

Famous outlaw was 'visitor' to ER

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By Henry Welcome
(Local historian Henry Welcome, a founder of the Eagle Rock Valley Historical Society, contributes an account of the connections with Eagle Rock, of Tiburcio Vasquez, noted California outlaw of the late 19th century).

Many towns, large and small in the west and middle-west, hitch a romantic and often completely unfounded, historical tale to the visitation of a famous badman of some by-gone era. A sort of George Washington slept here, bit.

Eagle Rock can actually lay claim to an authenticated case. Tiburcio Vasquez slept here.

As far as California outlaws go and the Latin ones especially, Vasquez stands second only to the legendary Joaquin Murietta. While most of the

life story of the "Robin Hood of Eldorado", Senor Murietta, is shrouded in a tale of wild fiction, we can piece together a reasonably accurate account of the true adventures of Tiburcio Vasquez. Being quite willing ~~talk~~ after his final capture, history has preserved much of his of crime, from his own lips.

Tiburcio was born in Monterey, California, on Aug. 11, 1835. His parents were respectable citizens of the community. the Vasquez home, directly in back of Colton Hall, is a handsome white adobe building, still standing.

The outlaw had three brothers and two sisters. All had married except for himself and one brother. He did admit to having sired a child, living in Monterey County.

As a youth he attended

school in his home town and learned to read and write in both English and Spanish. Of his penmanship he was very proud.

Ben Truman interviewed the outlaw the day after his capture in the Los Angeles City Jail. I quote Truman's description of Vasquez, "Not more than five feet seven in height, and of very spare build, he looked little like a man who could create a reign of terror. His forehead was low and slightly retreating to where it was joined by a thick mass of raven black and very coarse hair; and his sunken cheeks were only lightly sprinkled with beard. His lips thin and pale. His teeth white, even and firm; his left eye slightly sunken. He had small and elegantly shaped feet. Perhaps 130 pounds was as much as he weighed —". One must take into consideration that he had been wounded and captured only the day before.

LIFE OF CRIME

Why had this well brought up youngster, turned to life of crime? May I quote Vasquez himself, "My career grew out of circumstances by which I was surrounded. As I grew to manhood I was in the habit of attending balls and parties given by the native Californians, into which the Americans, then beginning to become numerous, would force themselves and shove the native born men aside, monopolizing the dance and the women.

"This was about 1852. A spirit of hatred and revenge took possession of me. I had numerous fights in defense of what I believe to be my rights and those of my countrymen. The officers were continually in pursuit of me. I believed we were unjustly and wrongfully deprived of the social rights that belonged to us".

This same year 1852 he fell in with bad company and at one of those dances

he talked of, with two companions, became involved in a fist fight. Unfortunately, when Constable William Hardmount arrived at the fandango to break up the confrontation, the officer was stabbed to death.

Garcia, one of the two in Vasquez's company, was believed to have done the killing. The three fled Monterey and justice. Thus was born the California-Mexican gang of Tiburcio Vasquez, that flourished from Monterey to Los Angeles, for over twenty years.

Vasquez apparently was not a wanton killer but more of the rustler of horses and cattle and the "stand and deliver" robber-type. Two decades passed with the authorities in most counties where the bandit operated having much greater criminal problems than making a concerted effort to hunt down and eliminate the Vasquez gang.

BIG MISTAKE

On August 26, 1873 the big mistake occurred. The scene, Snyder's General Store at Tres Pinos in San Benito County. A village far off in the hills, south of Hollister. By the way, Tres Pinos is very much the same today as it was that 98 years ago, except it now has a service station instead of a livery stable, and naturally a few other modern innovations like Coca Cola signs.

Everything went wrong. A Portugese sheepherder arrived in the middle of the well planned robbery. The sheepman either not hearing or not understanding an order to halt, was shot in the head by the trigger happy

bandit, Theodoro Moreno. At the sound of the commotion a small boy darted out the back of the store. A bandit caught him, knocking him unconscious with his pistol.

A teamster, George Redford drove up in front of the store at this same time. He was hard of hearing and when Vasquez covered him with his Henry rifle, he panicked, running for the rear of the store. The bandit leader shot him as he neared the stable door. From the corner of his eye Vasquez saw the proprietor of the hotel next door slam his front door. The Henry rifle was fired through the window, killing the hotel keeper.

Leaving with three dead, an injured boy and \$1200 stolen, for the first time Tiburcio Vasquez was in serious trouble with the law. The gang hastily beat their way south to first the Bakersfield area, where it soon got to hot for them so they crossed the Tehachan operating for a brief time in the Los Angeles basin. Time and the law were closing in on the gang. The Tres Pinos tragedy had put them number one on every California lawman's list. One by one they were being killed or apprehended.

Let us again quote Vasquez, "I wandered around the mountains after that until the time of the Repetto robbery. The day before that occurrence I camped at the Pietra Gorda, at the head of the Arroyo Seco".

Now let us put the story together. Vasquez with only part of his men arrived in April 1874 at the ranch house of George Allen. Here he was to stay for a short time, visiting with a Mexican girl and

using his friend's place as a hide-out.

CAMEL DRIVER

Allen, better known as Greek George, was an ex-camel driver for the United States Army. In 1857, when Jefferson Davis was Secretary of War in Washington, he authorized the use of camels here in the south-western deserts. The army men had trouble handling the beasts so they also imported Greek and Syrian camel drivers. After the Civil War when the experiement was given up, Greek George settled on a small ranch in what is now Hollywood. The house close to the hills near the preent intersection of Kings Road and Fountain Ave. It was but a shack, half adobe, the rest a wooden lean-to.

Vasquez had a new recruit in his gang, a young Mexican named Lebrado Corona. He being short of funds, sent Corona to "case" the ranchos for a possible robbery. In a few days Corona returned, reporting a sheep raiser near San Gabriel a likely candidate. Alexander Repetto, the victim, had recently sold a large quantity of wool.

CAMPED IN ER

Vasquez and his party left Greek George's house on April 11, 1874, crossed the Hollywood Hills into the San Fernando Valley on horseback. They rode to the Pacoima area and thence via Tujunga and La Canada to the foot of the Eagle Rock. Here they camped for the night.

The following day Vasquez rode to the Repetto ranch alone. It was in East Los Angeles. Finding a sheepherder of Repetto's, Vasquez informed him that he had lost

a horse and offered \$15 for its return. Riding on and not finding Repetto home he checked the ranch out for himself and by a round-about route returned to the camp below the Eagle Rock. I quote Vasquez:

"As soon as it was dark I returned with my men to the neighborhood of Repetto's and camped within a few rods of the house. The next morning about breakfast time we wrapped our guns in our blankets, retaining only our pistols, and I went toward the house, where I met the sheepherder and commenced talking about business. Asked him if Repetto wanted herders or shearers, how many sheep could he shear in a day, etc., speaking in a loud tone, in order to let Repetto hear us and throw him of his guard.

"I had left my men behind a small fence, and being told that he was at home, I entered the house to see if I could bring the patron to terms without killing him. I told him I was an expert sheep shearer, and asked if he wished to employ any shearers: the gentlemen who were out waiting by the fence were all good shearers, and wanted work. All were invited in, and as they entered they surrounded Repetto. I then told him I wanted money. At this he commenced hollering, when I had him securely tied, and told him to give me what money he had in the house. He handed me eighty dollars. I had told him that that would not do; that I knew about his affairs; that he has sold nearly \$10,000 worth of sheep lately, and that he must have plenty of money buried around the house

somewhere.

Repetto then protested that he had paid out nearly all the money he had received in the purchase of land; that he had receipts to show for it, etc. . . I told him that I could read and write and understood accounts, that if he produced his books and receipts and they balanced according to his statements, I would excuse him. He produced the books, and after examining them carefully, I became convinced that he had told me nearly the truth. I then expressed my regrets for the trouble I had put him to, and offered to compromise.

"I told him I was in need of money, and that if he would accommodate me with a small sum I would repay him in thirty days with interest at 1½ percent. He kindly consented to do so and sent a messenger to Los Angeles for the money, being first warned that in the event treachery or betrayal his life would be forfeit. The messenger returned, not without exciting the suspicion of the authorities, who, as is well known, endeavored at that time to effect my capture but failed".

The loan, Vasquez knew, was just his way of demanding money, with no intention to repay; an outright theft was intended. The messenger sent to Los Angeles was a thirteen year old boy, the newpew of Repetto. The badly frightened lad, mounted on a horse, rode rapidly through the countryside but as he approached the pueblo, slowed the animal to a walk. The boy presented a check for eight hundred dollars in his uncle's name to the cashier of the Temple and Workman Bank.

The teller could see the youngster was greatly agitated but the boy would admit to nothing and the check was found good. The cashier communicated his suspicions to the bank president, Mr. Temple, who in turn could learn nothing from the boy.

They called Sheriff Rowland to the bank and with more questions soon guessed the truth. The lad, frightened for his uncle's life, insisted on the money, of which five hundred in gold was given to him and he promptly returned to the ranch. Within thirty minutes the Sheriff had gotten together a posse and was on his way.

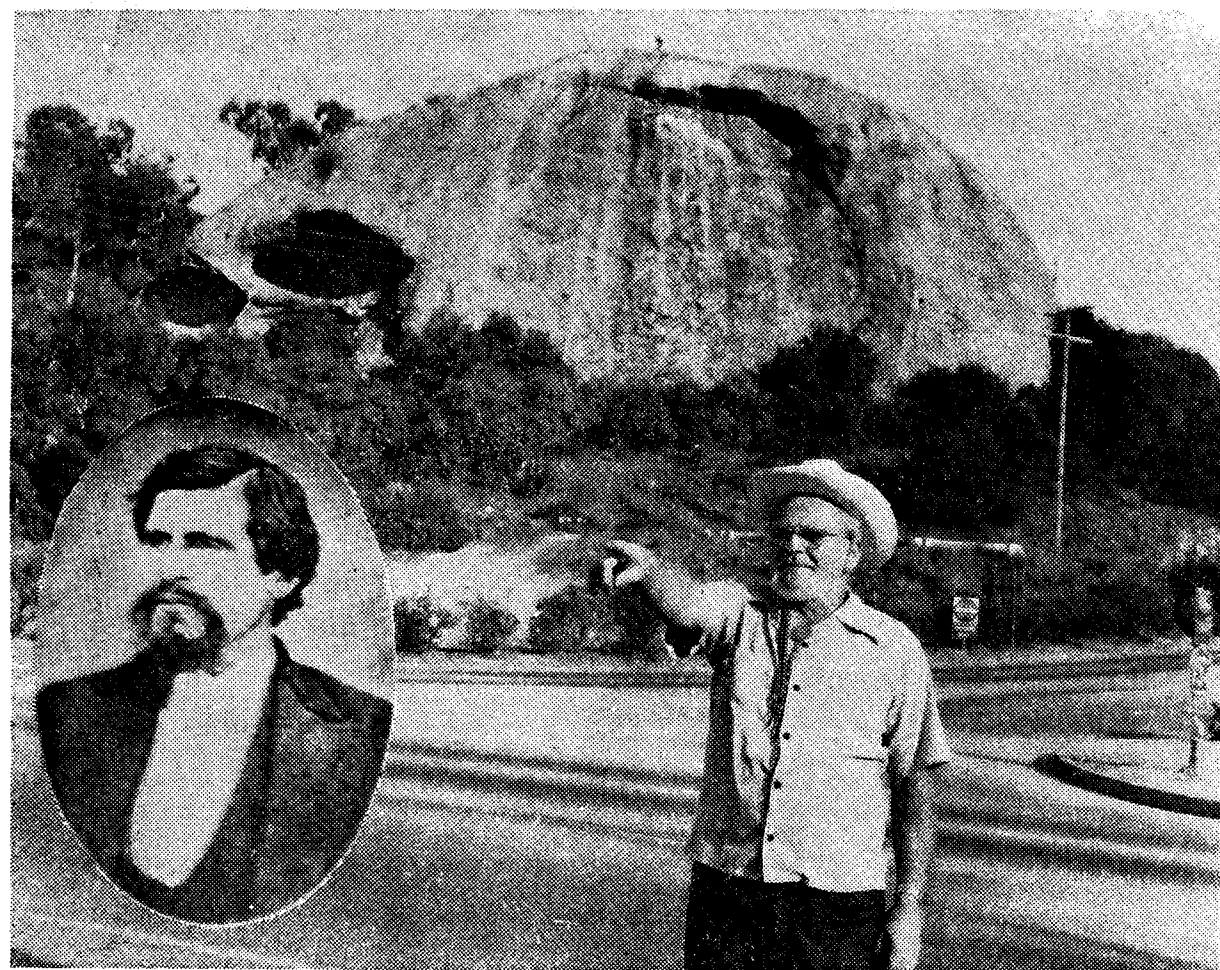
TELESCOPE

Vasquez had found a telescope in Repetto's house, which enabled the bandit's guard to spot the sheriff's posse when still about three miles away. The three robbers left the ranch with the money and headed back toward the Arroyo Seco near the Pasadena area, with the Posse hot on their trail. There was no time to even count the money. They headed north and west through some land owned by the Orange Growers Association. The Orange Growers were a group owning a large acreage on the east bank of the Arroyo Seco within the present limits of Pasadena.

Vasquez always took a spare horse on occasions like this. The posse had already ridden seven miles from the Pueblo of Los Angeles. Needless to say the posse could not gain on the badmen. Vasquez kept no more distance than necessary thereby saving his mounts.

As the bandits approached the Arroyo Seco they came upon a wagon driven by Charles Miles, superintendent of the Los Angeles Water Co., and two companions, John Osborne and John Rhodes. The three men had been inspecting the construction progress of a new water company dam further up the Arroyo near the present site of Devil's Gate Dam.

Never missing an opportunity to rob, Vasquez and his two followers surrounded the wagon, and trained their weapons on the three in the vehicle. Miles thought it a joke on the part of some local Mexican farm hands, and laughed. The muzzle of a repeating Henry rifle



Vasquez camped in ER

Historian Henry Welcome reports that Eagle Rock has a connection with a famous character out of California history, outlaw Tiburcio Vasquez, who camped near the rock just before the end of his long and checkered career.

poked behind his ear was rather sobering. Vasquez relieved the three of about seventy-five dollars and a fine gold watch from Miles. The robbery took but moments and they were soon on their way to where the Arroyo Seco enters the mountains.

DEVIL'S GATE

Crossing the stream in the present bed of the Devil's Gate Reservoir, they fired some shots into the air. This was a prearranged signal for a Mexican guide to show them through the mountains.

The guide failed to appear, and the posse was getting much closer. With no choice Vasquez and his two companions found the trail which led up the side of the Arroyo. At the summit (by the description one can presume it was at about the same point where the present Angeles Crest Highway stakes its first

summit just above Clear Creek H.W.) the trail ended. There was no turning back as the sheriff's group was hot on their trail.

The three bandits started down the canyon wall of Clear Creek, soon giving up their horses and footing it down the wash until they came into the Big Tujunga. This they descended to the valley near the present town of Sunland. As darkness came to the mountain sides, Sheriff Rowland called off the manhunt and returned with his men to Los Angeles.

Vasquez was captured by Rowland and a small posse several days later at the home of his old friend, Greek George in the Hollywood area. Though the bandit seemed seriously wounded when taken, he recovered to stand trial in San Jose. He was hanged for his 21 year career of crime which ran from armed robbery to

murder. Sheriff Billy Rowland received a reward of \$8,000 plus \$43.25 for "expenses". Vasquez life was ended by a San Jose hangman, Friday, March 18, 1875.