

EL SOBRANTE...PART OF SAN PABLO RANCHO?

By: Maurice P. Abraham – November 2011

It's a widely-known and historically accurate fact that the El Sobrante community's name evolved from the 1841 Mexican land grant, Rancho El Sobrante, awarded by Governor Juan Batista Alvarado to brothers Victor Ramon Castro and Juan Jose Castro. It is also a common perception that the entire El Sobrante community was historically part of Rancho El Sobrante. But was it? By chance, I came face to face with this question.

AN UNINTENDED DISCOVERY

While recently perusing old Rancho El Sobrante maps, I made an unexpected discovery. I had initially set out to determine how El Sobrante's present major roadways related to the old rancho boundaries and historic ownership patterns. What I found, however, was that much of the older parts of El Sobrante appeared to lie outside of Rancho El Sobrante!

More specifically, the San Pablo Dam Road business district, the Appian Way corridor and the older parts of El Sobrante generally west of the May Valley neighborhood were shown to be outside the boundaries of Rancho El Sobrante and instead within the old San Pablo Rancho. In other words, it looked like most of the older parts of the El Sobrante community were never part of Rancho El Sobrante!

Although very anxious to share my findings, I hesitated to prematurely conclude that what I was observing was correct. So, I dug deeper, uncovering an old San Pablo Rancho map from September 1893 (Figure 1). This map supported my initial conclusion. The 1893 map clearly showed significant portions of San Pablo Dam Road (then Road No. 7) and Appian Way (then Road No. 18) to be within the boundaries of San Pablo Rancho (Figure 2).

An additional effort to verify my conclusion involved researching the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) mapping of the area. The USGS maps typically show historic rancho and U.S. government survey lines. The 'Richmond' quadrangle map of the USGS maps clearly shows the old boundary line that separates Rancho El Sobrante from San Pablo Rancho. Seeing this was the final confirmation I needed to know that my preliminary conclusion was correct.

I do acknowledge that this 'discovery' is certain to be well known to others, particularly those in the land title and land survey professions. But in all my reading about Rancho El Sobrante history, I have never seen it stated that much of the El Sobrante community lies within San Pablo Rancho. So, I have to assume it is not widely understood and therefore thought it important information to share.

This finding was of particular personal interest; the Santa Rita Road property my parents purchased back in 1946 abuts the Rancho El Sobrante/San Pablo Rancho boundary line, and that property is still in the family. My long-held belief that our property was part of the old Rancho El Sobrante had just been determined false. I now realized it had never been part of Rancho El Sobrante. It was in San Pablo Rancho!

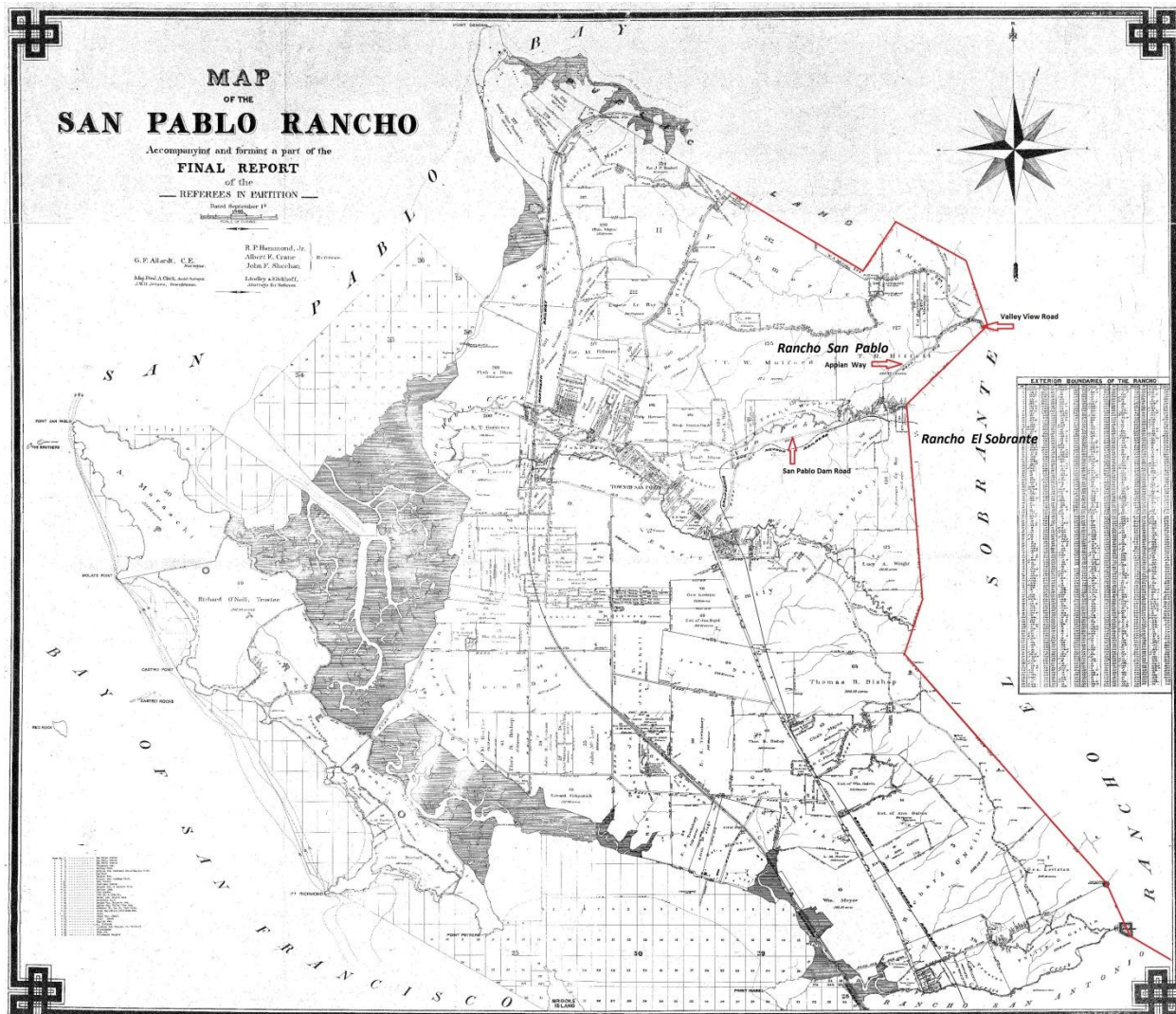


Figure 1 – Map of San Pablo Rancho. The red line is the common boundary between Rancho El Sobrante and San Pablo Rancho.

TRACING THE COMMON BOUNDARY

The common boundary of Rancho El Sobrante and Rancho San Pablo Rancho begins in the Berkeley hills, where the two Ranchos intersect with Rancho San Antonio. From that point, the common boundary proceeds along the Berkeley-El Cerrito Hills ridgeline. Easterly of El Sobrante’s La Colina/La Cima neighborhood, the boundary turns northerly through, bisecting the Jana Vista and Green Acres subdivisions west of Clark Road.

The rancho boundary then crosses San Pablo Dam Road easterly of the Canyon Pool Swim School on Campbell Lane, continuing along the easterly boundary of the Santa Rita Acres (Santa Rita Road) neighborhood. The Santa Rita Acres line is also a common boundary with the De Anza Vista and Whitecliff neighborhoods and the Richmond City limit line.

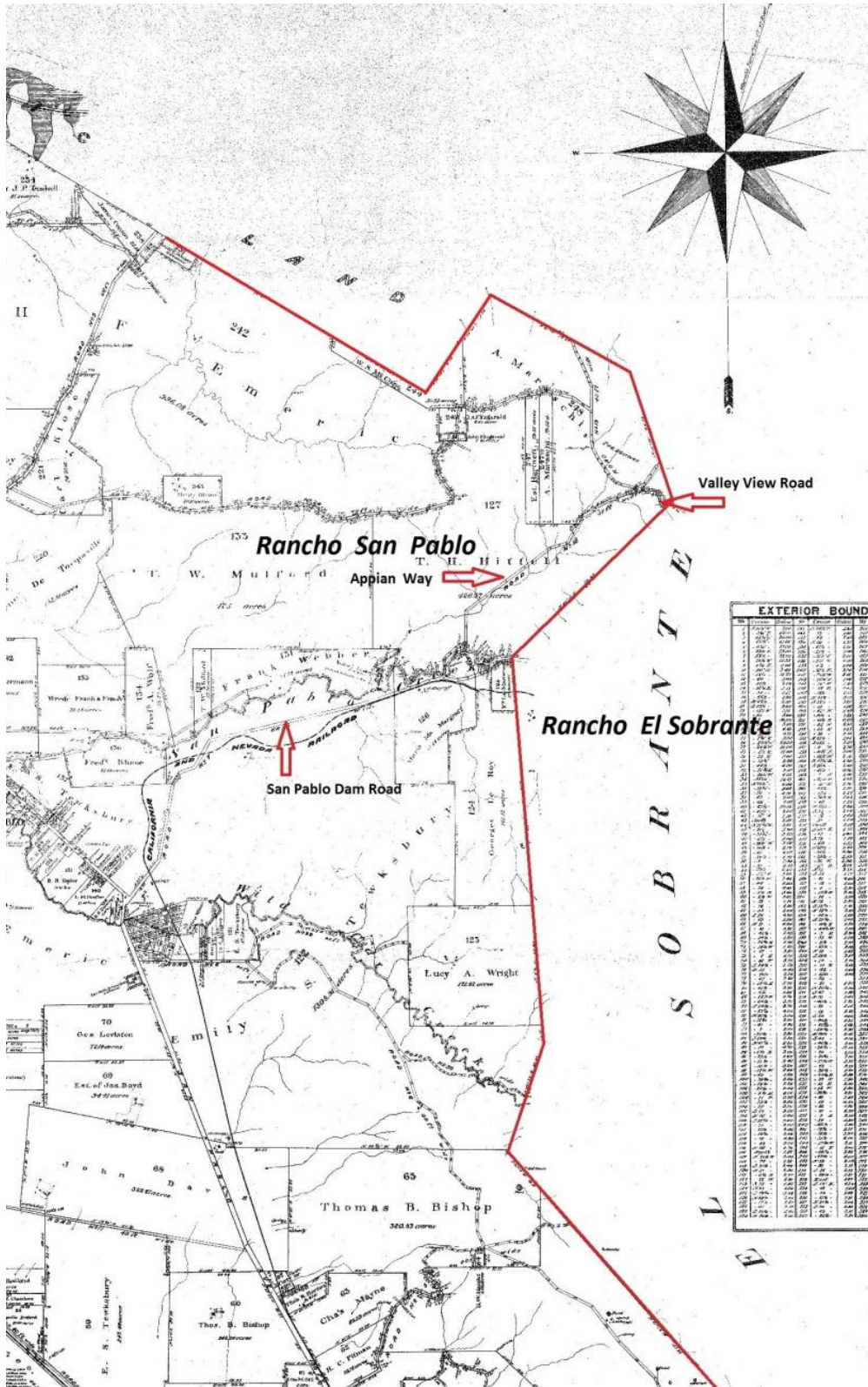


Figure 2. This enlarged portion of the 1893 San Pablo Rancho map in Figure 1 depicts the common boundary line's relationship to the San Pablo Dam Road and Appian Way corridors.

Finally, the common rancho boundary crosses Valley View Road at the westerly boundary of Marie Murphy School, proceeding up to the El Sobrante Ridge easterly of the Sobrante Avenue/Circle Drive/Oak Knoll neighborhood. At the El Sobrante Ridge the common rancho boundary terminates at the boundary of Rancho Pinole.

IMPLICATIONS OF THIS FINDING

We now know with absolute certainty that very little of El Sobrante's early settlement area was ever part of the Rancho El Sobrante land grant. That said, it is equally important to recognize that this fact does not materially change anything other than the perception of El Sobrante's relationship the historic ranchos. We are still El Sobrante; we still identify the community by the same prominent physical features we always have, the San Pablo and El Sobrante Ridge lines, the San Pablo Dam Reservoir and the Interstate 80 freeway.

Clarification of the rancho boundaries in no way detracts from El Sobrante's history; in fact, quite the opposite. Knowing the community was actually part of both ranchos means the history of San Pablo Rancho is an integral part of El Sobrante's history. In fact, the rancho histories have always been tightly intertwined, as both were grants to immediate members of the same family, the Castro's.

San Pablo Rancho was granted by Mexico to Francisco Maria Castro, father of Rancho El Sobrante grantees Victor and Juan Castro. When Francisco died, San Pablo Rancho passed to his wife, Maria Gabriela Berreyesa. Then, upon Maria's death, most of the rancho passed to their daughter, Martina Castro de Alvarado, wife of California's first governor, Juan Batista Alvarado. Governor Alvarado was the one that later approved the Rancho El Sobrante grant to his brothers-in-law.

So, the combined history of the two ranchos makes the lives of the entire Castro family, their settlements (Adobes) in San Pablo and El Cerrito and the ranching operations of both San Pablo Rancho and Rancho El Sobrante of even greater relevance to the history of the El Sobrante community. Going forward, persons interested in the community's history will now know that today's El Sobrante is underlain by not just one, but two Mexican land grants, Rancho El Sobrante and San Pablo Rancho.

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