

# Bear and bull fights were once the rage in Whiskey Hill

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**I**N THE 1860s, an enclosure was built near the Gonzales property in Whiskey Hill where, on Sundays, the bear and bull fights were held.

A bear would be chained to a post in the middle of the arena and an angry bull be let loose. Sometimes these animals would also be chained to each other for the ensuing fight. One story (which you are not required to believe) has it that on one such Sunday, after a noisy and dusty fight, the air cleared and the bear was standing by himself. As the dust settled the tail of the bull could be seen protruding from the bear's mouth! Lariat's were tied to the tail; some horses were hitched up and the bull was forcibly pulled out and lived to fight again!

*Sunday last our good citizens were shocked by sweet strains from a brass band in a wagon, followed by several gaily dressed hombres who were to fight the bulls at the grand show at Whiskey Hill Sunday afternoon. Truly, we are progressing. We thought it was Colonel Crockett on his return from Buzzard Roost; but it was not the circus, but only actors in a bull fight. A large crowd was in attendance.*

— *The Pajaro Times,*  
Oct. 29, 1864.

Palmer's Bull Fight Company conducted the "entertainment" starting precisely at 3 p.m. on Sunday. Seats were \$1 in the shade, 50 cents in the sun and children were admitted free. Besides the brass band, there were clowns performing and amateurs attending the fight were allowed to "play" with the bulls!

*There is a law against such exhibitions, but the proprietors of the concern may escape under the decision of a San Juan (Bautista) Judge, who, a few years since, upon the application of parties for a permit to hold a bullfight, declared he knew of no law against such exhibition. Only if it were for amusement and he didn't consider*

## That was Watsonville

*it amusing.*

— *The Pajaro Times,*  
October, 1864.

But civilization was on the march and the good people of Watsonville were appalled by the goings on at Whiskey Hill, so changes were on the horizon including the small village's name.

**WHISKEY HILL** — *The above appellation was bestowed upon a settlement two miles north of Watsonville about the year 1861. The move was appropriate up to within three or four years for it was inhabited by a rough class of people and whiskey shops were about the only business places that greeted the visitor. Several years ago innovations were made, a better class of citizens crowded out the bad, and to-day many of the most respected residents of the Pajaro Valley have their homes at Whiskey Hill, and a store and several shops have taken the place of the saloons. Our object in referring to this matter is to suggest that some more appropriate, if not euphonious appellation be selected for that settlement. Doubtless the residents in that section can suggest an appropriate name. Owing to its situation, Highland would answer. Being situated on the San Andreas Rancho, San Andreas would be appropriate, but there are already one or two towns in the state by that name. We do not think Smithville, Jonesville and like names possess much merit, but probably the citizens of the above beautiful locality can determine upon a name, when the Pajaronian will take pleasure in informing the world of the change.*

— *The Pajaronian,*  
May 17, 1877

Just a month later, a "mass" meeting was held at the Roache school with thirteen citizens present — all men — and the name Freedom was adopted. The bear and bull fights faded into history and legend.