

HISTORY *of Terra Linda*

Don Timoteo Murphy: Days of the Earliest Rancho

By Jean Wasp Terra Linda News p. 10 April 23, 1973

Irish Will and Spanish Politics mixed early in the Las Gallinas Basin when Timothy Murphy strode into Marin in 1828. One of Marin's 21 early ranchos, the three-fold San Pedro, Santa Margarita y Las Gallinas land grant was awarded to the giant Irishman in 1844. The 21,678.89 acres were used by the Don for stock-raising. Spanish steer, at that time, brought in \$25 a head, and San Rafael was an important landing point for shipment overseas.

Murphy came to the area from Monterey where he had been supervising packing and importing of beef for a British firm. Born in 1800 in Wexford, Ireland, he was described by early Marin travelers as a jovial six-foot-two, 300-pound man who delighted in good food and wild fun and treated the Indians with fairness. Appointed in 1837 as admission administrator at San Rafael Archangel, he served 12 years over the remaining Indians in the county. (Mission records show only a few hundred Indians left in the area. Many had been victims of diseases carried over by the Spanish explorers. One record noted 60,000 Indians had died of smallpox and measles one year.)

A Frenchman visiting San Rafael wrote that while the mission buildings lay in ruins, he found "some superb tobacco plants in the old mission garden, 20 Indians, and an Irishman named Murphy." A man of commanding appearance, Murphy had a fair, florid complexion and an aquiline nose. He reportedly could kill a deer or antelope at a distance of one-quarter mile with his rifle. His kennel, at one time, contained 35 beagles and greyhounds used for hunting. (Otters abounded in Marin. Murphy could get

\$40 for each pelt he obtained. The sport added much to his wealth.)

Like other large land grant owners in Marin, Murphy had acquired his acreage by ingratiating himself with the current Mexican governor. He was awarded the large grant from Governor Micheltorena on February 14, 1844. It was later approved by the U. S. Land Commission when California became a territory. Some historians say Murphy received the grant for his work with the Indians. The Indians were willing vaqueros for the Don, riding herd over his cattle. It took 20 horsemen to deliver 60-70 head of cattle to the shipping point. Timothy Murphy was the first to build a permanent home in San Rafael. It sat several blocks from the Mission at what is now Fourth and C Streets. (After Murphy's death, the newly formed County of Marin used his home as a courthouse.)

Murphy was known through the county as a man with a taste for fine food and fun. Reports from the guests at his many parties abound with details of a variety of meats and drink served at his dining table. At one affair in San Francisco, he killed a bear and three deer and put on a barbecue for old friends and Presidio officials. The party lasted two days and three nights and cost \$1,500.

In 1849, Murphy brought his brother, Matthew, and young nephew, John Lucas, from Ireland to share in the wealth of his estate. (A year later, with a population of 323 white men, Marin became one of the earliest counties to be established in California.) Timothy Murphy never married—the story goes that he had been rejected by General Mariano Vallejo's

sister, Donna Rosalia. He died in 1853 at the age of 53. The cause was a burst appendix. In his will, he left 7,600 acres of the Santa Margarita grant to his nephew, John Lucas. He left most of the San Pedro grant to his brother, Matthew (80 acres went to a long-time friend). John Lucas wasn't to hear of his inheritance until two years after his uncle's death. He left for Ireland in 1853 to fetch his bride, Maria Sweetman, and did not return until 1855. By that time, his other uncle, Matthew, had been dead a year—accidentally shot by a prison guard at San Quentin Point as he traveled through the familiar countryside. Shot in 1852, he died from the wounds two years later.

Also benefitting from Murphy's will was the Catholic Church, which received 300 acres to be used for an orphan asylum. It was to become St. Vincent's School for Boys. When Matthew died, the San Pedro Rancho—which includes China Camp and Peacock Gap—was sold to Samuel Todd for \$10,577. The Murphy ranch home was sold to Timothy Magon for \$1,050. On January 15, 1856, the tract now known as Santa Venetia was sold for \$127.60 to pay delinquent taxes. The Las Gallinas ranch had already been sold to James Miller by Murphy in 1851. Miller paid \$680 for 680 acres. Hence, the first subdivision had taken place in the Las Gallinas basin, paving the way for many more. And the only remembrance of Don Timoteo today is an elementary school named after him by the Dixie School District in Terra Linda. [Editor's note: St. Mark's School was formerly known as Don Timoteo. However, there is a cul-de-sac still named Don Timoteo near Terra Linda High School.]