

Tom Arano: the last of the vaqueros of early-day PV history

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A man who died nearly 44 years ago is still fondly remembered by many in Watsonville. His name was Tom Arano, a familiar figure around town who could spin fascinating yarns about the history of the Pajaro Valley. He was one of 11 children whose parents were Francisco Arano and Celedonia Amesti and his grandparents were Jose Amesti and Prudenciana Vallejo Amesti.

Jose had come to California in 1822 and was granted Rancho Los Corralitos in 1823; again in 1841 and confirmed in 1851 containing 15,440.02 acres. On the marriage of his daughter, Celedonia, to Francisco Arano in 1855, he gave them a wedding present of 2,000 acres and it was here that Tom Arano was born in 1861 and later was to attend the Green Valley School.

Tom was one of the old-time cowboys and vaqueros, having learned to ride at the age of 2 and practically living in the saddle throughout his life. At one time, he was a rider for the far-flung Miller & Lux Company, whose headquarters were in Bloomfield, south of Gilroy, and whose land, at one time, encompassed over 22,000 square miles. It was said that Henry Miller, the cattle king, could sit atop his horse and view his land holdings in any direction for miles and miles.

In the Pajaro Valley's rodeos, Tom was often a willing and colorful participant. The vaqueros would do daring deeds with horse and lariat — one such affair was held annually at the Kelly-Thompson ranch off Riverside Road.

The following item is from the

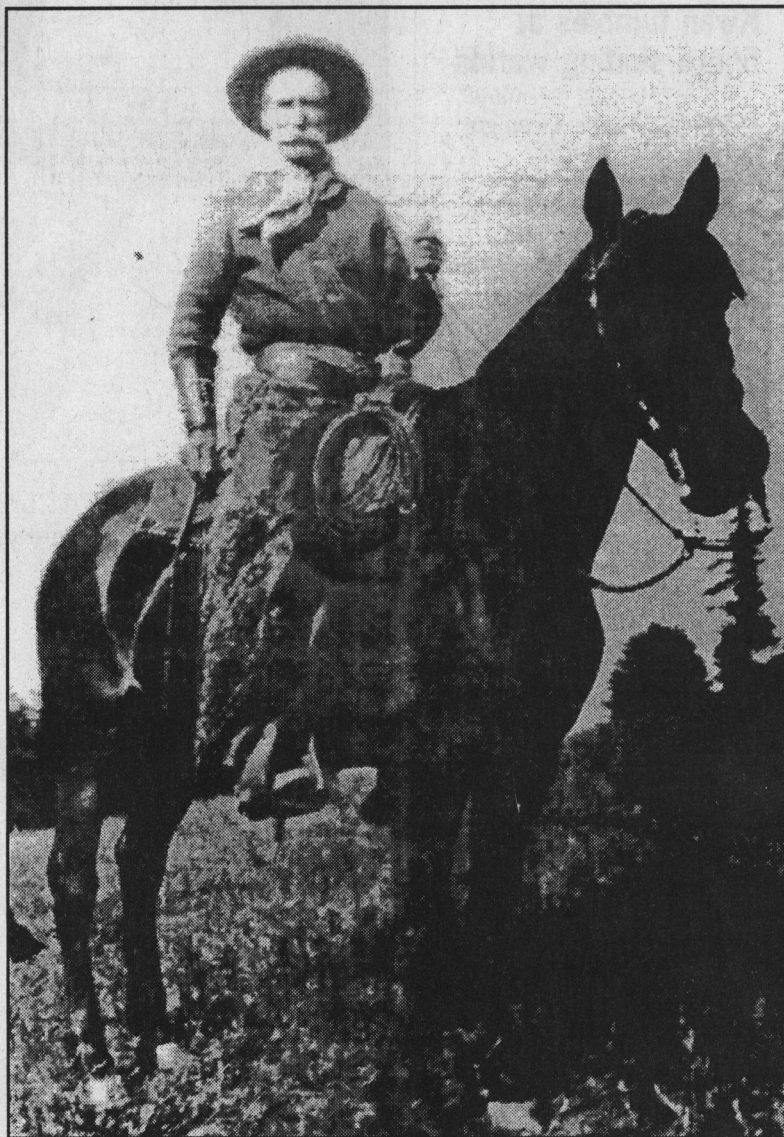


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That Was Watsonville

Betty Lewis

Pajaronian in 1903: "Another of the famous rodeos took place today at the foothills ranch of Mr. and Mrs. P. J. Thompson. Cattlemen were in attendance from all the neighboring ranches and the spirit of early California days was revived. The custom, once so well known, is becoming less and less a feature of local cattle raising, the cutting up of large ranges and the use of barbed wire fences having made it less of a necessity than in former times. The purpose of the rodeo is to gather in or round up all the cattle from each range, cut out the unbranded ones and to mark and brand each one with the particular design registered by its owner. At the rodeo and fiesta today much expert work was in evidence showing that the men who still follow the vaquero's profession are not far behind the old timers in skill."

Tom also rode in many Fourth of July parades, his back straight and his white mustache gleaming as he sat atop his faithful steed. In 1952, on his 89th birthday, he was given a surprise birthday party by his sister, Mrs. Carmella Rooney. And, in 1953, just before his 90th birthday, he was missing from his home for 27 hours and eventually



Courtesy of Betty Lewis

Pajaro Valley native Tom Arano, one of the last old-time cowboys from the area, is shown atop his trusty horse in this undated photo.

found down near the Pajaro River, apparently none the worse for wear from his long exposure to the elements.

Soon afterward, he was moved to a rest home in Santa Cruz and it was there that he died in 1955 at the age of 94. The Pajaronian noted at the time: "He was the last of

the vaqueros of early-day Pajaro Valley history and had been a storehouse of stories of Central California's cattle baron days."

Betty Lewis, a local historian and Watsonville resident, is a regular columnist for the Register-Pajaronian.