardens were created to grow vegetables for the family; corn and wheat were planted for use in making tortillas. Almost everything the family needed to eat was grown right on the rancho. The families had to entertain, educate, and support themselves.



Conceptual drawing of Jose Maria Amador adobe, c. 1840.

Kathie Petrie, 2004



Teacher pages

Student Activities

- **Critical Thinking:**

1. What is a land grant and why did the new Mexican government hope the land grants would develop California land for Mexico?
2. Explain why the families would enjoy fiestas and visiting neighbors and friends.

Language Arts standard

Write a friendly letter. Pretend you are living on Rancho San Ramon. Write a letter to a friend describing your life on the Rancho.

1. Brainstorm with a partner your knowledge of life on a rancho. Discuss that rancho life was isolated, and children had to create their own entertainment, and help with the chores on the rancho.
2. Review the form of a friendly letter.

Reading and Social Studies

Saturday Sancocho, written by Leyla Torres, is a story found in our *Communities* Social Studies book (Harcourt Brace). This is a good story to read to connect the knowledge of trading, or bartering. Connect this information to the need of the rancho families to obtain items they could not grow or make on the ranchos.

Read the story *Frieda Maria*, written by Deborah Lattimore. This story will create an understanding of life in the old Southwest.

Read *Clara Rides the Rancho* by Gail Faber and Michele Lasagna.

Field trips (See the special section on field trips.)

- **Family field trips:** Oakland Museum, Mission San Jose in Fremont
- **Passport Opportunity:** Go to the Museum of the San Ramon Valley and examine the rancho section

History/Social Science Standards

- 3.e Interprets historical events.
- Draws from historical and community resources to organize the sequence of events in local history and describe how each period of settlement left its mark on the land.

Additional Resources

Activity page

Making Adobe

Maps and pictures

Essay

Ranchos in the San Ramon Valley

Websites

- Mission San Jose (search)
- California Mission History: San Jose
- Californiahistory.net/span Spanish Colonial History, Mexican California
- SF museum.org/hist; excellent article by Guadalupe Vallejo (niece of Gen. Vallejo) on the rancho period

Books:

- Ramon A. Gutierrez and Richard J. Orsi, *Contested Eden, California Before the Gold Rush* (California Historical Society: Univ. of Calif. Press), 1997.
- Mildred Brooke Hoover, et. al., *Historic Spots in California* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 1966.
- Jo Mora, *Californios* (Garden City, N.J.: The Country Life Press), 1949.
- Leonard Pitt, *The Decline of the Californios, A Social History of the Spanish-Speaking Californians, 1846-1890* (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press), 1966.

RANCHOS IN THE VALLEY

The San Ramon Valley from 1830 to 1850

The twenty year period following 1830 witnessed gradual changes in the San Ramon Valley and in all of California. During this Mexican period two Ranchos were carved out of Mission San Jose's land in the San Ramon Valley. Beginning in 1846 Americans came to California in ever-increasing numbers and gold was discovered in January of 1848, barely two weeks before Mexico ceded California to the United States after the Mexican-American War.

Mexican Ranchos

The San Ramon Valley in the 1830's looked much as it had when it was part of Mission San Jose's grazing land. Cattle and sheep dotted the landscape and only few permanent structures existed. The Mexican government granted two Valley ranchos to retired soldiers in the early thirties, both called Rancho San Ramon. The southern one (over four square leagues or 16,000 acres in size) went to Jose Maria Amador while the northern two leagues were granted to Mariano Castro and his uncle Bartolome Pacheco.

All three of these men had been soldiers and were descendants of first generation Spanish California settlers. Jose Maria Amador was born in 1794 at Mission Dolores, was a soldier and an Indian fighter from 1810 to 1827, and served as the major domo of Mission San Jose for 15 years on and off. He was well acquainted with the San Ramon Valley and probably began living here in 1826. His grant lands included all of today's San Ramon and Dougherty Valley to I580 on the south.

Amador's ranch headquarters was a small version of Mission San Jose. At its peak he ran 300-400 horses and 13-14,000 cattle there and planted large vineyards, orchards and vegetable gardens. His 150 workmen produced leather goods, cloth, ranch equipment and other products. He paid Indians and Mexicans the same, unlike some rancheros and was very complimentary of the Indians' skills. He built several adobes over the years, including an enormous two-story one for his large family.

The Pacheco-Castro San Ramon Rancho (sometimes called the Valley or Las Juntas) was closer to the foothills of Mt. Diablo and had serious problems with the Indians of that area who took their horses and cattle. The Californios built seasonal homes in the south part of their grant and corrals in the middle but neither lived in the San Ramon Valley full time. They came for round ups and slaughters and supported vaqueros in the Valley. Pacheco's son Lorenzo inherited the southern

half of the grant and, when he died fighting the Indians in 1846, his widow Raphaela and children inherited it. Castro sold his half to Domingo Peralta in 1843.

Early in 1844 Castro and Pacheco agreed to the Romero brothers' application for a grant north of their property, extending over the hills to Tice Valley. It was called the Rancho El Sobrante de San Ramon. This sobrante or "leftover" piece of land was granted to them subject to a final measurement which never was done. The Romeros' headquarters was in Tice Valley. Later the Romeros sold the Alamo portion to the Garcias. Because the Romero grant was never correctly measured and title papers were lost in the 1850s, their ownership was not confirmed by the American courts.

The economy during the Mexican period was based on the hide and tallow trade. Amador, in an 1875 interview, said that he had regular contracts for his hides, taking "50 oxen over the pass to Alviso" where he traded hides for goods imported from all over the world.

After 1850, the American Period

The disposition of both Ranchos reflected their diverse ownerships and history. When the Americans arrived in California in increasing numbers, Amador sold his first league to Leo Norris. The date was 1850 and the transaction was the first clear sale of land from a Mexican Californian to an American in the San Ramon Valley. Each of the land transactions Amador was involved in with Norris, with Michael Murray and Jeremiah Fallon (1000 acres in 1852) and with James Witt Dougherty (10,000 acres in 1853) was relatively straightforward and confirmed successfully by American courts. His literacy and maturity may have contributed to these clear titles; he was likely fortunate in the honesty of the buyers as well.

From the start there were controversies surrounding the northern San Ramon Rancho. Horace Carpentier, a notorious American lawyer, sharpened his land acquisition skills in Oakland and then turned to Contra Costa County. Over the years, he acquired the entire San Ramon Rancho (Castro-Pacheco) holdings.

When the Americans took over the San Ramon Valley, their laws, cultural expectations and sheer numbers eclipsed those of the Mexican Californians. Fortunately some of these early Mexican settlers are still remembered and honored with their names on streets and schools.

From *Yesteryear in the San Ramon Valley* Beverly Lane

Making Adobe

Copy the sentence strips and cut each individually. Give a set of the six strips to each partner. Partners work together to put the strips in order to create the steps in making adobe bricks. After putting the strips in order, partners share why they chose this order of making adobe bricks.

First the workers dug the clay out of the riverbed.

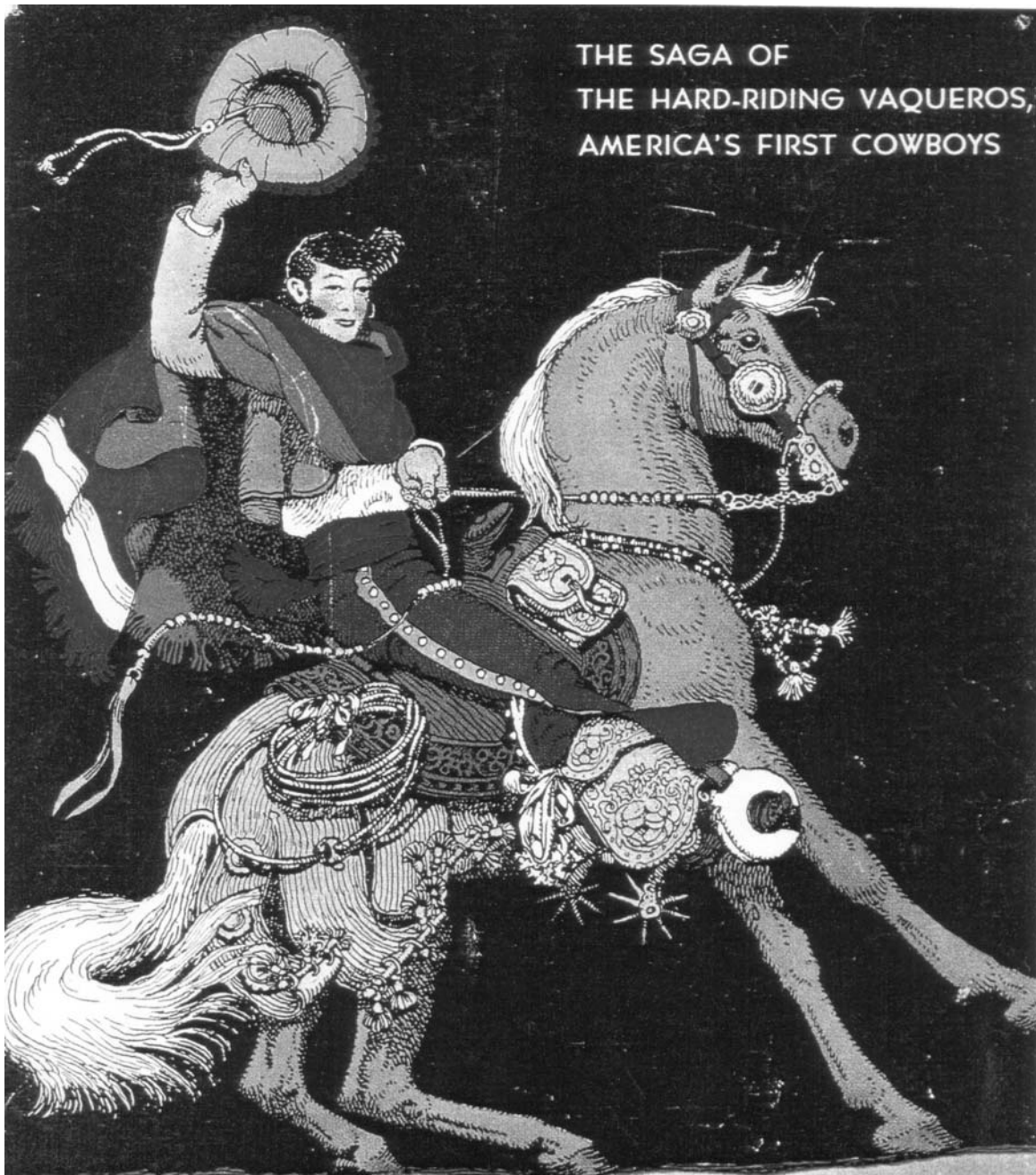
The clay was put into a pit in the ground. People stomped on it and mixed it with straw and water.

Leather bags were used to carry the clay from the pit to the brick makers.

The clay was poured into wooden molds with no tops or bottoms. Each mold was the size that the people wanted the brick to be made.

The bricks were set up on end so they would dry on all sides.

The dry bricks were used to build the house.



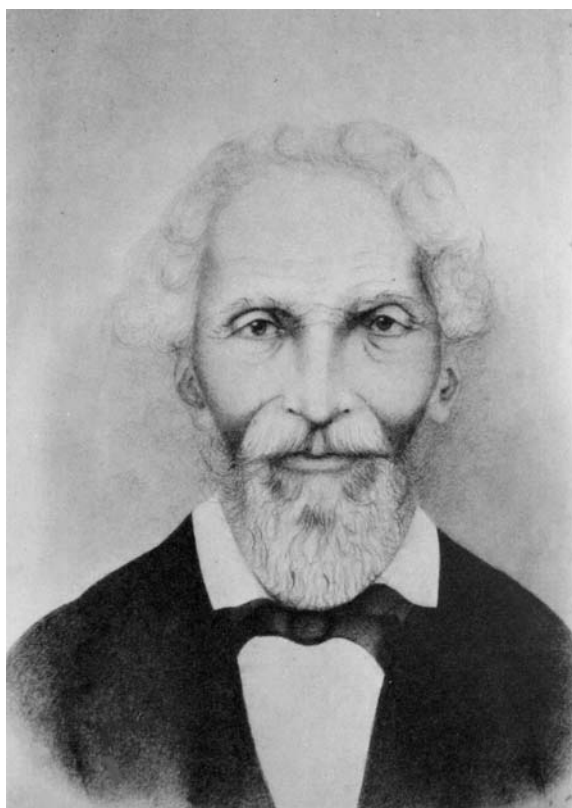
Drawing by Jo Mora



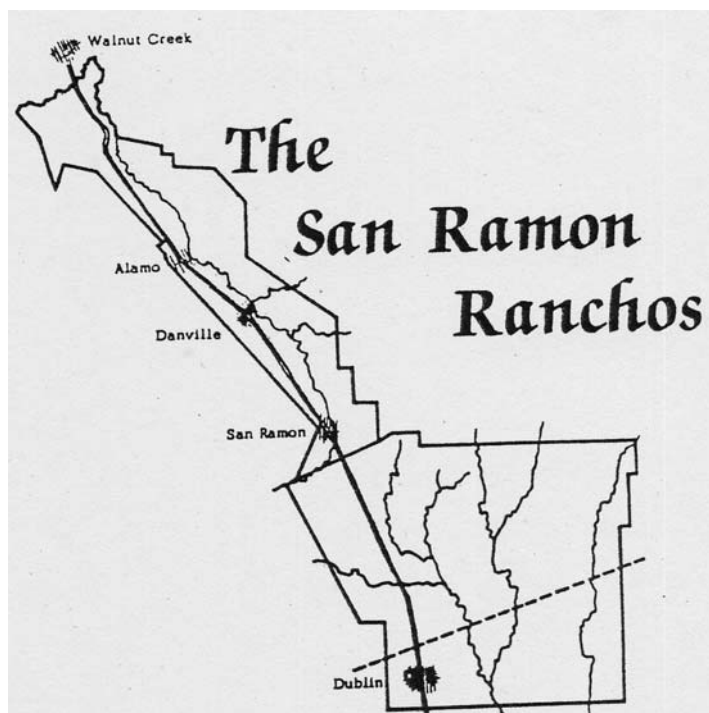
Drawing by Al Greger

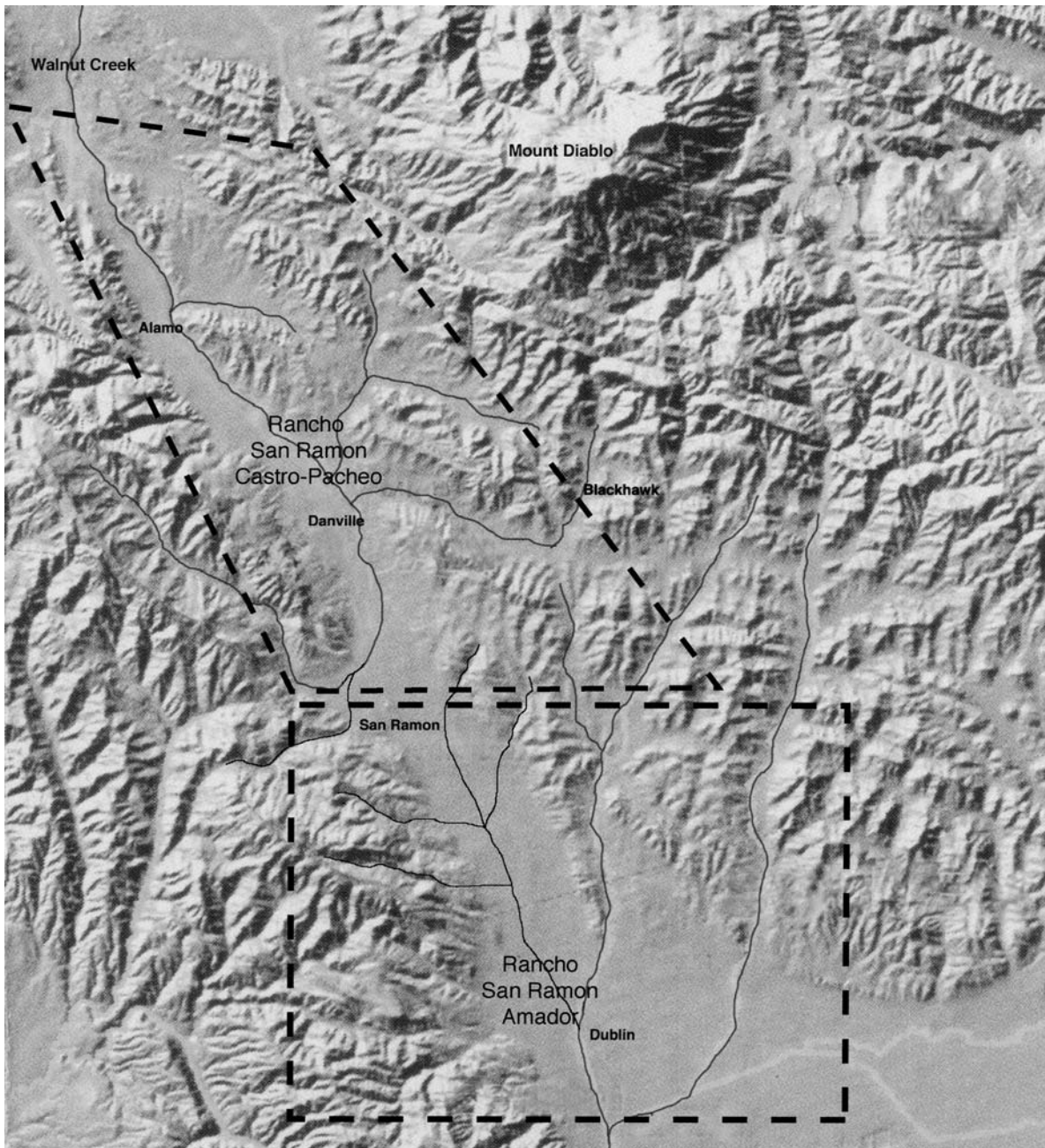


Drawing, courtesy The Bancroft Library



Jose Maria Amador





Map with San Ramon Ranchos Area